

City of Newcastle Submission

Senate Standing Committees on Foreign Affairs Defence and Trade

Inquiry into the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)

The City of Newcastle (CN) welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission to the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committees Inquiry into the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

CN represents 160,000 (2016) people, with an additional 32,000 people anticipated by 2036. Newcastle is a recognised United Nations City with a CIFAL research institute at the University of Newcastle.

Our vision for and commitment to a smart, liveable and sustainable global city highlights our dedication to the implementation of the SDGs and recognises the global context in which we operate.

As a local government organisation with strong ties to the community, we are well positioned to assist the Australian Government to progress and deliver on the Goals. We welcome the opportunity to work with the Australian Government to identify opportunities for collaboration.

To contribute to the implementation of the SDGs, CN requests that the Australian government gives consideration and supports the following initiatives:

The understanding and awareness of the SDG across the Australian Government and in the wider Australian community

CN has committed to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals at a local level, adopting the SDGs and New Urban Agenda as cornerstones for our planning, in our [Newcastle 2030 Community Strategic Plan](#) (CSP).

The role of local government outlined in the Local Government Act 1993 - Chapter 3 - The council's charter, provides a set of principles to guide council in carrying out its functions. The charter notes several roles councils undertake including, but not limited to, consultation, equitable and appropriate services, community leadership, and planning for the needs of our diverse communities, which all directly relate to implementation of the SDGs. The SDGs are embedded in the work we deliver.

The Goals offer local councils a global framework in which to deliver community focused outcomes in addition to the NSW State based Integrated Planning & Reporting (IP&R) Framework. We are thinking global and acting local.

For the SDGs to become integrated within our community's vernacular, we accept that people must first identify alignment between the SDGs and their own goals and aspirations. For this reason, the Newcastle 2030 aligned the aspirations and priorities of our community with the SDGs.

CN has already shown further commitment to the implementation of the SDGs as the only NSW Council to be involved in the first Australian rollout of the UN Global Compact Cities Program. Newcastle joins four Victorian councils in this two-year capacity building process to develop sustainable urban development solutions to achieve the SDGs and New Urban Agenda (NUA), focussed on delivery of SDG11 Sustainable Cities and Communities.

The potential costs, benefits and opportunities for Australia in the domestic implementation of the SDG

An opportunity exists for a national communication approach to effectively raise awareness and understanding of the SDGs and share success stories.

For local governments to raise understanding and awareness of the SDGs alone, will add to, and possibly confuse, the existing communication messages at a local level, and will not achieve the high level of communication and understanding required. A co-ordinated multi-level government approach will have a greater impact and allow these messages to be embedded at a community level.

Unless the SDGs are integrated or streamlined within existing reporting frameworks (e.g. IP&R) there is a risk of added costs to Councils, including increased resourcing to meet additional reporting requirements. It will be important that the Australian Government consult with State and Local Governments before developing new or modifying current reporting frameworks to ensure there is no net increase in reporting obligations.

The benefit of a streamlined, integrated measurement framework for local government to contribute to this initiative is that we will have the ability to compare and learn from other local government organisations. For example, cities will be able to benchmark against other cities and identify specific areas where we can collaborate, learn and/or replicate initiatives that are working.

What governance structures and accountability measures are required at the national, state and local levels of government to ensure an integrated approach to implementing the SDG that is both meaningful and achieves real outcomes?

Governance structures and accountability measures already exist at the NSW local government level that provide a quality platform to build on. The NSW State-wide IP&R framework provides a structure for local government reporting and ensuring our plans and actions are aligned with community goals. The IP&R Framework should be updated to reflect the role of the SDGs in local government planning and reporting.

CN recommends the development of a reporting and evaluation framework that is integrated with the IP&R Framework. This integration is aimed at keeping reporting and resource requirements at current levels.

How can performance against the SDG be monitored and communicated in a way that engages government, businesses and the public, and allows effective review of Australia's performance by civil society?

There is a lack of awareness at a local level regarding the direction the Australian Government is taking with respect to SDGs integration into government decision making and actions on a whole of government basis.

For local governments to positively contribute towards implementation of the SDGs and the associated 169 targets, the Australian Government must take a leadership role, and commit to undertake prioritisation, policy development and alignment of implementation between the three tiers of government.

To be effective we need a SDGs framework that encompasses all three levels of governments; including detailed policies and coordinated approaches to implementation, monitoring and reporting (integrated into NSW IP&R).

A detailed nationally driven research and data framework should be completed for implementation at the State and local level. This framework would address measuring, monitoring and reporting in a transparent manner. An integrated and consistent approach to data collection then allows for nuanced indicators of progress and reporting across relatively small geographic or local areas.

To improve and complement monitoring and measurement, we recommend the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (or other organisation if required) include appropriate SDG benchmarks in its data gathering. This will allow progress against the SDGs to be measured and understood at local, state and national levels.

CN is currently investigating the capabilities of the CAMMS strategy management software to capture and report on our delivery against the SDGs. A national data and delivery framework would reduce costs for councils and stop individual councils capturing information in different formats and having disparate data sets that can't be analysed to tell a state or national story. Data with the credibility that ABS delivers is integral to reporting on global imperatives across all levels of government.

General Concerns

CN has general concerns regarding recent reports that suggest 'Australia is performing worse than most advanced countries in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals'¹.

An article entitled 'Australia falls further in rankings in progress towards UN Sustainable Goals', authored by John Thwaites and Tahl Kestin and published in The Conversation states that "According to the SDG Index, released [on July 10] in

¹ <https://theconversation.com/australia-falls-further-in-rankings-on-progress-towards-un-sustainable-development-goals-99737>

New York, Australia is ranked 37th in the world – down from 26th last year, and behind most other wealthy countries including New Zealand, Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom.”

The SDG Index report raises strong concerns about Australia’s poor performance when it comes to efforts to address climate change.

John Thwaites and Tahl Kestin’s article suggests that deliberative action is required to address the SDGs such as ‘developing a national implementation plan or setting aside funding for SDG implementation’.