



*Advocating for the people of Western Sydney*

# State Election Issues Brief

## March 2015



Prepared by the:

**WESTERN SYDNEY REGIONAL ORGANISATION OF COUNCILS LTD**

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## MISSION

To secure – through research, lobbying and the fostering of co-operation between councils – a sustainable lifestyle for the people of Western Sydney and the provision of infrastructure such that no one should have to leave the region to have access to the sorts of amenities, services and opportunities others in urban Australia take for granted.

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## WESTERN SYDNEY REGIONAL ORGANISATION OF COUNCILS

Formed in 1973, the Western Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils Ltd (WSROC) represents ten local councils in Western Sydney: Auburn, Bankstown, Blacktown, Blue Mountains, Fairfield, Hawkesbury, Holroyd, Liverpool, Parramatta and Penrith.

WSROC provides a strong voice for the residents of Western Sydney. It also acts as a one-stop shop for organisations, businesses and agencies seeking to engage with Western Sydney councils and residents.

With a reputation for considered policy analysis and advocacy on a wide range of issues, WSROC gives particular focus to the key issues affecting residents of Western Sydney, namely transport, employment and regional planning.

WSROC is responsible for many improvements in these areas and has helped to create a number of the region's institutions and agencies. WSROC also develops and manages resource sharing and other cooperative projects which are either funded jointly by its members or from external sources.

WSROC has long advocated for increased funding and resources for locally-relevant arts and cultural activities in the region. In 2013 NSW Arts appointed a Western Sydney regional arts and cultural coordinator following WSROC's recommendation.

During 2014, WSROC was instrumental in developing a Western Sydney Regional Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Strategy. This strategy, developed in collaboration with ten Western Sydney Councils, will allow the region to more effectively manage waste challenges and maximise funding opportunities for the region.

WSROC has also been involved in staff development across local government. The Advancing Sustainability Leaders training program that concluded in early 2015 offered tailored development opportunities for Western Sydney's upcoming leaders in sustainability.

In matters of public health policy, WSROC is on the board of the Western Sydney Diabetes Management and Prevention Initiative which is committed to fighting the prevalence of lifestyle-related illness; a major issue for Western Sydney.

Moving into 2015, WSROC's Light Years Ahead project will replace approximately 13,000 residential street lights with more energy efficient LED or equivalent lights. The project will reduce energy costs to nine Western Sydney councils by \$21 million over 20 years<sup>1</sup>.

WSROC also arranges and manages a range of procurement contracts worth over \$31 million on behalf of Member Councils and other joint activities including funded projects.

## THE REGION'S ECONOMY

### Facts, statistics and opportunities

The WSROC area (Auburn, Bankstown, Blacktown, Blue Mountains, Fairfield, Hawkesbury, Holroyd, Liverpool, Parramatta and Penrith local government areas) is home to approximately 1.5 million people, 569,000 (37.7 percent) of whom were born overseas<sup>ii</sup>.

### Our resident labour force

- 426,366 (61.8 percent of labour force) employed full time
- 197,816 (28.5 percent) employed part time
- 48,994 (7 percent) unemployed
- 193,762 (29.9 percent of employed people) travel outside the region for work

### Occupations

Here is a snapshot of the occupations of our residents.

- 179,776 managers and professionals
- 94,796 technicians and trade workers
- 58,293 community and personal service professionals
- 111,992 clerical and administrative workers
- 59,051 sales workers
- 61,247 machinery operators and drivers
- 66,345 labourers

### Working in the WSROC region<sup>iii</sup>

There are 646,204 people employed in the WSROC region:

- 358,809 (55.5 percent) workers who live in the WSROC region also work in the region
- 139,827 people travel from elsewhere to work in the region (accounting for 28 percent of WSROC jobs)
- 419,500 (64.9 percent) workers who live in the WSROC region travel outside their local government area (LGA) for work

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## Industry in the WSROC region

A snapshot of industries located in the WSROC region include:

- 7,000 manufacturing businesses employing 78,163 people
- 26,000 construction businesses employing 52,629 people
- 9,000 retailers employing 69,160 people
- 3,873 hospitality businesses employing 38,018 people
- 14,000 transport and storage operations employing 43,708 people
- 709 communications services businesses employing 12,538 people
- 5,845 finance and insurance businesses employing 33,133 people
- 9,378 businesses in the various services sectors employing 46,186 people
- 11,000 professional scientific and technical services employing 12,538 people <sup>ivv</sup>



## **FIT FOR THE FUTURE: JOINT ORGANISATIONS**

WSROC has been a strong supporter of the local government reform process and has participated fully since its inception at the Destination 2031 summit in Dubbo in 2011.

WSROC supports many of the reforms outlined in the Revitalising Local Government<sup>vi</sup> report prepared by the Independent Local Government Review Panel including the fundamental principles of building capacity within local government to act as equal partners with the NSW Government in service delivery and infrastructure provision.

In relation to the role of Regional Organisations of Councils (ROCs), WSROC strongly supports the NSW Government proposal to allow councils to become members of a joint organisation, with a view to achieving cost savings and economies of scale through bulk procurement and shared services.

However, the Government's decision, as outlined in their Fit for the Future<sup>vii</sup> response, to only allow this option for rural and regional councils is disappointing.

We strongly believe that metropolitan councils should also have the opportunity to participate in a joint organisation if they wish and that the metropolitan ROCs are already well placed to assist the NSW Government in developing the model.

WSROC also broadly supports the proposed changes to the Local Government Act, in particular the move to allow councils to divest purchasing to independent third parties such as ROCs.

WSROC urges the NSW Government to strongly consider allowing ROCs to become prescribed joint organisations so they are able to enter into contracts directly on behalf of their councils. This would allow both councils and ROCs greater flexibility and independence in how they structure and negotiate contracts with suppliers which should result in significant cost savings to councils and their ratepayers.

Ultimately, councils will benefit from having control over their own affairs and the power to make their own choices.



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# 1. MANAGING WESTERN SYDNEY AND PLANNING FOR GROWTH

*Western Sydney is the fastest growing region in NSW. Worth \$95 billion annually, it is already the third largest regional economy (behind Sydney and Melbourne CBDs), and has only just begun to hit its stride. With 1 million extra people expected to settle in the region by 2031, we need to plan for this rapid growth.*



## DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING

### **Multi-billion dollar funding bonanza needs careful planning to avoid tokenism**

Western Sydney has just been promised a multi-billion dollar funding bonanza for major projects right across the region, but community consultation is essential to ensure the region gets the best bang for buck.

Despite specialist local knowledge and a practical understanding of home-grown issues, local councils and their communities are often marginalised when it comes to major development decisions; which primarily fall to centralised state government bodies.

In the past, this has led to a lack of clear responsibility for planning decisions, too many overriding and conflicting approval authorities, and a widespread failure to properly consult the community.

This has resulted in an ad hoc approach to development that has left the public feeling disenfranchised, with little confidence in the NSW planning process.

In addition, the trend of altering planning laws through regulation rather than at the legislative level has in many cases removed a developer's obligation to comply with council's local environmental, strategic planning and residential amenity laws; creating uncertainty and confusion for both residents and developers.

This means decisions on planning and development are often made at the state level, through appointed bodies such as Joint Regional Planning Panels (JRPPs) rather than the councils who are directly accountable to the communities in which these developments occur. This limits residents' ability to have meaningful input into the planning decisions that directly affect them.

Local councils and their communities are rich sources of local knowledge, and are strongly aware of planning issues at a practical level.

Whether transport, hospitals or sports stadiums, Western Sydney deserves to be consulted on major planning decisions that directly affect it.

Consultation is essential to ensure that state funding is directed towards effective planning outcomes for Western Sydney rather than more 'tokenistic' projects.

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## Action plan

The incoming NSW Government should:

- Conduct a complete review of the planning system, in consultation with local government, with a view to overhauling and redefining the roles of State and local government in the planning process;
- Simplify the planning process with clear definitions of the respective roles of State and local governments;
- Find an agreed balance of urban development on greenfield sites which are subject to environmental and agricultural concerns;
- Ensure respect and adherence to environmental and residential amenity regulations and processes in all planning decisions;
- Establish clear avenues for community input into the decision making process – at all levels and categories;
- Ensure that any over-riding development authority should work in consultation with local governments and the community to ensure that the decision making is conducted in a fair open and transparent process; and
- Ensure that infrastructure projects (transport, water, electricity and internet) are kept in line with growth and carried out in a timely manner.



## PUBLIC TRANSPORT

### Western Sydney chained to roads

Decades of under-investment in public transport has left Western Sydney struggling to adequately cater for the needs of its residents.

The region's rail network has remained largely unchanged since the 1930s, and as a result the region is heavily car dependent with resulting impacts on air quality, health and household budgets.

Western Sydney's rapidly expanding population and sprawling development have exacerbated transport issues – building transport infrastructure to reach these far-lying suburbs is far more expensive than a centralised network.

For those who can't drive (particularly the young, ill or elderly), car dependence results in decreased mobility and increased social isolation in many parts of Western Sydney.

Limited public transport options on the urban fringes lock disadvantaged groups into expensive car dependence, directly impacting employment options and opportunities (see. Figures 1 and 2 over the page).

