

25 October 2021

## Submission in response to the NSW Productivity Commissions recommendation 4.5 – Contributions plans use benchmark costs

### About the New South Wales Public Libraries Association (NSWPLA)

NSWPLA is the peak body for public libraries across NSW. The role of the Association is to:

- Advocate and lobby for the NSW public library network
- Initiate strategic partnerships
- Champion the public library cause
- Build trust and support
- Provide relevant information
- Foster cooperation and collaboration
- Strengthen the public library network

Membership to the Association is open to all Local Government Councils in NSW that have adopted the NSW Library Act 1939. The Association currently has 100% membership of NSW Councils, which provides a clear imprimatur for NSWPLA to represent the interests of NSW libraries as their recognised peak body.

### Public Libraries in NSW

There are currently 362 public libraries and 24 mobile libraries in NSW.

In 2019-2020 there were:

- 2,368 staff employed in NSW libraries
- 3.1 million library members
- 26 million visits in person
- 34.8 million loans
- 15.1 million visits to library websites
- 2.6 million internet sessions and 5.4 million wifi sessions
- 73,000 programs and events attended by 1.5 million people

Public libraries provide important community spaces where a significant proportion of NSW constituents attend for a wide variety of reasons including education, recreation, entertainment, and social integration.

Libraries provide physical and social focal points for their communities and make a significant contribution to prosperity and wellbeing of constituents. From a physical perspective, library buildings are often architectural landmarks and centrepieces of greenfield developments that make a significant contribution to the liveability of towns and cities. Investment in libraries is investment in communities.

Despite the closure of libraries across the state during the 2020 COVID-19 lockdown period, libraries very successfully reinvented their services to meet the changed circumstances. Nevertheless, a post-lockdown survey conducted with library members across Australia by the Australian Library and Information Association revealed that the loss of social interaction that libraries provide was one of the biggest impacts felt by communities.

### NSW Infrastructure Contributions and Library Buildings

There is a clear and demonstrated need for public library buildings in NSW. State government contributions to the provision of NSW public library buildings and services dropped from 23.6% in 1980 to just 7.8% in 2018-19. Effective lobbying by NSWPLA saw an injection of an additional \$60m for NSW libraries over the quadrennial period 2019-20 to 2023, providing a 12% contribution by state government to the total operating costs of NSW libraries.

The current Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (DPIE) Essential Works list has removed community facilities. This is a significant impediment to the funding of essential community infrastructure, especially in disadvantaged areas and those within high density areas, where libraries are often a family's lounge room.

Removing development contributions from Local Government would reduce capacity for Local Government to provide essential community infrastructure and amenities such as libraries. Libraries provide established community hubs where community members come together for a broad range of educational, recreational and social activities, resources and spaces.

### Recommendation

NSWPLA implores IPART to:

- Review the essential works list to allow community services buildings to be funded under Section 7.11 of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979,
- Amend the DPIE Essential Works list to include community services buildings.
- Development contributions to remain with Councils' so they can continue to provide community infrastructure at a cost that is reflective of communities geography, typology and requirements.

### Contact

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