

27 August 2020

Ms Abbie Galvin
NSW Government Architect
Department of Planning, Industry and Environment
4 Parramatta Square
Parramatta NSW 2150

Dear Ms Galvin

DRAFT GREENER PLACES DESIGN GUIDE

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the draft Greener Places Design Guide. The Water Services Association of Australia (WSAA) is the peak industry body representing the urban water industry. Our members provide water and sewerage services to over 24 million customers in Australia and New Zealand and many of Australia's largest industrial and commercial enterprises.

Overall, we support the NSW Government's Greener Places infrastructure design framework and the development of the Design Guide to provide advice on open space for recreation, urban tree canopy, and bushland and waterways.

A key ingredient to delivering Greener Places is water

Investing in water-enabled green and blue infrastructure can deliver benefits to physical and mental health by making our communities cooler, healthier and more attractive places to live, work and play.

Our recent report [Blue + green = liveability: the value of water to liveable communities](#) seeks to increase understanding and explain how the urban water industry enables broader liveability outcomes including contributing to green and blue infrastructure to deliver benefits to physical and mental health by making communities cooler, healthier and more attractive places to live, work and play.

Health benefits can be up to \$94/person/day in a greenfield development built with an integrated water management approach. Health benefits include improved physical and mental health, air quality and urban cooling. This is in addition to the provision of safe, secure and affordable drinking water and wastewater services. Case studies from our water utility members also identify property value uplifts of between 1 – 9 per cent for properties within close proximity to green and blue infrastructure.

However, while planning for green and blue infrastructure can start to unlock improved liveability outcomes there are often no clear pathways to deliver and fund these initiatives.

In [Blue + green = liveability](#) we outline specific recommendations for governments (all levels), the urban water industry and collaboration partners to enable green and blue infrastructure to deliver liveability outcomes for cities and regions. We recommend the NSW Government consider these recommendations in the Greener Places infrastructure design framework as it seeks to finalise the Greener Places Design Guide.

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Opportunities to improve the Greener Places Design Guide

In NSW, a number of organisations are involved in decision-making for the urban water cycle in place-making, including water utilities, local governments and the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment, with input from urban designers, developers and communities. As noted by the Productivity Commission and Infrastructure Australia, this can often lead to ad hoc outcomes due to the lack of clarity on who should lead planning, who is accountable, and funding arrangements including who should ultimately pay for the benefits.

We are pleased to see reference to the integration of water-sensitive urban design is referred to in the Greener Places Design Guide, and we support a move to improve the consideration of water-sensitive urban design in urban planning. However, to enable effective water-sensitive urban design we recommend the NSW Government develop clear roles and responsibilities for principles for governance and planning that reflect the importance of water to Greener Places and the role of urban water utilities to contribute to liveability outcomes.

We also recommend the inclusion of a mechanism that ensures water utilities are either partners or engaged early in the design of new and retrofitted places, to ensure the best and most efficient urban water and liveability outcomes for communities.

The Greener Places Design Guide could be further strengthened with the addition of methodologies that enable the effective evaluation of liveability outcomes with its implementation. Providing guidance on how to measure the financial, social and environment value of open space for recreation, urban tree canopy, and bushland and waterways.

We note the Greener Places Design Guide briefly mentions the types of funding available to projects. We recommend the NSW Government allocate funding, resources and accountability in the same way as other social infrastructure such as health and education. The urban water industry is interested in collaborating with government and private sector partners to identify funding arrangements that deliver liveability outcomes, for example public-private partnerships, contributions from beneficiary stakeholders and direct government funding.

Supporting urban tree canopy

We support the recommendation that the NSW Government explore opportunities for infrastructure and water policies that consider ongoing urban tree canopy resilience.

Enhancing urban bushland and waterways

We support the recommendation sustainably manage all water sources on a catchment and system basis, including managing stream process and ecological function, through interagency government programs. We encourage the NSW Government to include water utilities in the development and implementation of these programs.

While we support considering opportunities to increase recreation in major waterways, we note the need to protect our drinking water supplies. An understanding of the costs and benefits of recreation on drinking water supplies must be considered. In addition to the benefits of recreation, there are likely to be substantial risks and costs arising from recreational access of drinking water catchments and waterways.

We support identifying projects to capture, harvest and reuse urban stormwater and wastewater to create new habitat that minimise impacts on waterways and enhance the blue grid.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to provide this submission. Please do not hesitate to get in touch if you have any questions on 0417 211 319 and adam.lovell@wsaa.asn.au

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A Lovell', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Adam Lovell
Executive Director
Water Services Association of Australia