We need to transition people from their cars to more sustainable transport modes, as well as reducing the amount of travelling that people are currently required to do.

Improving public transport will require the construction of new infrastructure, as well as increased service levels and amenity on existing transport services.

Recent commitments to the North West and South West Rail Links are moving in the right direction, however these lines are still city-centric. Travel to non-central destinations, particularly along the north-south corridor remains extremely difficult.

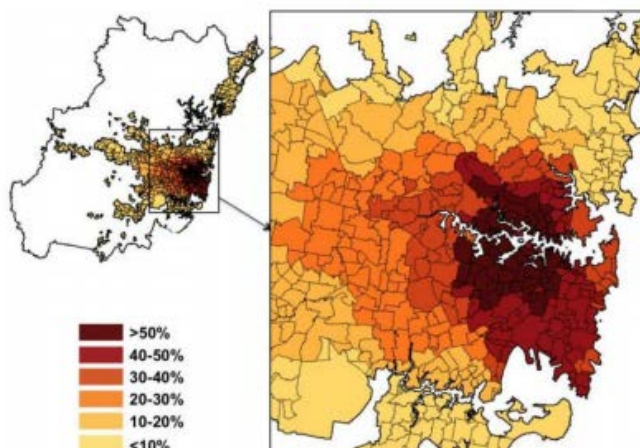
This is clearly demonstrated by transportation figures in the North West and South West subregions. Public transport usage is as low as 4.7 percent in some areas (compared with the Sydney metropolitan average of 20 percent), despite around half of the working population leaving the region each day<sup>viii</sup>.

Western Sydney residents deserve regular, reliable public transport services, so they can look forward to better opportunities.



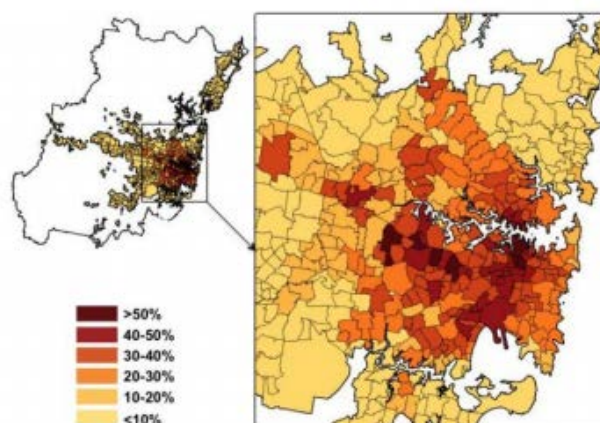


Figure 1: Percent of total jobs accessible within a 30 minute car trip



Source: SGS Economics and Planning (2013); Draft Metro Strategy Submission Final Report RDA Sydney June 2013

Figure 2: Percent of total jobs accessible within a 30 minute public transport trip



Source: SGS Economics and Planning (2013); Draft Metro Strategy Submission Final Report RDA Sydney June 2013

Figure 3: Subregion snapshots

**North West subregion**

*North west Sydney has the lowest proportion of trips made by public transport of any Sydney subregion. In 2011 only 13.4 percent of the subregion's population used public transport to travel to and from work<sup>1</sup>. This was greatest in the Hawkesbury LGA where only 4.7 percent of residents used public transport regularly, despite 42.6 percent of residents working outside the LGA.*

**South West subregion**

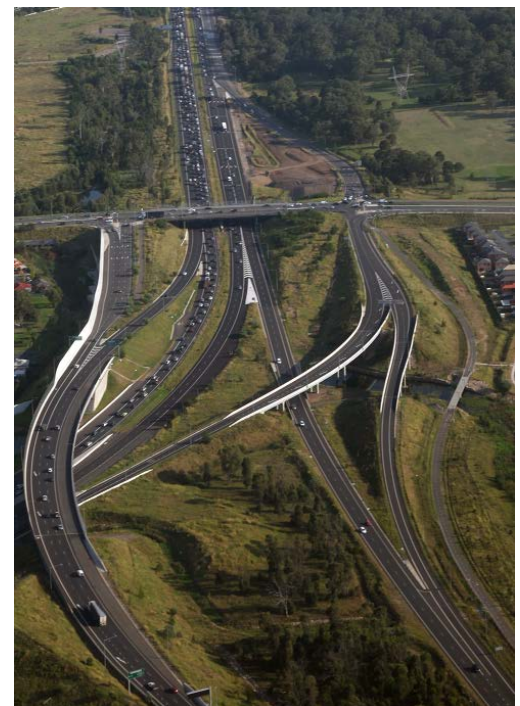
*In south west Sydney, 64 percent of the Liverpool population work outside their local government area, travelling to jobs dispersed across Sydney. Despite this, only 12.4 percent use public transport to access employment compared to the Sydney metropolitan average of 20 percent.*

Source: Australian Census 2011 data via Profile.ID. (n.d.). North West subregion: Method of travel to work. Retrieved from: <http://profile.id.com.au/wsroc/travel-to-work?WebID=210>

## Action plan

The incoming NSW Government should:

- Complete the major critical infrastructure projects required to support ongoing growth in Western Sydney including:
  - *The North West Rail Link through Rouse Hill to the Richmond Line at Vineyard;*
  - *The extension of the South West Rail Link from Badgerys Creek to Penrith;*
  - *Connect the South West and North West Rail Links between Penrith and Vineyard to create a Western Sydney rail loop;*
  - *A commitment to the next stages of the Western Sydney light rail;*
  - *Strategic bus corridors and cross-regional bus services, particularly along the north-south corridor;*
  - *Implementation of local integrated land use and transport plans; and*
  - *Duplication of the Western rail line between Riverstone and Richmond.*
- Expand the NSW Government bus network to improve public transport services in the outer suburbs which have limited transport choice;
- Plan for a public transport corridor along the M7, other north-south links and high-speed train links between Penrith, Blacktown, Liverpool, Parramatta and Richmond to the CBD;
- Improve public transport service frequency on all main rail lines and bus corridors, especially in off peak times, with a minimum 15 minute service. Services during the peak hour shoulders should also be restored and when sectorisation is further advanced. Travel times on public transport should be reduced to pre-2004 levels and made more competitive with private vehicle travel times;
- Lobby the Commonwealth Government to provide tax concessions for regular public transport commuters equivalent to those provided to employees with company cars;
- Upgrade major rail stations to meet current disability access standards and expand and improve commuter parking facilities;
- Commit to a high-speed rail shuttle along the length of the Parramatta Road corridor connecting the Parramatta and Sydney CBDs;
- Divert the route of the proposed Brisbane to Melbourne high speed train to go via Parramatta; and
- Reserve a corridor for the proposed M9 Orbital, including rail and road options.



## **WESTERN SYDNEY AIRPORT**

### **Badgerys Creek airport: Gateway to the West**

Badgerys Creek airport must form the basis of a whole new redevelopment of Western Sydney if the full economic and employment benefits for the region are to be realised.

Expected to create 28,500 jobs in the immediate area, the proposed Western Sydney airport is an unparalleled opportunity for economic growth in the region<sup>ix</sup>.

Badgerys Creek is a blank canvas that offers the State Government a once in a generation opportunity to plan a state of the art precinct that demonstrates world-leading public and commercial transport, entertainment, recreational facilities and environmental best practice.

If well planned, the proposed airport could also have significant flow on effects for business and tourism in the region.

The airport is also an opportunity to decrease road freight congestion in other parts of Sydney. Nearly two thirds of industrial freight from Port Botany travels to Western Sydney businesses. An airport at Badgerys Creek would provide a direct ticket into the heart of Sydney's manufacturing region.

The Badgerys Creek site is located beside 10,000 hectares of designated Western Sydney Employment Lands and can provide direct links to both the North West and South West Growth Centres.

This project provides a tremendous opportunity to build not just an airport, but an aerotropolis.

Having said this, the incoming State Government needs to make the most of this opportunity carefully considering existing residents and ensuring protection against environmental effects. Western Sydney councils need to work in close consultation with the Commonwealth and NSW Governments to ensure that the airport is a benefit, not a liability, for the West.



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## Action plan

The incoming NSW Government should:

- Commit to upgrades of arterial roads servicing the proposed site; connecting it to major centres including Blacktown, Parramatta, Penrith and Liverpool;
- Commit to investment in public transport, service and social infrastructure surrounding the proposed infrastructure; including shopping centres, sports stadiums and conference centres;
- Undertake programs to reduce the current level of private motor vehicle use in the region and to increase the development, provision and use of public transport;
- Undertake programs and offer incentives that will generate employment surrounding the proposed airport;
- Take every measure to minimise the noise and air pollution surrounding the site;
- Take every measure to ensure residents under the proposed flight paths are protected and compensated;
- Develop an aviation and hospitality precinct using the Western Sydney Employment Lands to build hotels, conference and sporting facilities;
- Prioritise local employment and procurement in planning and construction of the precinct; and
- Relocate the proposed Moorebank Intermodal freight terminal to Badgerys Creek.



## WASTE MANAGEMENT

### Smart, sustainable and regional

With landfill sites under pressure, and increasing resource recovery targets, Western Sydney needs to think smart, think sustainable and think regional when it comes to managing waste.

