Ms Kiersten Fishburn
Secretary
Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure
Locked Bag 5022
Parramatta NSW 2124

**Submission Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure Draft Community Participation Plan**

Dear Ms Fishburn

I am writing to make a submission on behalf of my local community to voice the serious concerns that have been raised with me regarding the Minns Labor Government's proposed Statewide Community Participation Plan (CPP) that is currently on exhibition by the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure (DPHI).

I have received correspondence from residents and precinct committees expressing concerns about the proposed changes to community participation requirements across the NSW planning system. The concerns raised by our community are profound and widely held, both in the abolition of local plans, and in the detail of what is proposed in the new statewide Plan. Locals believe that the proposed Plan represents the continuation of a fundamental and deeply troubling shift in how planning decisions are made in New South Wales - away from transparency, community participation and local accountability, and toward centralised ministerial control.

I raised these concerns in the Parliament of NSW during debate on the legislation, where I outlined the broad community concern about loss of voice, and highlighted the role that councils currently play in understanding their communities and preparing plans that reflect their communities. The NSW Liberals moved amendments to that Bill which the Labor Government voted down.

> *A central tenet of the planning system is community voice. It is why we have a bottom-up strategic planning system that empowers our local councils—the closest level of elected representation to the community, I will give them that—to undertake local environmental plans [LEPs] and development control plans [DCPs]. They are done through extensive and detailed local work and community consultation. Good strategic planning uses local knowledge and insights to shape a future which has buy-in from our communities. It often requires tough decisions to meet growth and housing targets, such as decisions about where the local environment and infrastructure can and cannot support density.*
>
> *This bill, in its current form, seeks to abolish district and regional planning panels. The Opposition will move amendments to those provisions. The district planning panels, like the Sydney North Planning Panel that covers my electorate, include two council-nominated members appointed for each council, ensuring a local voice in decisions. This Labor*

*Government seeks to remove that local voice, but we will seek to retain those panels to maintain that community input.*

*The bill also seeks to abolish the local community participation plans that LGAs shape to set out how the planning authority will engage the public in decision-making.*

*Lane Cove and North Sydney have had their plans in place since 2019; Mosman, since 2020. Each of them outlines how the council will engage with its community in the powerful role of exercising its planning functions. They include assessment and determination of development applications, and preparation of local strategic plans, LEPs, DCPs and contribution plans. They are all crucial decisions councils make which communities deserve a say in. The Opposition will move amendments that seek to guarantee meaningful engagements, not just box-ticking exercises.*

*There is also significant concern, which the Minister will have heard, that the Minister will use his discretion to cut public exhibition and consultation on State significant developments from 28 days to 14 days. The Opposition opposes any reduction in consultation on what are major projects that could clearly have major impacts. We have also sought a minimum exhibition time frame of 28 days for consultation to be enshrined in the targeted assessment process rather than centralising more power with the Minister. I ask the Government to support that amendment.".*

Environmental Planning and Assessment Amendment (Planning System Reforms) Bill 2025, 15 October 2025

The abolition of the local Community Participation Plans by the Minns Labor Government takes away additional opportunities for local communities to have their views heard and reflected in decision-making. Each local Community Participation Plan also had its own consultation process, which ensures the unique voice of each community is considered. A statewide plan abolishes all these components.

**A cumulative erosion of community rights**

It is critical that these changes to Community Participation Plans are considered in the context of the vast range of changes already made which have diminished community participation. It must be understood against the backdrop of a series of planning reforms introduced by the Minns Labor Government that have already significantly reduced community input into planning decisions across NSW and that residents in the North Shore electorate have raised with me.

Many residents have contacted me regarding the NSW Government's Low and Mid-Rise Housing Policy and the impact it is having on the character, infrastructure and liveability of our neighbourhoods. There is widespread concern about a range of developments being proposed, the lack of time for community consideration, the failure of the Minns Labor Government to plan for or fund supporting infrastructure, the loss of protections for heritage and preservation, and environmental harms.

