



Environmental
Defenders Office

Submission on the NSW Government's *A new approach to strategic planning - Discussion Paper* (and draft Sydney Plan)

27 February 2026

About EDO

EDO is a community legal centre specialising in public interest environmental law. We help people who want to protect the environment through law. Our reputation is built on:

Successful environmental outcomes using the law. With over 40 years' experience in environmental law, EDO has a proven track record in achieving positive environmental outcomes for the community.

Broad environmental expertise. EDO is the acknowledged expert when it comes to the law and how it applies to the environment. We help the community to solve environmental issues by providing legal and scientific advice, community legal education and proposals for better laws.

Independent and accessible services. As a non-government and not-for-profit legal centre, our services are provided without fear or favour. Anyone can contact us to get free initial legal advice about an environmental problem, with many of our services targeted at rural and regional communities.

www.edo.org.au

[Lodged online](#)

For further information on this submission, please contact:

Cerin Loane
Special Counsel, Policy and Law Reform
E: cerin.loane@edo.org.au

Revel Pointon
Managing Lawyer, Policy and Law Reform
E: revel.pointon@edo.org.au

Acknowledgement of Country

The EDO recognises and pays respect to the First Nations peoples of the lands, seas and rivers of Australia. We pay our respects to the First Nations Elders past, present and emerging, and aspire to learn from traditional knowledges and customs that exist from and within First Laws so that together, we can protect our environment and First Nations cultural heritage through both First and Western laws. We recognise that First Nations Countries were never ceded and express our remorse for the injustices and inequities that have been and continue to be endured by the First Nations of Australia and the Torres Strait Islands since the beginning of colonisation.

EDO recognises self-determination as a person's right to freely determine their own political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development. EDO respects all First Nations' right to be self-determined, which extends to recognising the many different First Nations within Australia and the Torres Strait Islands, as well as the multitude of languages, cultures, protocols and First Laws.

First Laws are the laws that existed prior to colonisation and continue to exist today within all First Nations. It refers to the learning and transmission of customs, traditions, kinship and heritage. First Laws are a way of living and interacting with Country that balances human needs and environmental needs to ensure the environment and ecosystems that nurture, support, and sustain human life are also nurtured, supported, and sustained. Country is sacred and spiritual, with culture, First Laws, spirituality, social obligations and kinship all stemming from relationships to and with the land.

A note on language

We acknowledge there is a legacy of writing about First Nations peoples without seeking guidance about terminology. We also acknowledge that where possible, specificity is more respectful. For the purpose of this submission, we have chosen to use the term First Nations. We acknowledge that not all First Nations will identify with that term and that they may instead identify using other terms or with their immediate community or language group.

First Laws is a term used to describe the laws that exist within First Nations. It is not intended to diminish the importance or status of the customs, traditions, kinship and heritage of First Nations in Australia. The EDO respects all First Laws and values their inherent and immeasurable worth. EDO recognises there are many different terms used throughout First Nations for what is understood in the Western world as First Laws.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Environmental Defenders Office (**EDO**) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the *A New Approach to Strategic Planning: Discussion Paper* (**Discussion Paper**) and draft Sydney Plan. This submission provides feedback on the Discussion Paper and, where relevant, elements of the draft Sydney Plan which is on exhibition concurrently. The draft Sydney Plan is illustrative of how the new approach to strategic planning is intended to be implemented. We also note the government is at the same time seeking feedback on a draft Statewide Industrial Lands Policy, however we do not provide any substantial feedback on that document directly.

Strategic land use planning is a key tool for managing land use conflicts and guiding how land will be used, developed and protected in the face of competing economic, social and environmental pressures. Effective strategic planning can provide greater certainty for communities and investors, reduce cumulative environmental impacts by managing impacts at a landscape scale, and identify areas of high environmental and cultural value for conservation and restoration. However, strategic planning should not replace individual project assessment; site-specific assessments are still required to scrutinise the real, detailed impacts of a proposal, such as impacts on particular threatened species populations, hydrology, cultural heritage, or community amenity, once specific details of a project are known, and where these may not have been fully considered in earlier, high-level planning.

EDO has long advocated for a robust, legislated framework for strategic planning in NSW. In our view, the current provisions of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* (NSW) (**EP&A Act**) fall short, because they do not include key elements of best practice strategic planning, including, for example, requirements for baseline studies of environmental values, mandatory consideration of prescribed criteria, and requirements to align with other government strategies, including, for example, in the areas of natural resource management, cultural heritage, transport, infrastructure and health. Without these elements, there is a risk that strategic plans developed in NSW won't provide the holistic vision needed for guiding the future of our State.