Over 1 million people will settle in Western Sydney over the next 15 years<sup>x</sup>, having a significant impact on the waste footprint of the region.

Currently Western Sydney does not have enough waste and recycling infrastructure to cater for this population boom, and worse still, residents have been producing more waste per capita than ever before.

A total of 699,887 tonnes of domestic waste was collected from Western Sydney households in 2011 - 2012. By 2021, this is expected to increase to 1,040,000 tonnes; the equivalent of garbage trucks filled with waste queued back to back from Sydney to Brisbane.

In order to manage waste sustainably into the future a combination of government actions and community behavioural changes are needed. The rapid growth of communities, in particular, the move towards construction of higher density dwellings, is placing increasing pressure on council resources.

At the same time, inadequate planning controls for developers reduces the ability of local government to provide effective and sustainable waste services to communities within new multi-story dwellings.

Local councils need stricter planning controls when it comes to waste services, as well as better community education to ensure more waste is diverted from landfill.

Another major issue facing Western Sydney councils is the disposal of asbestos. One in three homes built before 1982 contain asbestos, making this a serious issue for WSROC councils, whose jurisdictions cover the heart of Sydney's 'fibro belt'.

Problems with asbestos disposal include the public perception that it is expensive and time consuming to dispose of. This has led to wide-scale illegal dumping in the region.

Current legislation has many grey areas when addressing domestic asbestos removal, which provides difficulties for local government trying to educate and enforce domestic asbestos removal issues.

WSROC has developed a Regional Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Strategy to tackle existing and emerging waste issues.

A key aspect of this strategy is reducing waste produced by households, increasing the percentage of waste that is recycled, and ensuring infrastructure is in place to collect, process and dispose of waste responsibly.

State Government support for regional initiatives will ensure local councils will be able to manage the increasing volume of domestic household waste into the future.

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## Action plan

The incoming NSW Government should:

- Plan for and facilitate adequate waste infrastructure to cater for increased volumes of waste produced by growing populations in the region;
- Develop appropriate planning controls to ensure favourable development of waste infrastructure;
- Ensure planning approval systems include controls that do not contradict the guidance and direction of state waste and resource recovery strategies;
- Maintain and strengthen adequate planning controls to ensure developers adequately address waste management issues, particularly in multi-unit and high density developments;
- Continue and expand financial support for the Regional Illegal Dumping Squads and council dumping teams, who deal with dumped wastes including asbestos;
- Introduce better government and council regulation of disposal and monitoring of waste disposers, for example, mandatory registration of asbestos disposal contractors and use of identification technologies such as data-dot;
- Commit to ongoing funding of Community Recycling Centres (CRCs); and
- Continue and expand funding opportunities for local government waste and resource recovery projects and education programs.





## 2. MANAGING WESTERN SYDNEY'S NATURAL ENVIRONMENT AND RESOURCES

*Western Sydney is not often recognised for its natural environment, however it is home to three major rivers, countless waterways, heritage listed national parks, the last remnants of the unique Cumberland Plain forests, a number of threatened and endangered species and some of NSW's most fertile and productive farmland. Western Sydney needs to commit to sustainable development or risk the welfare of future generations.*



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## SUSTAINABLE URBAN MANAGEMENT AND GROWTH

### One chance to get it right

Western Sydney needs to commit to sustainable development or risk the welfare of future generations.

Western Sydney is NSW's fastest growing region. The next decade promises unprecedented large-scale development right across the Greater West - offering governments a one-off chance to get it right.

The region's vast size and rapid growth is already putting pressure on employment, housing availability and infrastructure. This has direct flow-on effects for the environment, economy, as well as the health and well-being of Western Sydney residents.

WSROC believes that strict adherence to principles of sustainable development is essential if the region is to develop in a manner that safeguards the welfare of future generations.

Public transport should be foremost in the minds of planners. The region is currently hampered by car dependence, with around 68 percent of residents travelling by private vehicle on a daily basis<sup>xi</sup>.

Traffic congestion is not only inconvenient but has a number of environmental ramifications due to the use of unsustainable, non-renewable and polluting fuels.

A regional jobs deficit is also cause for increased environmental and social pressure. Around 30 percent of residents in the region are required to travel into Sydney for work, many by car.

Developing local economies to offer a range of jobs in specialist industries would not only reduce commute times and car dependence, but increase the standard of living for residents now and in the future.

In addition, inefficient land use and an ad hoc approach to development has compromised the balance of rural and urban areas. This has increased negative impacts on the environment and has resulted in an unnecessarily high demand for energy and water.

This lack of sustainability is particularly significant given the context of global warming and climate change.

Change is needed now to ensure future generations have access to the natural resources we take for granted as well as reliable sources of food water and energy.

A regional approach to planning, food security and sustainable building practices will ensure future sustainability targets are met.

## Action plan

The incoming NSW Government should:

- Commit to investment in public transport infrastructure, improved services and better integration between modes;
- Ensure that implementation of the 2014 metropolitan strategy, A Plan for Growing Sydney<sup>xii</sup>, recognises the interconnectivity and interdependence of all elements of the strategy;
- Implement state and local integrated land use and transport plans which include developing and renovating employment and industrial centres close to sources of skilled labour, and reviewing competing demands for land use;
- Develop mandatory design principles for new housing and urban developments which ensure maximum water and energy efficiency;
- Establish new industrial and service sector clusters close to where skilled workers live, supported by broadband connectivity and complementary educational facilities;
- Provide industrial scale renewable energy supplies;
- Stem the loss of productive agricultural land in the Sydney Basin and provide greater certainty by strong protection of rural lands, including definition of boundaries and policies to support agricultural and associated land uses;
- Give greater recognition to the importance of providing open space to both support the recreational needs of new communities at the urban fringe and also retrofit parks and civic meeting places in areas undergoing urban renewal;
- Provide incentives and subsidies to encourage energy production within Western Sydney from renewable sources, to reduce energy consumption and to make the region a hub for energy efficient and alternative energy industries;
- Establish education campaigns which aim to reduce waste generation, energy consumption, water usage, and encourage sustainable purchasing decisions; and
- Develop a consistent urban tree management policy in consultation with local government to reduce tree removal and to fund large-scale native tree planting initiatives.

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## AIR QUALITY

### The dirtiest air in Australia

Western Sydney is swimming in a stagnant pool of toxic gas and smog.

High levels of human activity combined with the region's unique geographical structure, trap and concentrate pollution, creating the dirtiest air in Australia<sup>xiii</sup>.

Air quality has been a key concern for Western Sydney for many years, but surging populations and development in the region could quickly see pollution levels sky rocket if nothing is done to minimise pollution.

With many developments planned for the Western Sydney region, WSROC is calling on the incoming State Government to take action – regularly assessing and monitoring air quality.

Of all air borne pollutants, particulate matter from coal-fired power stations, motor vehicles and wood fire heaters is considered to be most detrimental to community health both short and long term<sup>xiv</sup>.

A complex cocktail of acids, chemicals, metals, and dust, particulate matter is estimated to cost the NSW greater metropolitan area around \$4.7 billion per year in direct health costs<sup>xv</sup>.

Increased public transport options as well as improved roads could significantly improve air quality in Western Sydney<sup>xvi</sup>.

Motor vehicles are one of the biggest sources of air pollutants in the region accounting for 80 percent of toxic carbon monoxide emissions and 70 percent of nitrogen oxides<sup>xvii</sup>. Western Sydney has much higher levels of car dependence than the rest of the metropolitan area, an issue compounded by congested roads which increase emissions per kilometre travelled .

Coal-fired power stations are also on the biggest polluters list. Investment in clean, sustainable technologies is crucial to the continual improvement of air quality in Western Sydney.

Finally, wood-fire heaters are major generators of fine particulate pollution, especially during the winter months<sup>xix</sup>. In 2014 WSROC ran a series of community workshops to help residents reduce wood smoke pollution and save money over the winter months. This program was very well received, and funding should be considered for future programs.

The incoming State Government will have a pivotal role in monitoring air quality, addressing many of the fundamental causes of air pollution and in assisting local government initiatives.

## Action plan

The incoming NSW Government should:

- Improve and expand public transport options for the residents of Western Sydney;
- Incorporate detailed air quality assessments in environmental impact statements for new projects e.g. F3, M2 and Western Sydney airport;
- Shift road-based freight to rail to achieve a net reduction of greenhouse gases and particulate emissions whilst ensuring that the negative environmental and social impacts of the resulting infrastructure and its operation on local communities are managed appropriately;
- Reintroduce the electrification of all freight rail services in the Sydney Basin, and where appropriate, in other areas of NSW;
- Ensure that a key objective of the planning process is a reduction in the need for residents to travel to access employment, facilities and services;
- Support and lobby the Commonwealth Government to develop and introduce sustainable and cost effective alternative transport fuels, including natural gas and hybrid vehicle technologies, to reduce fuel consumption and greenhouse gas emissions;
- Install enhanced air quality monitoring networks across the region. This should include monitoring points near known and potential pollution sources to ensure comprehensive monitoring for the effective management of air pollution and its impacts;
- Establish education campaigns in conjunction with the Commonwealth and local governments that target environmental issues including climate change.





