

REDUCING THE BURDENS ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT

18 January 2016

The Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) is seeking feedback on 49 recommendations to reduce the regulatory burdens that the NSW Government imposes on local government.

IPART Chairman Dr Peter Boxall said the draft recommendations address inefficient, unnecessary and excessive burdens placed on councils by the NSW Government in relation to reporting, planning or compliance.

While the recommendations cover a range of council functions, those in the areas of planning and water will bring the greatest improvements in council efficiency.

Planning laws impose a significant regulatory burden. The draft recommendations aim to reduce cost and delays by making better use of technology to automate data gathering, payments and the issuing of certificates.

IPART proposes a risk-based approach to regulating councils' water functions, consistent with the regulation of other water utilities in NSW. The draft recommendations aim to reduce the regulatory oversight of water for lower risk councils, allow water resource planning at the catchment level, and reduce the reporting and auditing burden.

"Approximately 67 Acts administered by 27 different State agencies impose obligations on councils to prepare plans, provide information or comply with other requirements in implementing these Acts," Dr Boxall said.

"While many regulatory obligations are necessary, all come at a cost. Our goal is to identify those that are inefficient, unnecessary or excessive, and recommend ways to remove or reduce these burdens on councils."

Overall, IPART's Draft Report calls for the State to work as a partner with local government when giving councils additional responsibilities by considering the cost to councils, by taking a whole-of-government approach, and by adopting risk-based approaches, including support for councils where needed.

IPART is seeking feedback on the draft recommendations, which include:

- ▼ Improving the planning system by expanding the use of the ePlanning Portal and developing a suite of standardised development consent conditions to reduce costs and delays.
- ▼ Reforming regulation of the 100-plus council owned and operated Local Water Utilities that provide water supply and sewerage services to over 1.8 million people.

- ▼ Addressing systemic issues to reduce cost shifting to councils, including requiring NSW Government agencies to consider the costs and benefits of any regulation on local government before making any change.
- ▼ Streamlining reporting requirements across local government administrative and planning functions.

IPART has also recommended reforms to reduce the burdens associated with building and construction, managing public lands and infrastructure, animal control and alcohol-free areas.

Dr Boxall said the draft recommendations are the result of information gathering, analysis and consultation including submissions to the Issues Paper in July, council questionnaires and workshops.

“This is an opportunity to address many of the concerns raised by local government about burdens imposed on councils by the State. We hope to receive submissions from both councils and community stakeholders over the next five weeks,” Dr Boxall said.

A public hearing will be held in Sydney on 8 February 2016, which will be webcast to allow participants from across the State. Submissions close 19 February 2016.

IPART’s Final Report will be provided to the NSW Government in April 2016.

The Draft Report, along with a full list of the draft recommendations and information on the public hearing, is available at IPART’s website <<http://www.ipart.nsw.gov.au>>.

This review is part of the NSW Government’s broader local government reform program that commenced in 2011 and is the result of a recommendation of the Independent Local Government Review Panel.

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