The current proposal for developing a new approach to strategic planning and the draft materials on exhibition realise this risk: the proposed framework fails to incorporate essential elements for effective strategic planning, and the proposed strategic plans are unlikely to be effective in managing conflicting land uses and guiding the future growth and prosperity of all aspects of the State's future.

Our submission addresses the following key issues:

- Overarching comments needing to be addressed for effective strategic planning:
 - Imbalanced framing of the role of strategic planning
 - Failure to underpin plans with transparent, robust evidence
 - Failure to align plans with other government strategies
 - Recommendations for legislative reform
 - Future consultation

- Feedback on specific elements of the Discussion Paper
 - Section 6 – A stronger framework
 - Section 7 - Proposed Statewide priorities
 - Section 8 - A framework designed to adapt

- Further specific feedback on the draft Sydney Plan

Our submission provides the following **key recommendations**:

Recommendation 1: While conservation planning and Aboriginal Cultural Heritage protection may also happen under separate processes, these must be incorporated into strategic land use planning.

Recommendation 2: The new approach to strategic planning must specify what information needs to underpin strategic plans (in particular regional plans) and this evidence should be publicly available and explained in the context of draft plans.

Recommendation 3: Strategic land use planning must align with other government strategies. Strategic land use planning documents must not be developed in isolation from broader government policies, and more work is needed to clearly explain how the proposed Statewide land use priorities drive planning outcomes that are consistent with other government priorities.

Recommendation 4: The legislative framework for strategic planning should be enhanced, including clear requirements for an evidence base and matters for consideration, to ensure strategic plans have the rigour needed to address the challenges facing our State and manage competing land use interests.

Recommendation 5: The government must undertake further consultation, including on:

- a draft State Land Use Plan and, if needed a revised Sydney Plan
- any specific legislative changes to the EP&A Act needed to implement the new approach to strategic planning
- any changes to the local strategic planning statement framework

The government should also undertake targeted consultation with First Nations peoples.

Recommendation 6: The government should consider separate regional plans based on regional characteristics; and clarify how local councils and affected First Nations communities can input into strategic planning processes.

Recommendation 7: The State Land Use Plan should include a standalone statewide land use priority in relation to environmental protection. Alternatively, we recommend environment protection is more clearly embedded within the existing proposed priorities.

Recommendation 8: The government must undertake genuine and meaningful engagement with affected First Nations communities and organisations during the development of local and regional plans, and consider opportunities for Aboriginal landowners and cultural heritage protection.

Recommendation 9: The government should develop principles for Aboriginal Cultural Heritage management and protection that can guide strategic planning processes.

Recommendation 10: The government should provide more specific information about how the strategic planning framework will be implemented, including any specific legislative changes or policy guidance, so that stakeholders can better understand how the strategic planning framework will be implemented in practice.

OVERARCHING COMMENTS

Imbalanced framing of the role of strategic planning

Strategic land use planning is a key tool for managing land use conflicts and guiding how land will be used, developed and protected in the face of competing economic, social and environmental pressures. With a long-term, landscape-scale approach, strategic land use planning enables governments to coordinate growth, infrastructure and social, cultural and conservation priorities rather than responding to development proposals in a piecemeal way.

Effective strategic planning can provide greater certainty for communities and investors, reduce cumulative environmental impacts by managing impacts at a landscape scale, and identify areas of high environmental and cultural value for conservation and restoration. However, strategic planning should not replace individual project assessment; site-specific assessments are still required to scrutinise the real, detailed impacts of a proposal, such as impacts on particular threatened species populations, hydrology, cultural heritage, or community amenity, once specific details of a project are known, and where these may not have been fully considered in earlier, high-level planning.

Land use planning and biodiversity conservation

The accelerating growth of cities, urban areas and the agricultural industry is causing biodiversity loss around the world due to high levels of habitat fragmentation and permanent land modifications.¹ As a result, integrating ecological principles in land use and urban planning policies is increasingly being recognised around the world as fundamental to improving biodiversity conservation.² Whilst there remains an ‘implementation gap’, powered by the economic and opportunity costs of setting aside land for conservation over urban development,³ shifting away from the myopic focus on economic optimisation of land-use not only improves biodiversity outcomes but also ensures long-term liveability of cities and regions.⁴ Strong urban biodiversity has been linked to improving human health, well-being, connection to nature,

¹ Ascelin Gordon, David Simondson, Matt White, Atte Moilanen, Sarah Adine Bekessy, ‘[Integrating conservation planning and land use planning in urban landscapes](#)’ (2009) *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 91(4), 183-194.

