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NEW SOUTH WALES

FROM THE STATE LIBRARIAN

Mr Peter Achterstraat AM
NSW Productivity Commissioner
NSW Productivity Commission
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Wednesday, 5 August 2020

Dear Mr Achterstraat,

Review of Infrastructure Contributions

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on the Commission's Review of Infrastructure Contributions. The State Library of NSW supports measures to more easily facilitate infrastructure contributions for the development of new and improved public libraries.

NSW public libraries are vital facilities in communities across NSW, and they have experienced considerable growth in usage in recent years. The latest figures compiled by the State Library of NSW show that the 363 public libraries across the state experience over 35 million visits per annum, and that their collections, technology and library spaces are in considerable demand.

More than half of the state's public libraries are housed in buildings that are more than 30 years old, and built for a time when population catchments were smaller, and the services offered by libraries were less expansive than those expected by today's community.

Contemporary public libraries need to be larger than their predecessors due to higher populations in local catchments, space required for programs, IT facilities, community activities, study and demand for collections.

Other drivers of library size needs include the ageing population (older people use libraries at a higher rate than younger people), young families in growth centres (demand for early literacy collections and programs), and urban consolidation (people





living more densely in smaller residences have high demand for library spaces for study, Wi-Fi and social activities).

The State Library of NSW works with all NSW local councils under the Library Act 1939 to *promote, provide and maintain local libraries for the people of NSW*. The State Library administers the Government subsidies and grants provided annually to assist councils to provide library services. This includes a \$24M capital grant program which will be delivered between 2019/20 and 2022/23 to improve library buildings.

These funds are welcome, however the cost for councils to build or significantly improve public library buildings greatly exceeds the capacity of councils and the grant program.

Section 7.11 of the Environmental Planning & Assessment Act 1979 enables consent authorities (usually local councils) to levy developer contributions, as a condition of development consent, towards the cost of providing local public infrastructure and facilities required as a consequence of development. The power to levy a contribution relies on there being a clear nexus between the development being levied and the need for the public infrastructure or facility.

Contributions plans which propose rates above a threshold amount of \$20,000 per dwelling and \$30,000 in greenfield areas can only be levied after the Contributions Plan has been assessed by the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) against the Department of Planning, Infrastructure and Environment's (DPIE) Essential Works List.¹

At present only *land for public libraries* is on the List, which precludes councils from seeking funds toward library building infrastructure.

The inclusion of public library facilities on the Essential Works List would enable councils, especially those in growth areas, to more easily levy developers for contributions (subject to approval by the Minister for Planning and IPART) which will support the development of necessary public library infrastructure.

The NSW Government is making a significant commitment to improving public libraries, with a \$60 million increase to library subsidies and grants between 2019/20 and 2022/23. The inclusion of public library building infrastructure on the Essential

¹ <https://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/Policy-and-Legislation/Infrastructure/Infrastructure-Funding/Local-contributions>





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Works List will enable councils to more easily leverage the necessary investment in library infrastructure from developers for new and growing communities.

There may be mechanisms other than s7.11 that could ensure that public library infrastructure needs are included when developments are under consideration. The State Library encourages the Productivity Commission to consider the need for new and larger public libraries as a key imperative for communities as developments are planned and implemented.