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## **WATER MANAGEMENT**

### **Protecting western waterways**

Whether for farming, recreation or leisure, our waterways are one of Western Sydney's greatest assets, yet their conservation value is often considered inferior to Sydney's harbour and beaches.

Western Sydney is home to a number of significant river systems including the Hawkesbury-Nepean, Georges and Parramatta Rivers, and their protection is essential for a healthy environment as well as for recreation, business and tourism.

The challenges around effective water management will continue to grow as Western Sydney's population expands and the impacts of global warming become more apparent.

Urban encroachment, stormwater pollution, weeds, mining, introduced animals and erosion pose major threats to our Western Sydney catchments, aquifers and rivers.

The need for effective water management is heightened due to the region's susceptibility to the costly impacts of urban salinity.

Most of Western Sydney's waterways, including the Hawkesbury-Nepean River System, have been highly modified by weir and dam construction and significant water diversion. The maintenance of environmental flows has become a major challenge across the region.

WSROC has argued that management of the Hawkesbury-Nepean is complicated by the lack of a single, local entity with responsibility and funding to implement programs that will ensure its long-term health. In addition, funding is required to provide the necessary technology and equipment required to maintain the river's health.

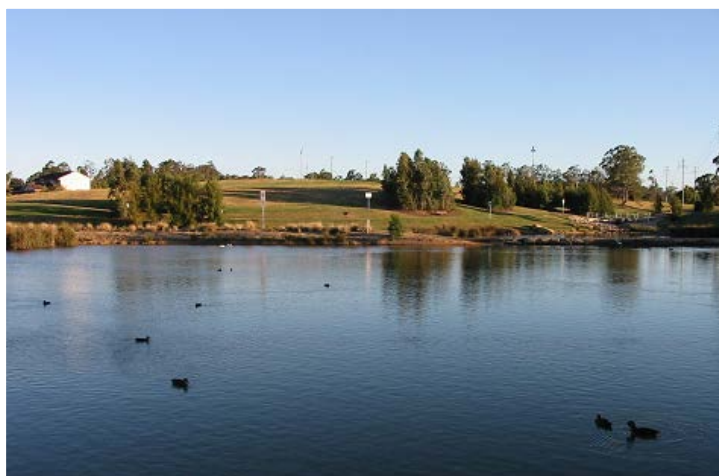
WSROC has led a number of projects aimed at improving Western Sydney's water quality. In the current context of the national debates on global warming and climate change, water quality and quantity are issues both of national and regional importance.

The health of Western Sydney's rivers and waterways is affected by activities right across the Sydney Basin, therefore a regional approach to management is necessary to protect these priceless assets.

## Action plan

The incoming NSW Government should:

- Increase environmental funding for a whole-of-catchment approach to managing the Hawkesbury-Nepean River, Georges River and Parramatta River systems;
- Increase funding support for aquatic weed management programs;
- Provide funding to support catchment action plans and restorative work on riparian zones, revegetation and protection of the endangered Cumberland Plain Woodland and habitats necessary for biodiversity;
- Develop programs to assist with protecting biodiversity threatened by urban sprawl;
- Increase support for flood mitigation measures in the Hawkesbury Nepean Valley;
- Ensure firm controls to prevent environmental damage from coal seam gas exploration and mining;
- Provide water that is affordable and safe to drink;
- Maximise water efficiency and recycling, especially capturing stormwater and invest in research and innovation;
- Develop education programs that enable government and community to take joint responsibility for water management;
- Promote the strategic integration of water cycle management with urban planning, including demand management, supply, and improving water quality, for example by incorporating water sensitive urban design into the planning process;
- Relocate the proposed Moorebank Intermodal to Badgerys Creek, preserving the Georges River precinct for low-impact activity such as recreation and low-density housing; and
- Work with commercial, industrial and agricultural sectors to assist the application of best practices to reduce pollutant and nutrient loads on waterways.



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## AGRICULTURAL MANAGEMENT AND FOOD SECURITY

### Balancing act: Affordable housing and affordable food

Sydney's housing shortage and burgeoning population mean rapid development is necessary, but we must not ignore the way in which this development is reshaping the local agricultural industry.

As part of the NSW Government's metropolitan strategy, *A Plan for Growing Sydney*, 52 percent of Sydney's fresh produce farms<sup>xx</sup> are making way for 180,000 new homes in Sydney's South West and North West Growth Centres<sup>xxi</sup>; most of which are small, privately owned farms.

Without these growers the cost of fresh fruit and vegetables would increase. Less availability, greater need for transportation and refrigeration, as well as more imported produce would all impact on the cost to consumers.

In 2006 the Sydney Basin provided 90 percent of Sydney's perishable vegetables, 18 percent of Sydney's milk and 33 percent of the state's poultry<sup>xxii</sup>.

At this time around 94,000 hectares of land was dedicated agricultural use<sup>xxiii</sup>, the North West and South West Growth Centres alone will take up almost 30 percent of this land (27,000 hectares).

WSROC understands the need to increase the number of available dwellings as Sydney's population grows, however these populations also need access to fresh and affordable food.

Decline in local food availability would have the greatest impact on low-income families in Western Sydney who already struggle with weekly household food bills.

WSROC is calling on the incoming State Government to actively protect Sydney's most fertile farming land, particularly in the North West and South West Growth Centres.

Prioritising food security is prioritising Australian farming, Australian health and cost of living for future generations.

## Action plan

The incoming NSW Government should:

- Establish an urban-rural edge within statutory state plans showing the limits of urban expansion in the life of a regional strategy and basis for separation between these two uses;
- Designate agricultural land protection areas within the regional and metropolitan plans which conserve agricultural land resources;
- Prevent mining which has the potential to adversely affect rivers by either removing riparian vegetation or cracking river bases;
- Establish an agricultural lands taskforce to advise governments on strategies to secure appropriate land for agricultural purposes around the major cities and about additional infrastructure support to sustain agriculture; and
- Develop agricultural strategies to protect both agricultural land and agricultural activities.



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## LAND MANAGEMENT AND URBAN HEAT

### Greener spaces for cooler cities

Sustained growth and human activity are rapidly reshaping Western Sydney's landscape and as a result the region's agricultural lands have been encroached, its rivers despoiled and natural vegetation largely cleared.

This level of growth is unsustainable and without proper protection of biodiversity corridors, agricultural lands and recreational spaces, Western Sydney will see average temperatures and pollution levels continue to increase<sup>xxiv</sup>.

Urban areas are already much hotter than their rural counterparts because roads, buildings and footpaths hold and retain more heat than natural vegetation.

This Urban Heat Island Effect (UHI) is well documented<sup>xxv</sup> and has been shown to decrease liveability and increase the need for high-energy cooling. Some areas of Western Sydney such as St Marys routinely achieve temperatures over 40 degrees Celsius, even on days when the regional average is around 35 degrees.

This effect is exacerbated in Western Sydney by the geographical structure of the Sydney Basin, which naturally traps heat and pollution.

The effect is strongest in Blacktown but also affects Camden, Liverpool, Parramatta and Richmond<sup>xxvi</sup>.

The maintenance of green corridors, parks and green-cover in metropolitan areas has been shown to have significant cooling effects for urban areas<sup>xxvii</sup> – securing a much more comfortable and aesthetically pleasing environment for future generations.

Maintaining biodiversity is key to healthy green spaces. Areas with high levels of biodiversity are better able to withstand the impact of changes than areas with low biodiversity. Therefore Western Sydney's biodiversity must be maintained and enhanced if the region's environment is to cope with its continued growth.

The incoming State Government needs to thoroughly consider emerging research into UHI in Western Sydney. This will not only inform the development of more sustainable urban areas, but prioritise the protection of green corridors and parks which will increase the liveability of Western Sydney for future generations.



## Action plan

The incoming NSW Government should:

- Continue support of the Growth Centres Biodiversity Offset Program<sup>xxviii</sup>;
- Create regional nature reserves and provide adequate funding to preserve areas of regional open space;
- Expand 'green' open space corridors along the major north-south creeks in the region in line with further urban expansion;
- Actively encourage initiatives that support and promote biodiversity;
- Promote initiatives that assist in educating the community about the importance of biodiversity;
- Develop a consistent urban tree management policy in consultation with local government to reduce tree removal and to fund large-scale native tree planting initiatives;
- Prevent mining activities which have the potential to adversely affect rivers by either removing riparian vegetation or cracking river bases;
- Identify and protect biodiversity corridors;
- Increase funding to Landcare NSW through the Local Land Services, to support grassroots land management projects;
- Protect the Western Sydney Parklands;
- Conduct further research to identify UHI hot-spots in Western Sydney;
- Support and fund the establishment of increased green cover in Western Sydney LGAs;
- Assist local government with the tools and support to tackle UHI effect by integrating climate change mitigation in all levels of planning; and
- Develop education campaigns to enhance the community's resilience to extreme heat events.