² Miller, James R., Martha Groom, George R. Hess, Toddi Steelman, David L. Stokes, Jan Thompson, Troy Bowman, Laura Fricke, Brandon King, and Ryan Marquardt, ‘[Biodiversity conservation in local planning](#)’ (2009) *Conservation Biology* 23(1), 53- 63.

³ Soanes, K., Taylor, L., Ramalho, C. E., Maller, C., Parris, K., Bush, J., Mata, L., Williams, N. S. G., & Threlfall, C. G., ‘[Conserving urban biodiversity: Current practice, barriers, and enablers.](#)’ (2023) *Conservation Letters*, 16.

⁴ Carthew, S., & Allan, M. ‘[Strategic planning in regional cities: new conceptions.](#)’ (2005) *Conference Paper for State of Australian Cities Conference*.

providing access to ecosystem services and allows recognition of First Nations knowledge systems.⁵ As such, responsible and effective strategic planning requires a holistic approach which balances social, economic, infrastructure and conservation objectives to ensure sustainable development within ecological limits.⁶

With substantial urban expansion anticipated, this holistic approach to planning is a necessity in NSW as 25% of Australia's nationally listed threatened plant species and 46% of nationally listed threatened animal species, are found in urban areas.⁷ However, in the last 3 years, the number of listed threatened plant and animal species in NSW has only increased,⁸ as habitats have experienced a 29% decline in their capacity to support native plants, animals and ecosystems compared to their original condition.⁹ These numbers reflect the shortfalls of current planning policies in NSW to address concerns of biodiversity loss and emphasise the need for reforms to prevent further ecological decline in the wake of accelerating urban developments. Without a clear and integrated conservation focus at the strategic planning level, future land-use and development decisions risk causing irreversible damage to NSW's biodiversity which will inevitably undermine the long-term resilience and prosperity of our environment and communities.

A new approach to strategic planning

We are concerned that the Discussion Paper has a heavy emphasis on the role of strategic planning in guiding growth and development, but does not provide equal emphasis on the role of strategic land use plans in identifying important environmental, Aboriginal Cultural Heritage and social values and guiding how these will be protected and enhanced in the future.

For example:

- Page 11 of the Discussion Paper states: “*Strategic land use planning in NSW must evolve to respond to growth pressures, infrastructure needs and changing community expectations, whether this is in cities or regional areas*”. This statement fails to acknowledge that strategic planning must also respond to environmental challenges (including climate change, biodiversity decline, and pollution) and ecological constraints, and recognise and protect Aboriginal Cultural Heritage.
- Page 27 of the Discussion Paper sets out the roles of responsibilities for each of the planning documents (State plan, regional plans, local strategic plans), including, for example:

⁵ Soanes, K., Taylor, L., Ramalho, C. E., Maller, C., Parris, K., Bush, J., Mata, L., Williams, N. S. G., & Threlfall, C. G., ‘[Conserving urban biodiversity: Current practice, barriers, and enablers.](#)’ (2023) *Conservation Letters*, 16.

⁶ James E.M. Watson, Madhu Rao, Kang Ai-Li, Xie Yan, ‘[Climate Change Adaptation Planning for Biodiversity Conservation: A Review](#)’ (2012), *Advances in Climate Change Research* 3(1), 1-11.

⁷ Australian Conservation Foundation, ‘[The extinction crisis in Australia's cities and towns](#)’ (2020)

⁸ NSW Environmental Protection Authority, *NSW State of the Environment 2024 – Biodiversity*, (2024) Report <<https://www.soe.epa.nsw.gov.au/index.php/all-themes/biodiversity/plants>>.

⁹ DCCEEW 2024, *NSW biodiversity outlook report 2024* in NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, Sydney in NSW Environment Protection Authority, *NSW State of the Environment 2024*, Report <<https://www.soe.epa.nsw.gov.au/all-themes/biodiversity/plants#threats-to-native-plants-overview>>.

- establishing statewide planning priorities in areas such as housing, jobs and resilience;
- providing clear land use change policy positions to guide rezoning and investment; and
- guiding the sequencing of development and infrastructure delivery within precincts, by aligning growth with infrastructure provision.

