



Submission in response to the NSW Productivity Commission's Review of Infrastructure Contributions in New South Wales

31 July 2020

1. About us

Australian Library and Information Association

The Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) is the professional organisation for the Australian library and information services sector. On behalf of our 5,000 personal and institutional members, we provide the national voice of the profession in the development, promotion and delivery of quality library and information services to the nation, through leadership, advocacy and mutual support.

ALIA Australian Public Library Alliance

The Australian Public Library Alliance is part of ALIA and represents the interests of the nation's 1500 public libraries. Offering books, magazines, newspapers, DVDs, WiFi, PC internet access, learning programs, fun activities and expert staff help, these libraries are a much loved, highly regarded and trusted community resource.

- More than 9 million registered users in 2018-19 and more than 110 million visits to libraries, 51 million visits to library websites.
- More than 273,000 programs eg storytime, Be Connected, attracted over 7.4 million attendees.
- Per capita annual cost of \$52.38, funded by councils, state and territory governments.¹

In NSW, there are 449 outlets, including main libraries, branches and mobile library services, serving metro, regional and remote communities. There are more than 3.14 million registered or active library members and nearly 1.9 million participants take part in 95,600 library programs, including storytimes for young families; Be Connected, promoting digital literacy for seniors; language classes for those for whom English is a second language.

2. The value and importance of library buildings

Across Australia, public libraries are the physical manifestation of a centre's ambition to be a smart city. They provide both an architectural focal point and engaging experiences that help create a strong sense of community. Often, they are centrepieces for civic renewal and

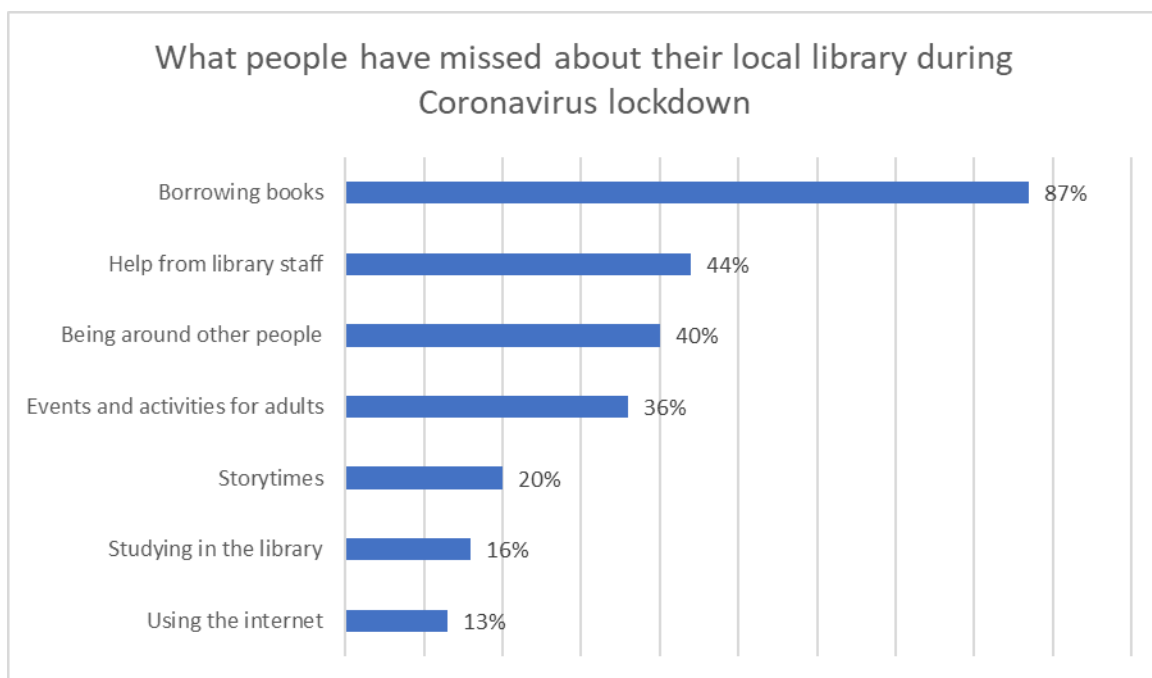
¹ <https://www.nsla.org.au/sites/default/files/documents/nsla-public-library-stats-2018-19.pdf>

provide the social cohesion for greenfield developments. New builds are frequently a partnership between all three levels of government, with developer contributions, recognising that an investment in libraries is an investment in the 'social glue' which makes for a safer, more inclusive society and helps create liveable cities.

In our response to the Australian Infrastructure Audit 2019 (Section 6.5 Social Infrastructure²), ALIA highlighted some of the issues facing libraries.

- The suitability and currency of public library buildings varies by state and territory and by local government area. While some communities benefit from new, state-of-the-art facilities, others have ageing buildings which are not fit for purpose.
- In areas of population growth, social infrastructure lags behind community need and libraries can be too small to accommodate user demand for study space, public access computers, quiet reading areas and group activities.

During the COVID-19 lockdown, public libraries have been closed and the lack of access has been deeply felt. The first 500 responses to a nationwide survey of library users showed that, after book borrowing, social interaction was the biggest loss felt by communities.



3. NSW infrastructure contributions and library buildings

Against this backdrop of need, opportunities and challenges, funding for library buildings is critical to serve existing communities and those in new and high growth areas.

² <https://www.infrastructureaustralia.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-08/Australian%20Infrastructure%20Audit%202019%20-%20206.%20Social%20Infrastructure.pdf>

At present, local infrastructure contributions in NSW are capped at \$30,000 per dwelling or residential lot in greenfield areas and \$20,000 in infill areas. If councils seek to go above these caps, they can only do so if the uses are included on the essential works list. The current Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (DPIE) Essential Works list includes the land for library and community facilities but not the buildings themselves. This is a significant impediment to the funding of new facilities, especially in disadvantaged areas.

The findings of this review could assist in easing the restrictions on contributions for facilities and enable new communities to enjoy access to services which others in NSW take for granted. This would strongly support the principle of equity outlined in the Productivity Commission's issues paper.

4. Recommendation

ALIA urges the review panel to acknowledge the issue of contribution caps and their detrimental effect on investment in library and other community buildings.

We ask the panel to recommend that the NSW Government allow community services buildings to be funded under Section 7.11 of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979, where contributions exceed the caps of \$30,000/\$20,000 per lot or dwelling, and to amend the DPIE Essential Works list to include community services buildings.

Contact:

██
██
██