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## 3. PROVIDING EMPLOYMENT AND EDUCATION FOR OUR REGION'S GROWTH

*Home to a vibrant, diverse and well-educated workforce, Western Sydney is one of the fastest growing regions in NSW in terms of population, however its economy is beginning to show signs of stress as a result of the decline of traditional manufacturing. This \$95 billion dollar economy needs to diversify in order to prosper.*



## EMPLOYMENT AND POPULATION GROWTH

### Diversify or die: Saving the Western Sydney economy

A shift from traditional labour and manufacturing industries to value-added future technologies is needed if the Western Sydney economy is to support its own population.

Worth \$95 billion a year, Western Sydney is Australia's third largest regional economy after the Sydney and Melbourne CBDs, and a major driver of NSW prosperity<sup>xxix</sup>.

However this wealth means little if the region continues to rely on declining industries such as traditional manufacturing which has seen 17 percent fewer jobs in south west Sydney alone in the past year<sup>xxx</sup>.

Western Sydney also has one of the fastest growing populations in NSW. By 2031, the region will have around 200,000 fewer jobs than it needs to maintain existing employment levels in the face of projected population growth<sup>xxxi</sup>.

WSROC believes Western Sydney's economy must be restructured as a matter of urgency. The future of the Western Sydney economy must be driven by value-added future technologies, including energy, water and resource efficiency, broadband, and other high-tech industries.

There is need and demand for this. Almost 30 percent of Western Sydney's workforce leave the region each day for work<sup>xxxii</sup> – a young, educated labour force that is ready to lead the charge in new, highly skilled industries.

Furthermore, Western Sydney has a generous supply of industrially zoned land, strong educational and research facilities, potential for increased transport and infrastructure, and proximity to international gateways including the proposed Western Sydney airport.

Improving the scale and mix of employment opportunities in Western Sydney, will not only help it to develop jobs in line with population growth, but will also allow more people work closer to home, reducing commuting times, and making Sydney a more productive and pleasant place to live<sup>xxxiii</sup>.





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## Action plan

The incoming NSW Government should:

- Fund the development of new environmental and high technology industry clusters, located close to where workers with relevant or transferable skills currently live, close to existing public transport infrastructure, and on existing dedicated employment lands under the State Government's A Plan for Growing Sydney;
- Assist businesses and other high value service enterprises to establish or relocate their operations to Western Sydney's existing major commercial centres and business parks, close to where workers with relevant skills currently live;
- Provide necessary enhancements to public transport infrastructure connecting people to the industry clusters from where they live;
- Co-locate tertiary educational facilities in or near the new industry clusters;
- Give priority to the new high technology industry clusters for the roll out of the National Broadband Network (NBN);
- Support these initiatives by funding the immediate commencement of construction of the Parramatta light rail, the extension of the North West Rail Link, the duplication of the Western Line and implementation of local government integrated land use and transport strategies in Western Sydney;
- Work with local TAFE colleges and University of Western Sydney to develop a skills base to fill demand from new industries;
- Establish 'smart work hubs' to increase workplace flexibility and reduce commuting time;
- Revitalise town centres to encourage local entrepreneurs and small businesses to flourish;
- Move more public service positions west; and
- Build greater Aboriginal workforce participation in Western Sydney by improving links between the private sector and Aboriginal communities to increase employment, business and economic development opportunities, including promoting the Western Sydney Job Compacts.

## EDUCATION

### **Decreasing barriers, increasing access and supporting teachers**

Research shows that life opportunities are significantly increased according to the levels of education completed. After completing a university degree earning potential is increased by \$1 million over a lifetime compared to a person who only completes year 12.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

Western Sydney residents are not choosing to pursue the same level of education as other Sydney residents, impacting their capacity to thrive, and potentially restricting economic growth in the region.

These choices could be put down to a number of barriers including study costs, family and work commitments, transport and other difficulties. By choosing not to pursue senior high school, vocational or universities study, the earning potential for individuals and the wider Western Sydney region is hindered.

#### ***Numeracy and literacy***

Evidence suggests that there are pockets of severe educational disadvantage in some parts of Western Sydney. We need to give our young people the best chance they can to set up their future careers and earn decent incomes. If young people struggle at high school levels they won't have the option to pursue vocational or higher education – their options will be limited.

Basic literacy and numeracy must be a focus. The State Government should work with teachers and schools who are at the frontline and have many insights on how to make improvements. Funding for literacy and numeracy programs should be complemented with professional development for teachers.

#### ***Participation***

The 2011 census showed only 15.9 percent of residents WSROC council areas had obtained bachelor or higher degree qualifications compared to 24.1 percent of residents in Greater Sydney populations (an 8.2 percent difference). The figures for residents indicating no formal qualification was also striking – 48.3 percent for WSROC area residents compared to 40.5 percent in Greater Sydney (a 7.8 percent difference).<sup>xxxv</sup>

The figures are even worse for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. In 2011 only 8.3 percent of the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island populations reported a year 11 or 12 qualifications as their highest qualification compared to the overall WSROC region figure of 47.6 percent. The government must engage the indigenous community to work with the NSW Department of Education and Communities, local governments and non-profit sector on targeted approaches to improve participation and student engagement.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

#### ***Supporting and encouraging teachers***

As Western Sydney's population ages, the region is losing experienced teachers. WSROC calls for NSW Government initiatives and incentives to encourage new undergraduate and post-graduate teachers to the teaching profession, including 'career changers'.

At the other end of the career spectrum, more also needs to be done to encourage what we used to consider more experienced teachers to remain in the system – either in a full-time or part-time capacity. Experienced teachers have a lot to contribute in terms of mentoring new teachers and passing on the knowledge that isn't necessarily covered by teaching degrees.

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### ***Education providers and funding***

With a predicted NSW Government budget surplus of \$272 million for the 2015-2016 financial year,<sup>xxxvii</sup> WSROC urges the NSW Government to reallocate funding to TAFEs.

WSROC would like to see the government reinvest funds from any predicted budget surplus back to all TAFEs, including Western Sydney Institute of TAFE and South West Sydney Institute of TAFE. Funding increases can assist with operational and infrastructure costs, to replenish or reinstate successful outreach programs where possible, and to create student scholarships or rebates to help individuals most vulnerable to course fee rises.

### ***Transport to and from providers***

WSROC calls for the NSW Government to consider the transport needs of residents getting to and from all education provider sites. Western Sydney infrastructure projects must consider the needs of students, teachers and support staff as they travel between home, work and places of study.

Young students without cars are reliant upon public transport to and from their education provider, and many mature students have to weigh up the travel time and stresses of getting between work and study in peak hour traffic or transport. Efficient and frequent transport services connecting public transport nodes with the major campuses must be a priority.

## Action plan

The incoming NSW Government should:

- Apply pressure to the Commonwealth Government to review its cuts to Gonski Funding – to reinstate the two years of funding that were cut, and honour the original State Government-signed agreement;
- Support and fund programs to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island participation in all forms of education - particularly around increasing year 12 completion rates and university and vocational enrolments;
- Increase funding to primary and high school literacy and numeracy programs. Review and fund related teacher professional development opportunities and resources;
- Increase funding to TAFEs for operational and infrastructure costs, outreach programs, and scholarships or rebates for individuals most impacted by course fee increases;
- Implement new programs and incentives to encourage new teachers into all forms of education. Encourage post-graduate students and 'career changers', in particular. Encourage retirement age teachers to remain teaching in a part-time capacity to reduce the skills 'drain' occurring as the Australian population ages;
- Reconsider levels of funding directed to private vocational education providers; and
- Consider public transport needs of students moving to and from major Western Sydney education institutions including the University of Western Sydney, TAFE campuses, Community Colleges and private education providers.



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## YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

### More than just Gen Y apathy

The NSW Government needs to address youth unemployment in Western Sydney or risk a disconnected welfare generation.

Employment is a critical part of young people's personal development. It allows financial independence, builds positive social engagement and feelings of self-worth.

If unable to find work, young people can lose a sense of hope and purpose. This can result in exclusion from mainstream society and long-term reliance on welfare<sup>xxxviii</sup>.

Youth unemployment is of particular concern in Western Sydney. The region has some of the highest youth unemployment rates in the country, the most extreme being in Parramatta where rates are around 18 percent<sup>xxxix</sup>.

Mission Australia's 2014 Annual Youth Survey<sup>xl</sup>, found that over 80 percent of young people see career success as very important, yet only 40 percent believe they are likely to achieve their goals.

While this trend is more pronounced in lower socio-economic areas, it is certainly not limited to disadvantaged groups. More affluent areas such as the Hawkesbury and Hills districts (13 percent) and Blue Mountains (10 percent) are also seeing high rates of youth unemployment<sup>xli</sup>.

There are several factors which have been identified as contributing to higher levels of unemployment in Western Sydney:

- The global financial crisis and a recovering economy<sup>xlii</sup>;
- The changing job market and decline in primary manufacturing. This means less unskilled work available to young people without education or other workplace skills<sup>xliii</sup>;
- A disconnect between tertiary graduates and available jobs. For example an over-supply of personal trainers<sup>xliv</sup>; and
- An over-emphasis on university and stigma attached to entry-level skilled work<sup>xlv</sup>.