There is no clear explanation of the roles and responsibilities in relation to identifying and conserving and restoring areas of high biodiversity or managing natural resources, or identifying and protecting Aboriginal Cultural Heritage, which are also key matters that the planning documents must address.

- We also note there is little mention of how priorities relating to agricultural land and primary industries will be incorporated into regional plans.

This framing in the Discussion Paper highlights how the approach is imbalanced, with a clear focus on delivering outcomes for growth and the economy, with other competing interests taking a back seat. This is not a holistic, balanced approach to land use planning that aims to manage competing interests effectively and deliver broad outcomes across all sectors and for the needs of all of NSW. While conservation planning and Aboriginal Cultural Heritage protection may also happen under separate processes, these must be incorporated into strategic land use planning so that strategic land use plans are able to effectively manage competing land uses and not simply manage housing and infrastructure siloed from other priorities of the State.

Recommendation 1: While conservation planning and Aboriginal Cultural Heritage protection may also happen under separate processes, these must be incorporated into strategic land use planning.

Failure to underpin plans with robust, transparent evidence

Strategic land use planning must be based on robust information and evidence. Best practice would dictate what information and studies should inform strategic planning, including for example, baseline studies of environmental and natural resource values and Aboriginal Cultural Heritage values, and strategic environment assessment that includes mandatory consideration of prescribed environmental criteria and assessment of cumulative impacts. For accountability and transparency, this information would be publicly available so that stakeholders are able to understand how plans have been developed.

This is not a requirement of the current framework, and this type of information is not available in the context of the consultation materials. For example, while the draft Sydney Plan does include a list of references at the end, there is no clear evidence of environmental studies, Aboriginal Cultural Heritage studies or data underpinning the plan. Rural and conservation lands and areas with biodiversity values are mapped in the draft Sydney Plan but it is unclear what data has been relied on to create those maps.

Recommendation 2: The new approach to strategic planning must specify what information needs to underpin strategic plans (in particular regional plans) and this evidence should be publicly available and explained in the context of draft plans.

Failure to align plans with other government strategies

Strategic land use planning must align with other government strategies, including for example, in the areas of natural resource management, Aboriginal Cultural Heritage, transport, infrastructure and health. The Discussion Paper talks generally about aligning growth with infrastructure provisions, and the draft Sydney Plan references some specific State policies including, for example, the State Disaster Mitigation Plan, the Sydney Green Grid, and Draft NSW Waste and Circular Infrastructure Plan. However the extent to which strategic land use planning aligns with broader government priorities and objectives is unclear. For example, there is no clear explanation of how the seven statewide land use priorities align with existing government strategies and priorities.

As one example, the government's NSW Plan for Nature commits to developing a NSW Nature Strategy to guide public and private investment and action to protect, connect and restore ecosystems and landscapes across tenures.¹⁰ Although a draft Nature Strategy is still in development, there is a clear opportunity to ensure that new strategic planning documents are aligned with that Nature Strategy. Otherwise, there is a real risk that any Nature Strategy goals and targets will be undermined by planning documents and possible contradictory land use priorities.

Recommendation 3: Strategic land use planning must align with other government strategies. Strategic land use planning documents must not be developed in isolation from broader Government policies and more work is needed to clearly explain how the proposed Statewide land use priorities drive planning outcomes that are consistent with other government priorities.

Recommendations for legislative reform

EDO has long advocated for a robust, legislated framework for strategic planning in NSW.¹¹ Many of the inadequacies of the proposed new approach reflect the failure of the EP&A Act to establish a robust framework for strategic land use planning that embeds prescriptive requirements into the legislative framework. For example, EDO has previously recommended that strategic planning processes should include requirements to:

- describe how the goal of ecologically sustainable development will be put in practice;

¹⁰ NSW Government, [NSW Plan for Nature](#), July 2024

¹¹ See, for example:

- EDO, NCC and TEC, *Our Environment Our Communities - Integrating Environmental Outcomes and Community Engagement in the NSW Planning System*, 2012, available at https://assets.nationbuilder.com/natureorg/legacy_url/2765/our_environment_our_communities_0.pdf?1630462731
- EDO, *Submission to the Inquiry into regional planning processes in NSW*, 2016, available at <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/lcdocs/submissions/53843/0023%20EDO%20NSW.pdf>