At the same time, the Minns Labor Government has reduced community consultation periods for State Significant Development (SSD) applications from 28 days to just 14 days, giving residents less time to review complex proposals and make informed submissions. This is particularly impactful as these are complex projects that can have broad impacts across many streets and potentially hundreds of dwellings. Developers may spend many years preparing the documents they lodge for an SSD application, with the support of paid and skilled expert consultants, and yet residents without the qualifications and experience are expected to digest hundreds of pages of materials and prepare meaningful responses within only 14 days.

Although the Minister advised me that I could seek to retain the 28-day community consultation period by requesting it of him when an SSD is lodged, of those I have requested

subsequently, none have been extended, and my requests were not responded to within the exhibition window. The community is therefore experiencing the full weight of these changes to the planning system with the systematic dismantling of their ability to engage and be heard.

**Removal of exhibition and notification rights**

The proposed Plan incorporates a range of changes which likely would not have been supported in local Plans, if they had not been abolished. These are opposed by members of my community, particularly the components that exempt an extraordinarily wide range of development types from public notification and exhibition, including:

- Residential flat buildings and shop-top housing including those up to 8–9 storeys enabled under LMR provision.
- All new single and two-storey dwellings, dual occupancies and secondary dwellings
- Alterations and additions to existing dwellings
- Alterations to schools, and community, health and education infrastructure
- Demolition works (excluding heritage items)
- Strata subdivision
- Tree removal
- Change of use of commercial development, industrial retail outlets, and bed and breakfast accommodation

These are not all low-impact developments. Residential flat buildings of 8–9 storeys can materially affect surrounding properties through loss of privacy and views, overshadowing, increased traffic, acoustic impacts, and adverse changes to neighbourhood character and streetscape. Community members across North Shore are deeply concerned that they will lose all ability to be heard before such developments are approved.

Community submissions do not merely raise objections - they provide valuable local knowledge about existing traffic conditions, drainage, cumulative impacts, pedestrian safety and neighbourhood character that consent authorities frequently lack. Removing this input will lead to worse planning outcomes. Developer applications are often accused of providing incomplete or misleading information, and local councils do not have resources to verify compliance at every level. A claimed compliance with planning controls is not, and should not be, a substitute for notification.

**Inadequate exhibition periods**

Where exhibition is retained, the proposed timeframes are inadequate for meaningful community participation:

- 14-day exhibition periods are insufficient for development applications, particularly those involving large volumes of documentation such as state significant developments, as outlined above. Many community members have full-time employment, family commitments and other obligations. A fortnight does not provide a realistic opportunity to review complex applications and prepare meaningful submissions.
- The proposed timeframes are fixed and inflexible, removing the discretion of local councils to extend exhibition periods to accommodate local circumstances, community complexity, or the scale and nature of a particular proposal.
- The Plan grants the Minister and NSW Government the power to determine whether public exhibition of changes to the EP&A Act and Regulation is required at all, with no published criteria. This means fundamental changes to planning law could be made without any community input.

- State Environmental Planning Policies which can rezone land and dramatically alter what can be built making exhibition discretionary rather than mandatory.
- A broad catch-all provision allows the Government to truncate community participation processes for undefined 'government priorities' or 'administrative requirements', with no limits on when this power can be exercised.
- Pre-commencement notice for Complying Development Certificates is proposed to be cut from 14 days to 7 days insufficient for residents to understand the scope of works, prepare, or document the condition of their property before demolition or excavation begins.

**Conclusion**

The proposed Statewide Community Participation Plan represents a significant and concerning diminishment of the rights of NSW residents to participate meaningfully in planning decisions that directly affect their lives, homes and communities.

NSW communities deserve a planning system that treats their participation as an asset, not an obstacle. A planning system that works for all residents must be built on genuine, meaningful, and accessible engagement.

I note all my local councils in my community, Mosman, North Sydney, and Lane Cove have all made submissions expressing concern about reducing community participation by changing how residents are notified and consulted on development applications.

I look forward to your consideration of the concerns raised in this submission on behalf of my local community.

Yours sincerely

**Felicity Wilson MP**
**Member for North Shore**