## Action plan

The incoming NSW Government should:

- Fund a youth transitions scheme to assist young people build basic employability skills, find work experience, vocational guidance and training opportunities;
- Create opportunities for meaningful work experience for young people, including increased use of intermediate labour market programs and social enterprise;
- Provide more intensive, youth-focussed assistance for young people within the employment service system, to ensure their needs are met early and job outcomes improve;
- Establish programs that link schools, TAFE and universities with local businesses; providing a strong pathway for graduates;
- Build and diversify the Western Sydney economy to create a greater range and quality of job opportunities;
- Commit to a greater focus on job readiness and soft skills in schools to improve employment outcomes for students entering the workforce;
- Increase incentives for employers to hire under 25s and offer on-the-job training opportunities;
- Encourage school children from years 10 upwards to be actively engaged in examining career choices and taking up work experience;
- Establish programs that target key transition periods between school, tertiary study and first jobs; and
- Ensure state schools maintain an equal focus on all work pathways including on the job training, TAFE or university studies as suits each individual student.



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## EARLY INTERVENTION AND CHILD CARE

### Two thirds of mothers' wage spent on childcare

Western Sydney mothers are spending over two thirds of their hourly wage on childcare according to a study by the National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling<sup>xlvi</sup>.

A mother from a low-income family earning \$16.37 per hour would keep less than one third of her pay, \$4.55, if returning to work full-time.

Western Sydney has a high proportion of low income families who are dependent on childcare because both parents work. These families are unfairly burdened by the high cost of childcare and in many areas have difficulty finding quality places.

Staff shortages are also a major issue for the region's early childhood centres. These shortages have occurred partly due to the low salaries of trained early childhood teachers, which encourage teachers to move to primary school teaching positions or other related family focussed services.

Investment in early intervention, both in early education programs and the identification of problems through childcare or pre-school, leads to better educational and life-experience outcomes. Early intervention is also cost-effective, saving around seven times its cost in remedial action later in life.

However, children's services are in crisis in Western Sydney, with unsustainable patterns of shortage occurring in some parts of the region and oversupply in others. These patterns have intensified over the past five years with major expansion of private childcare centres, the development of new release areas and a declining ability to pay for childcare by some disadvantaged groups.

Many centres are being sustained only through significant council subsidies with the rationalisation or restructuring of services being considered.

The incoming NSW Government needs to address child care in Western Sydney, with a particular focus on low income families.

Good quality child care, offers a good start for young children and affordability is key factor in allowing mothers to return to employment.



## Action plan

The incoming NSW Government should:

- Audit levels of childcare supply in all regions of the state and research childcare demand drivers to identify the causes of the existing unsustainable mismatch of demand and supply, particularly in Western Sydney;
- Establish benchmarks for childcare availability for all children in the state, particularly, but not exclusively, for preschool-age children;
- Increase funding for preschools to levels that ensure ongoing viability and increased supply, especially in socio-economically disadvantaged areas;
- Increase operational support for preschools to allow them to offer salaries which are comparable to primary school teachers;
- Urgently address staff shortages in the early education and childcare field through negotiations with and additional funding for tertiary institutions to increase the number of places for trainee teachers and other staff specifically involved in 0 – 5 year education and care;
- Provide councils with increased resources for council-run childcare centres; and
- Increase the funding to early childhood centres to increase the supply of preschool places and so that long day care centres can offer salaries which are comparable to primary school teachers for staff with equivalent qualifications.

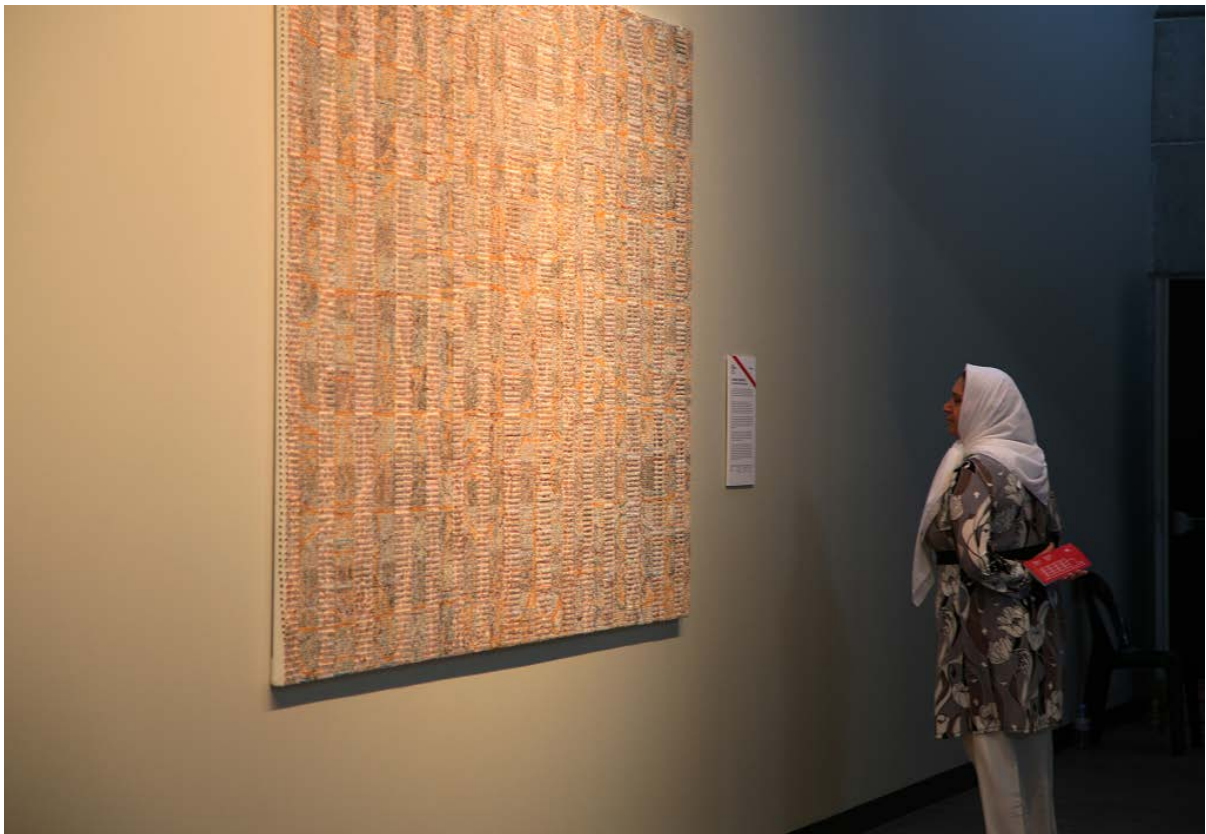




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## 5.IMPROVING THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL SUSTAINABILITY OF WESTERN SYDNEY

*Western Sydney is a vibrant and diverse region that has much to offer NSW. However, its residents suffer a number of inequalities. Health, affordable housing and cultural opportunities are key issues for the region.*



## PREVENTATIVE HEALTH

### **Preventative health. We can't afford not to.**

When it comes to preventable lifestyle diseases, Western Sydney is costing NSW billions in tax-payer dollars every year.

Compared to the national average, Western Sydney has a higher incidence of lifestyle risk-factors including obesity (51 percent), smoking (21 percent in Nepean-Blue Mountains health district), insufficient exercise (52 percent) and poor diet (92.9 percent)<sup>xlvii</sup>.

Unsurprisingly, Western Sydney is a hot-spot for a range of lifestyle diseases including lung cancer, cardiovascular disease and type two diabetes.

The average annual healthcare cost per person with diabetes is \$4,025<sup>xlviii</sup>, but this can more than double if complications arise. With 103,000 registered diabetics in Western Sydney, this equates to base annual health costs of over \$400 million<sup>xlix</sup>.

However, the costs of chronic disease are much greater than health care bills indicate. Those suffering these conditions are less likely to participate in the labour force, less likely to be employed full time, and more likely to be long-term unemployed<sup>i</sup>.

These issues are only set to increase. It is estimated that the prevalence of diabetes in Western Sydney will be 204 percent higher in men by 2025.

We need to stop now and address the explosion of lifestyle-related illnesses, most of which are preventable.

Simple measures that encourage healthy lifestyle choices such as eating more fresh fruits and vegetables, regular exercise and reduced smoking and alcohol consumption, would significantly reduce the cost of medical care and pressure on the public health system.

While the steps to prevention are simple, Western Sydney's unique make-up poses several challenges. Large indigenous and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, have historically suffered higher rates of chronic illness and need to be catered for.

Support is also required for low socio-economic groups who are also at greater risk of developing lifestyle related issues.

Education programs that address these groups are essential to beating lifestyle-illness in the region. Teaching young people healthy habits through in-school programs is also a proven strategy for success.

WSROC is supporting a number of programs including the Western Sydney Diabetes Prevention and Management Initiative<sup>ii</sup>, and urges the incoming State Government to do the same.

NSW cannot afford to ignore lifestyle disease. Western Sydney needs help and the cost is affecting everyone, at a local, state and federal level.