- undertake independent baseline studies of catchments' environmental qualities;
- collate and publish data to promote accurate, transparent, evidence-based decisions;
- identify competing land uses and 'triple bottom line' values across regions;
- take account of potential cumulative impacts of development over time;
- integrate natural resources management goals into the planning process;
- identify sensitive areas of NSW where certain kinds of development is prohibited;
- provide for comprehensive rights of public participation, and support to engage;
- promote resilience to climate change for communities and their environments;
- consider and integrate infrastructure needs upfront (including all forms of public transport); and
- prioritise the value of 'green infrastructure' (parks, waterways, wildlife corridors etc).¹²

Similarly, the 2012 NSW Independent Planning Review Panel recognised the need for a clear legislative framework for strategic planning, with key objects for strategic planning to, amongst other things:

- identify sensitive areas containing (or likely to contain) factors that will limit or prevent development taking place;
- consider the scientifically anticipated impact of climate change within the footprint of the strategic planning study area and the broad measures required to mitigate its impact;
- identify areas where competing and potentially conflicting land use [is likely]; and
- identify past and present human activity constraints with broader than localised impacts.¹³

The Independent Panel specifically recognised in its report the need to integrate biodiversity issues into strategic planning and encompass consideration of potential cumulative impacts.

The introduction of a new approach to strategic planning in NSW provides an opportunity to enhance the legislative framework for strategic planning, including clear requirements for an evidence base and matters for consideration, to ensure strategic plans have the rigour needed to address the challenges facing our State and manage competing land use interests.

Recommendation 4: The legislative framework for strategic planning should be enhanced, including clear requirements for an evidence base and matters for consideration, to ensure strategic plans have the rigour needed to address the challenges facing our State and manage competing land use interests.

¹² EDO, NCC and TEC, *Our Environment Our Communities - Integrating Environmental Outcomes and Community Engagement in the NSW Planning System*, 2012, available at

https://assets.nationbuilder.com/natureorg/legacy_url/2765/our_environment_our_communities_0.pdf?1630462731

¹³ Moore and Dyer, *The Way Ahead for Planning in NSW - Recommendations of the NSW Planning System Review*, Volume 1 – Major Issues, May 2012,

Future consultation

We are concerned that this new approach is being progressed without scope for community feedback to be properly integrated into final documents. For example:

- While the Discussion Paper sets out the proposed State priorities to be included in a State Land Use Plan, there has been no commitment to consult on the actual wording of a State Plan itself.
- While it is useful to see the draft Sydney Plan during this consultation period, as an example of how the State priorities may be implemented, it is pre-emptive to progress the Sydney Plan further before State priorities are refined and a State Land Use Plan (and the Draft Statewide Policy for Industrial Lands) is finalised. Further work may be needed on the State priorities and subsequently the draft Sydney Plan, in response to this consultation period.

We recommend that in response to this consultation period, the government undertake further consultation on a draft State Land Use Plan and, if needed, a revised Sydney Plan. We also recommend that the government undertake targeted consultation with First Nations peoples. If there are going to be legislative changes to the EP&A Act to implement the new approach to strategic planning, then there should be public consultation on those specific changes as well. Similarly, if there are going to be changes to the Local Strategic Planning Statement (**LSPS**) framework (noting the consultation materials flag this is under review in consultation with councils) there should be broader public consultation on that as well.

Recommendation 5: The government must undertake further consultation, including on:

- a draft State Land Use Plan and, if needed a revised Sydney Plan
- any specific legislative changes to the EP&A Act needed to implement the new approach to strategic planning
- any changes to the Local Strategic Planning Statement framework

The government should also undertake targeted consultation with First Nations peoples.

FEEDBACK ON SPECIFIC ELEMENTS OF THE DISCUSSION PAPER

In this section of our submission we comment on specific elements of the Discussion paper, namely:

- Section 6 – A stronger framework
- Section 7 - Proposed Statewide priorities
- Section 8 - A framework designed to adapt

Section 6 – A stronger framework

Section 6 of the Discussion Paper proposes a three-tier framework for strategic plans, consisting of:

- A State Land Use Plan
- 4 Regional Plans, one each for
 - Sydney
 - Lower Hunter & Central Coast
 - Illawarra Shoalhaven
 - Regional NSW (the remainder of the State)
- Local Strategic Planning (noting the Department is concurrently undertaking a review with councils on the current LSPS framework)

We provide the following feedback on this section of the Discussion Paper:

- We have concerns regarding the proposal to have a single regional plan for Regional NSW (outside the three main urban centres). While we agree that regions should not be based on arbitrary administrative boundaries, there is benefit in defining regions based on landscapes, catchments and ecosystems as well as commuting patterns, infrastructure networks and labour markets. For example, the needs and priorities of the north coast of NSW will be different to the needs and priorities of the far west, and a single Regional Plan for NSW may be too limiting to recognise these distinct needs. By providing regionally based Regional Plans there is also a great opportunity for close focus on the needs and nuances of the region and more buy-in by communities where they can feel more ownership and relevance over a plan they can identify with.
- It is unclear who is responsible for developing regional plans, and how local councils and affected First Nations communities can input into this process (noting the proposed statewide priorities specify co-design to achieve Aboriginal outcomes).

Recommendation 6: The government should consider separate regional plans based on regional characteristics; and clarify how local councils and affected First Nations communities can input into strategic planning processes.

Section 7 - Proposed statewide priorities

Section 7 of the Discussion Paper outlines seven statewide land use priorities. As noted above, there is no clear explanation of how the seven statewide land use priorities align with existing government strategies and priorities.

We provide feedback on the following specific priorities:

Resilient: *Supporting a sustainable environment and biodiversity to help achieve net zero and build climate resilience. Success means communities can better withstand hazards and environmental pressures.*

We generally agree that ‘resilient’ is an important statewide land use planning priority. We agree planning land use decisions need to support a sustainable environment and biodiversity, help

achieve net zero and build climate resilience, including that communities can better withstand hazards and environmental pressures.

However, we don't think this priority, or any of the other six, adequately capture the need to protect and restore biodiversity and natural landscapes intrinsically. For example, the need to support a sustainable environment and biodiversity is not only to help achieve net zero and build climate resilience, but to also maintain essential ecosystem services, reverse biodiversity decline, and for well-being and economic prosperity.

A thriving environment is interlinked to some of the other proposed priorities as well. For example:

- prosperity is reliant on a healthy environment; we cannot grow resilient, innovative economies without it. Further, many key industries (e.g. agriculture, fisheries, and tourism) depend directly on functioning ecosystems. Degraded environments can reduce farm productivity, increase disaster recovery costs, and undermine regional economies.
- connected does, in one sense, mean linking communities with efficient transport systems, but is also requires maintaining green and blue corridors. We need to support this connectivity because fragmented landscapes cannot sustain biodiversity, ecosystem function, or climate resilience over time.
- coordinated does not simply mean aligning land use with infrastructure delivery, it also means aligning land use planning with conservation and restoration, and Aboriginal Cultural Heritage objectives.

We recommend that a standalone statewide land use priority in relation to environmental protection (e.g. biodiversity and ecosystem conservation) is included in the State Plan. Alternatively, we recommend environment protection is more clearly embedded within the existing proposed principles, drawing on the comments above.

This would be consistent with other Australian states which all have environmental values at the forefront of at least one of their focus areas in planning documents. South Australia's *State Planning Policies* has sixteen policy areas and State Planning Policy 4 is specifically dedicated to biodiversity conservation. Western Australia's *State Planning Framework* takes a broader approach to conservation involving environmental harm minimisation and protection from inappropriate land use and development under the key principle of "Conserve the State's natural assets through sustainable development". Similarly, the *Tasmanian Planning Policies* and Queensland's *State Planning Policy* have focus areas dedicated to "Environmental Values" and "Environment and Heritage" respectively, with both specifically calling out biodiversity conservation as a key value. Victoria's *Plan for Victoria* addresses "conservation of natural values" under the strategic pillar of 'Sustainable Environments'. These strategic planning approaches all seek to achieve biodiversity conservation for its intrinsic importance rather than as a means to achieve other sustainability targets.

Recommendation 7: The State Land Use Plan should include a standalone statewide land use priority in relation to environmental protection. Alternatively, we recommend environment protection is more clearly embedded within the existing proposed priorities.

Aboriginal Outcomes - Embedding co-design to recognise Country in planning outcomes. Success means that land use plans recognise Country and custodianship to support use and benefit opportunities for Aboriginal landowners to achieve social, cultural, environmental and economic self-determination.

It is unclear exactly how affected First Nations communities will be involved in strategic planning processes if this this priority is to be achieved. There must be genuine and meaningful engagement with First Nations communities and organisations during the development of local and regional plans, and consideration of opportunities for Aboriginal landowners and cultural heritage protection.

The framework should include principles for Aboriginal Cultural Heritage management and protection that can guide strategic planning processes.

Recommendation 8: The government must undertake genuine and meaningful engagement with affected First Nations communities and organisations during the development of local and regional plans, and consider opportunities for Aboriginal landowners and cultural heritage protection.

Recommendation 9: The government should develop principles for Aboriginal Cultural Heritage management and protection that can guide strategic planning processes.

Section 8 - A framework designed to adapt

Section 8 of the Discussion Paper states:

“A more agile, modular approach is proposed, enabling updates to individual components or technical appendices without rewriting the entire plan. Plans will retain a clear long-term vision for growth and change, and can easily adapt as needed”.

It outlines five key elements, as follows:

1. A modular structure that allows components such as priorities, policy responses or technical appendices to be updated separately, reacting quickly to changes like infrastructure investments or demographic shift
2. Flexible responses that will be updated regularly or as needed to align with evolving circumstances, without full document revisions
3. Technical appendices that can be updated as information becomes available, ensuring the plan remains relevant for practitioners
4. Review triggers such as major infrastructure projects or population change
5. A monitoring, evaluation, reporting and learning framework to track progress and enable timely action if needed

In response, we provide the following feedback:

- It is unclear what processes would need to be followed to allow particular modules to be updated. For example, what public consultation is required to update an individual module? What evidence base would be needed to support changes? What accountability and transparency measures will be put in place to ensure strategic planning documents are not undermined by short-term, political decisions?
- Review triggers should include not only major infrastructure projects or population change, but also major events such as bushfire and floods, which may affect future land use planning in a region. It is unclear if these review triggers will be prescribed in legislation.
- We generally support a monitoring, evaluation, reporting and learning framework to track progress and enable timely action if needed. Again, it is unclear if this will be a legislative requirement, and also whether there will be legislative or governance mechanisms to enable timely action if needed.
- It is unclear exactly how responses in regional plans will be implemented. For example, while the draft Sydney Plan identifies both NSW Government and Council actions and timeframes, it is unclear exactly how these will be enforced.

More specific information about how the strategic planning framework will be implemented is needed, including any specific legislative changes or policy guidance, so that stakeholders can better understand these concepts and how the strategic planning framework will be implemented in practice.

Recommendation 10: The government should provide more specific information about how the strategic planning framework will be implemented, including any specific legislative changes or policy guidance, so that stakeholders can better understand how the strategic planning framework will be implemented in practice.

FURTHER SPECIFIC FEEDBACK ON THE DRAFT SYDNEY PLAN

In addition to comments above relating to the draft Sydney Plan, provided in the context of responding to the proposed new approach to strategic planning, we provide the additional specific feedback on the draft Sydney Plan:

- Maps contained within the draft Sydney Plan map the following:
 - urban footprint
 - rural and conservation lands
 - areas with biodiversity values

It is unclear how these areas have been determined, or what regulatory effect these maps may have. For example, how exactly will areas with biodiversity values be recognised and

protected through local planning and in future planning decision? How will the statement 'Urban development outside of the urban footprint is generally not supported' be implemented in practice?

- The draft Sydney Plan states "Regional conservation planning means biodiversity values are identified upfront". It is unclear exactly what is being referred to here, although it does refer to the Cumberland Plain Conservation Plan. We note this is not a statutory plan and regional conservation planning is not undertaken in a uniform way across Sydney or the rest of NSW. In that sense 'regional conservation planning' via strategic biodiversity certification processes cannot be relied on to ensure biodiversity values are identified holistically upfront. As outlined earlier in our submission, comprehensive conservation planning must be integrated into strategic land use planning.
- Identifying blue-green grid connections, mentioned on page 65 in the context of 'Response 12: Protect and enhance the natural environment' should be included as a specific action. Other actions could also be identified in Response 12, including for example, identifying wildlife corridors.
- Response 12 also discusses aligning planning controls with contemporary environmental management approaches early in the planning process to provide pathways to protect the range of natural assets and areas with biodiversity values within Sydney. However it is unclear what actions will be undertaken to achieve this.
- Response 11 does not clearly explain how conservation land outside the urban footprint will be conserved and restored. The actions in this response focus primarily on rural land.
- It appears that none of the responses and actions relate specifically to Aboriginal Cultural Heritage.

*Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission.
Please do not hesitate to contact our office should you have further enquiries.*