## WESTERN SYDNEY SNAPSHOT

51.7 percent of the population are overweight or obese<sup>lii</sup>

52 percent of people do not do adequate levels of physical activity (approx.)<sup>liii</sup>

92.9 percent do not eat enough vegetables<sup>liv</sup>

6.5 percent are known to have diabetes, a further 6.5 percent are believed to be undiagnosed diabetics<sup>lv</sup>



## Action plan

The incoming NSW Government should:

- Invest more in preventative health strategies especially tailored to the specific needs of the Western Sydney region (including its Indigenous and CALD communities);
- Support the Western Sydney Diabetes Prevention and Management Initiative in their work towards reducing the prevalence of type two diabetes in Western Sydney;
- Give funding priority to mental health treatment and support programs, including an assessment of transport disadvantage in these groups which contributes to social isolation and difficulty accessing services;
- Support equitable communities programs for major disadvantaged communities such as Katoomba and Mount Druitt where premature death rates, mental and behavioural disorders and preventable disease are all well above the state averages;
- Support and expand the development of smoking cessation strategies including the provision of quit services at Blacktown, Mt Druitt and Doonside Community Health Centres, and specialised programs targeting Indigenous and CALD communities, pregnant women and people with a mental illness; and
- Develop and support education campaigns such as [SALSA](#)<sup>lvi</sup> to reduce children's intake of sugar including soft drinks and promote healthy eating and nutrition in schools.



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## HEALTH SERVICES

### Western Sydney deserves equal access to public health

Residents of Western Sydney are disadvantaged in almost all areas of health care services.

With significantly fewer beds, hospital staff, GPs and mental health facilities than the North, South and East combined, Western Sydney has some of the longest wait times in NSW in its emergency department as well as for cancer and elective surgeries<sup>lvii</sup>.

Western Sydney also has a higher rate of hospital admissions than the rest of Sydney<sup>lviii</sup> meaning hospital resources are more stretched, with fewer beds and hospital staff taking care of more patients when compared to the rest of Sydney.

A significantly lower number of general practitioners puts further strain on the hospital system as patients check-in to emergency departments for non-urgent medical treatment.

Western Sydney needs urgent attention. Increasing the number of public hospital beds and medical professionals will certainly come at a significant cost, however as a fundamental principle of public policy, all members of a community should have equal access to health care.

While there is a great need for increased health services in regional NSW, there are programs and incentives targeting these remote areas. There are no such incentives to encourage increased health services in Western Sydney, one of the largest population bases in Australia.

The one area that sees an equal level of service is aged care. This is due to government policy that ensures a proportional supply of aged care beds across all regions<sup>lix</sup>.

WSROC believes a similar approach in other areas of health care would greatly benefit Western Sydney residents.

While it is true that some people, through their ability to afford and access private hospital treatment, may be able to obtain better services than others, there is no justification for this being the case in the public sector – particularly in a region where residents are less able to afford private health care.

All members of the community should have equal access to public health services.



## Action plan

The incoming NSW Government should:

- Support and expand the development of specialised health programs targeting indigenous and CALD communities, pregnant women and people with a mental illness;
- Prioritise the patient journey when dealing with chronic and ongoing health conditions to ensure thorough, holistic care;
- Expand and invest in health services to meet the needs of growing and aging population – including aged care, mental health services, critical care, integrated primary health care services and cardiology;
- Provide incentives to attract more general practitioners and medical specialists to practise in Western Sydney;
- Provide funding for more nurses and hospital beds to meet community needs and the increasing demand for high quality personal care;
- Bring dental treatment under the Medicare system to cover non-cosmetic dental and oral health services for low and middle-income families; and
- Increase funding for healthy communities and healthy workers initiatives for Western Sydney.

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## HEALTH AND URBAN PLANNING

### Healthy spaces for healthy living

The environments we live in have a major effect on our health and wellbeing. Across Sydney, the odds of having diabetes vary geographically by 42 percent<sup>lx</sup>.

A joint study being conducted by the University of Western Sydney and WentWest has found that where people live, and what kinds of services they have access to have an influence on healthy or unhealthy lifestyles<sup>lxi</sup>.

Environmental factors such as ready access to healthy and affordable food, adequate public transport services, and safe, aesthetically pleasing recreational spaces can all encourage people to make better lifestyle choices.

Inadequate access to fresh, healthy food options can be seen across many lower-socio economic areas.

Increased car dependency caused by inadequate public transport services also contributes to unhealthy lifestyles. Every additional hour per day in a car translates to a 6 percent increase in the likelihood of obesity<sup>lxii</sup>.

Thirty percent of Western Sydney residents commute long distances to the Sydney CBD each day, and many more are required to travel well out of their local area for work<sup>lxiii</sup>.

Supporting the development of new business and employment hubs closer to where people live, would increase the ability of residents to choose active methods of travel, as well as giving increased leisure time to pursue recreational activities.

Ensuring new communities have access to regular public transport services, safe walk ways and cycle paths, as well as end-of-journey amenities such as bike lockers, showers and change rooms, all increase the likelihood of active travel and healthy lifestyles.

Research has shown the distances individuals are willing to walk increase in line with the 'walkability' of their environment<sup>lxiv</sup>. In this way, effective urban planning that ensures, safe and aesthetically pleasing environments can encourage increased physical activity within the community.

Every additional kilometre walked translates to a 4.8 percent reduction in the likelihood of being obese, and by extension, a reduction in the likelihood of associated lifestyle diseases<sup>lxv</sup>.

Supporting the development of healthy communities that inherently encourage physical activity and healthy eating could save the Government millions in health care costs and create healthier, happier communities.

## Action plan

The incoming NSW Government should:

- Develop and implement policies that ensure the availability of fresh, healthy and affordable food options in high-risk communities such as Blacktown and Mt Druitt, particularly in close proximity to schools;
- Introduce legislation to prevent the establishment of fast food outlets in close proximity to schools, and consider strategies to discourage children seeking out these options when travelling to and from school;
- Encourage and support local councils to create walkable and liveable communities in line with the Walk21 International Charter<sup>bxvi</sup>. Offer financial support for investments that encourage active travel including walkways, cycle ways, increasing neighbourhood safety and public transport infrastructure;
- Consider the needs of elderly residents when planning new developments; and
- Prioritise sustainable or active travel when planning new developments and communities. This may include the provision of cycle and walkways, public transport and end-of-journey services such as showers and change rooms.



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## ARTS AND CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

### Vibrant region deserves fair funding

The cultural diversity of Western Sydney is unique to Australia. More than one third of the region's population was born overseas and half of the world's nations are represented among its residents.

The arts and cultural content developed in Western Sydney is highly diverse. The region has long been a producer of quality artists and cultural content, including sophisticated engagement with Pacific-Asian content.

However, despite former initiatives to develop a strong and vibrant artistic industry in the West, a worrying inequity remains between Western Sydney and other regions (NSW or Sydney) when it comes to arts employment, infrastructure, audience building and funding.

Currently only 5.5 percent<sup>lviii</sup> of NSW arts funding goes to Western Sydney where 30 percent of the state's population lives.

This significant shortfall seems to be part of an increasing trend that assumes Western Sydney audiences are adequately serviced through activities in inner-city organisations.

As a result, funding is directed to major cultural institutions in inner-Sydney rather than being used to support and grow already established Western Sydney arts institutions and organisations.

This attitude denies Western Sydney audiences the opportunity to experience quality arts and culture in their own communities, including locally developed arts experiences.

WSROC urges the State Government to take a proactive and strategic approach in order to create an equitable, inclusive and sustainable arts sector and stimulate economic growth.

Existing cultural festivals such as Parramasala, Cabramatta Moon Festival and the Festival of Fisher's Ghost all celebrate the diversity of Western Sydney and offer insight into the great potential for cultural and arts tourism within the region.

If Western Sydney is to reach its potential as a mecca for multicultural arts it needs equity in funding.

## Action plan

The incoming NSW Government should:

- Identify Western Sydney as a key-priority area for arts and cultural development;
- Commit to more proportional funding for Western Sydney;
- Commit to representation of Western Sydney at major NSW Arts institutions (e.g. a Western Sydney representative on its board);
- Introduce the structural resourcing needed to create a sustainable arts environment, create pathways to guaranteed long term funding and support for organisations and cultural institutions;
- Conduct comprehensive qualitative and quantitative research on arts in Western Sydney to identify key gaps and opportunities;
- Re-investigate arts training and education in order to establish a new community engagement model; and
- Recognise and support the role of local government in building and encouraging their local arts communities.





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## HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

### Housing shortage squeezes on urban fringe

The shortage of affordable housing is now reaching critical levels, especially in Western Sydney.

The Australian Government estimates that Sydney needs well over 45,000 new dwellings every year to keep up with current demand, yet only 15,000 homes are being built annually<sup>lxviii</sup>.

This housing deficit is increasing by 30,000 dwellings per year and has seen both housing and rental prices skyrocket, not only in the city, but along the fringes of Sydney's west.

In the last five years, the average house price in Windsor on Sydney's urban fringe has increased by 48 percent, while the price of homes in Mulgoa, to the south of Penrith have more than doubled.<sup>lxix</sup>

The effects of this dramatic price rise have been offset by low interest rates, however the average size of new loans has risen significantly, increasing the risk that householders will not be able to make their repayments if interest rates were to rise<sup>lxx</sup>.

Even with low interest rates, WentWest report that 13.1 percent of households are experiencing mortgage stress. This is particularly prevalent in Blacktown, Liverpool, Parramatta (27.5 percent), Fairfield and Rouse Hill<sup>lxxi</sup>, where unemployment rates are highest.

The rental market is proportionally impacted. Low-paid workers in the private rental market are most at risk as they don't qualify for public housing and are suffering high levels of rental stress, even on Sydney's fringes. ABS figures show that 24 percent of households have real difficulty meeting their rental commitments<sup>lxxii</sup>, and this number jumps to 57 percent among low-income earners in NSW<sup>lxxiii</sup>.

The problem has been exacerbated by the under-provision of affordable housing options and social infrastructure as the region's population has grown over the past 30 years.

The Government needs to develop strategies that increase the amount of housing available at the lower end of the market, not just provide subsidies to consumers<sup>lxxiv</sup>.

According to the NSW Department of Planning and Environment, around 46 percent of households are lone person or couple only households, this is expected to increase to increase 53 percent by 2031.<sup>lxxv</sup>

We need to prioritise housing options that cater for these smaller households. Dwellings that are affordable for those on a single income or the aged pension will see increased demand over the next 15 years.

Smaller, more affordable housing options close to key services will need to become a priority as the demographic of Western Sydney changes.

## Action plan

The incoming NSW Government should:

- Adopt a comprehensive affordable housing policy – which does not rely solely on private developers to initiate developments;
- Increase NSW Government investment in both public and community housing;
- Look at realistic funding arrangements and incentives to ensure the appropriate numbers and types of new dwellings are built in the appropriate areas;
- Ensure that new housing developments include diverse housing forms and affordable housing to create communities with residents from diverse social and socio-economic backgrounds;
- Guarantee timely development of social infrastructure in all new residential developments and ensure adequate government or developer funds are available to pay for it;
- Review and increase levels and types of funding provided for local government community service programs; and
- Provide additional infrastructure and support including improved community and public transport to encourage older people and people with disabilities to maintain their independence.



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## POPULATION GROWTH AND DIVERSITY

### Catering for the communities of the future

Managing population increase is one of the major challenges facing Western Sydney and Australia today.

The Greater Western Sydney region is already home to over 1.9 million people<sup>lxxvi</sup> and is expected to increase by over 1 million in the next 20 years. Around 70 percent of the population increase will be due to the combined effects of birth rates and an ageing population. A further 30 percent will be due to immigration.

WSROC is already working with a variety of key stakeholders and community groups to research and develop policies on issues such as housing affordability, planning and transport, infrastructure and food security.

#### SNAPSHOT

Western Sydney residents speak over 130 different languages

37.7 percent were born overseas (12percent higher than NSW average). Figures in some LGAs are much higher - around 57 percent in Auburn, 63.3 percent in Parramatta, 43.1 percent in Holroyd and 37.6 percent in Blacktown<sup>lxxvii</sup>

8.5 percent of our residents do not speak English well<sup>lxxviii</sup>

60 percent of new immigrants to Australia settle in Western Sydney, (56.9 percent of Auburn's population were born overseas<sup>lxxix</sup>)

Between 2006 and 2011 the greatest increase in immigration has been from India (+22k), closely followed by China (8,252) and Iraq (8,214)<sup>lxxx</sup>

Most WSROC LGAs record below average SEIFA scores (socio economic index for areas) – except Blue Mountains and Hawkesbury<sup>lxxxi</sup>

There is a significant indigenous community - about 223, 181 people, dominated by a younger age group – 43 percent are under 18 compared to 25 percent of the general population. Conversely the older age group (over 65) comprises only 4 percent compared to 11 percent in the general population<sup>lxxxii</sup>

## Action plan

The incoming NSW Government should:

- Commence construction of the Western Sydney Light Rail, and other essential major transport infrastructure;
- Implement state and local integrated land use and transport plans including the development and renovation of employment and industrial centres close to sources of skilled labour, and review competing demands for land use;
- Work to establish new industrial and service sector clusters close to where appropriate skilled workers live, supported by broadband connectivity and complementary educational facilities;
- Lobby for Commonwealth support to investigate the optimal mix of production sources to ensure Sydney's supply of equitably priced fresh produce today, in 2030 and beyond; and
- Aid the provision of industrial scale renewable energy supplies.



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## GLOSSARY

**Active travel:** Refers to methods of transport that encourage physical activity including walking, cycling and public transport. Public transport requires travellers to walk from public transport stops to their final destination.

**A Plan for Growing Sydney:** The NSW Government's 2014 Sydney metropolitan strategy.

**Brownfield sites:** Previously developed sites that have been earmarked for restoration or redevelopment.

**Cumberland Plain Woodland:** A distinct grouping of plants and substrates that occur on the Cumberland Plain in central New South Wales. In 1877 Cumberland Plain Woodlands covered 107,000 hectares occupying approximately 30 percent of the Sydney Basin. Today less than six percent (6400 hectares) remains in small fragments scattered across the western suburbs of Sydney.

**Fibro Belt:** Immediately following World War II, Western Sydney experienced a period of rapid development. Demand for housing outstripped building supplies and cost-effective fibro cement sheeting became the most popular building material for working class homes. By the 1970s almost 180,000 fibro dwellings had been constructed across Western Sydney in what is now referred to as Sydney's 'fibro belt'.

**Fit for the Future:** The NSW Government's blueprint for creating more efficient and sustainable local government. This includes suggestions for council mergers and the development of Joint Organisations. Fit for the Future was based on the recommendations outlined in the Revitalising Local Government report. Financial assistance is only available to Joint Organisations established in rural NSW.

**Gonski Review:** An investigation into the way Australian public schools are funded. Published in December 2011, the Review recommended that schools be funded according to the needs of their students and what is required to educate each one of them to a high standard.

**Green corridor:** An area of habitat that connects wildlife populations separated by human activities or structures. These corridors allow populations to mix, preventing interbreeding and facilitating the re-establishment of struggling populations.

**Greenfield sites:** Undeveloped land that has been earmarked for commercial development or housing.

**Growth Centres Biodiversity Offset Program:** This program was established in 2008 as part of the biodiversity certification of the Sydney Region Growth Centres State Environmental Planning Policy (SEPP). The Growth Centres Biodiversity Offset Program is part of a package of conservation measures to offset the impacts on biodiversity from the development of the North West and South West Growth Centres in Sydney. Total funding will be \$397.5 million in 2005–06 dollar values over the next 30 to 40 years.

**Joint Organisations:** As outlined in the NSW Government's 2014 Fit for the Future strategy, Joint Organisations are regional organisations whose role would be to bring together a group of neighbouring councils to discuss and collaborate on projects of regional importance such as pooling funds for major works and attracting industry. The form of these organisations will be developed in consultation with regional councils as part of a pilot process between 2014 and 2016. NSW Government assistance for councils forming Joint Organisations will only be available to regional councils.

**North West Growth Centre:** The North West Growth Centre is a 10,000 hectare area that is being progressively released and rezoned for the development of 70,000 new dwellings. This area includes parts of The Hills, Blacktown and Hawkesbury local government areas.



**North West subregion:** The North West subregion, as defined by the NSW State Government's A Plan for Growing Sydney, includes four local government areas: Blacktown, Blue Mountains, Hawkesbury and Penrith.

**Patient journey:** Refers to the experiences and processes the patient goes through during the course of a disease and its treatment.

**Riparian zones:** The interface between land and a river or stream. 'Riparian' refers to vegetation, habitats or ecosystems that are dependent on a body of water whether perennial, intermittent or sub surface water drainage.

**Smart work hub:** A facility or space that offers workers an alternative to working in their normal place of work or working from home. The NSW Government has committed to three smart work hubs in Western Sydney – Rouse Hill, Oran Park and Penrith.

**South West Growth Centre:** The South West Growth Centre is approximately 17,000 hectares in size and includes parts of the Liverpool, Camden and Campbelltown local government areas. The area is earmarked for 110,000 new dwellings for some 300,000 residents -- almost the same population as Canberra.

**South West subregion:** The South-west subregion, as defined by the NSW State Government's A Plan for Growing Sydney, includes four local government areas: the Camden, Campbelltown, Liverpool and Wollondilly Shire. Only Liverpool City Council is a member of WSROC.

**Urban Heat Island Effect:** The rise in temperature in any man made area due to the effects of urbanisation. This may be due to pollution that alters the chemical properties of the atmosphere, or covering of the soil surface with materials such as asphalt and concrete which absorb and hold more heat than natural vegetation.

**Walkability:** Refers to how 'walker-friendly' an area is. Factors that increase walkability include well maintained footpaths, pedestrian rights of way, traffic conditions, general safety and the aesthetic appeal of an area.

**Western Sydney Employment Lands:** The Western Sydney Employment Lands or Western Sydney Employment Area refers to 10, 000 hectares of land stretching between the Blacktown LGA and Badgerys Creek Airport. This land has been reserved for industry and employment use including transport, logistics, warehousing and office space.

**Western Sydney Job Compacts:** The Western Sydney Job Compact Agreement has the principal aim of fostering increased employment opportunities for Aboriginal people in the Western Sydney area. Signatories agree to actively working trying to overcome the barriers restricting Aboriginal people from accessing employment opportunities and assist in the employment of Aboriginal people.

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