

ITEM-19 LMM 22/09/20 - ENSURING COVID-SAFE BEACHES FOR NEWCASTLE

MOTION

That City of Newcastle:

- 1) Notes that on 21 September 2020, the NSW Government released their COVID Safe Summer Plan, recommending that suspected breaches to the Public Health Order can be reported to Crime Stoppers, but falling short of adopting the recommendations of Local Government NSW (LGNSW) and Surf Life Saving NSW to fund COVID marshals for the state's City beaches over Summer;
- 2) Acknowledges the incredible and difficult work that our wonderful staff have undertaken to keep our community and visitors safe throughout the COVID-19 global pandemic, noting that it has now been more than 6-weeks since a positive COVID-19 case in Newcastle;
- 3) Notes that local government has a critical role in supporting our communities to be COVID-safe as managers of beaches, but requires additional assistance from the NSW Government to ensure that their Public Health Orders are adhered to over Summer;
- 4) Notes that LGNSW has written to the NSW Premier, the Hon. Gladys Berejiklian MP, calling on the NSW Government to make a commitment to:
 - a. Develop a NSW Government funded COVID Communications Strategy and Campaign for NSW beaches and open spaces;
 - b. Fund COVID-safe marshals in local government areas with major beaches;
- 5) Joins with LGNSW in calling on the NSW Government to provide support to the Newcastle Local Government Area, including the development of a COVID Communications Strategy and Campaign and funding to support COVID-Safe marshals at our beaches, to ensure Newcastle's beaches and open spaces remain safe throughout Summer.
- 6) Notes that City of Newcastle staff have already been developing a COVID Safe Summer Guide for the Newcastle LGA, with Surf Life Saving NSW, Hunter Surf Life Saving, and neighbouring councils to take a collaborative approach to managing our local beaches, including promoting social distancing and strict compliance with the Public Health Orders, ahead of the Summer Beach Patrol Season which commences on Saturday, 26 September 2020.
- 7) Writes to the Hon. Rob Stokes MP, Minister for Planning and Public Spaces, calling on the NSW Government to assist City of Newcastle to keep our beaches safe over Summer by funding COVID-safe marshals at our City beaches.

BACKGROUND:

ENSURING COVID-SAFE BEACHES FOR COMMUNITIES ACROSS NSW

Following recent community concerns about the management of public beaches, LGNSW convened a roundtable with Mayors whose local government areas cover the major Sydney beaches, NSW Police and Surf Life Saving NSW in order to establish what is needed to ensure that, together, we best manage these important public spaces during the continuing COVID pandemic as the weather continues to warm and community use increases.

Our beaches and open spaces will be an increasingly popular and vitally important resource for communities across the state as Summer approaches. These spaces proved critical in contributing to community wellbeing during the initial stages of the pandemic.

LGNSW acknowledges local government has a critical role in supporting communities to be COVID-safe as managers of beaches alongside so much of the open space in NSW; but require cooperation and partnership from the NSW Government in doing so.

As a result of this meeting, local governments, NSW Police and Surf Life Saving NSW acknowledge we will work better together to share real time information about beach capacity, and share local government management plans across the beaches to ensure, where possible, clear and consistent decision authorities, responsibilities and guidelines for actions required. Specifically, we will aim for Council-led consistent communication and beach management approaches across and between beaches supported by Surf Life Saving NSW.

The Office of Local Government has advised councils that it is a matter for each council to determine whether or not to open any outdoor spaces for which they are responsible and to establish conditions that apply to their use. However, we cannot manage transport and access to these spaces, and do not have powers or resources for enforcement when public spaces, such as beaches, become overcrowded.

As the pressures on these spaces increase over the coming months, councils seek two specific actions from the NSW Government to ensure the safety of our communities.

Firstly, LGNSW has requested that the NSW Government develop and fund a Beaches and Open Spaces Communications Strategy and Campaign, in consultation with councils, NSW public service agencies and Surf Life Saving NSW.

A state led campaign is needed to raise public awareness of the need to be COVID-safe at beaches and popular public spaces, aware of public health order requirements that apply and conscious that they should not attend locations that are overcrowded and at or nearing capacity.

Materials from the Communications Strategy would be used by local governments, Surf Life Saving NSW, NSW Police and other NSW public service agencies to promote public awareness of how Public Health Orders apply to our beaches, and what we can all do, together, to keep these public spaces open for all to enjoy as the weather warms and COVID continues to impact our communities.

Secondly, LGNSW requests that the NSW Government fund councils with significant beaches to employ COVID-safe marshals to assist with encouraging compliance with Public Health Orders at beaches and open spaces and escalating non-compliance to the NSW Police Force as appropriate. The beach management responsibilities of Council and volunteer lifeguards are significant in a pre-pandemic environment and monitoring of Public Health Orders during a pandemic bestows additional responsibility that needs to be supported to ensure a safe environment.

Already, we see councils across NSW building on their public community safety role, particularly through working with local food businesses that need assistance to comply with COVID-safe requirements.

However, councils have expressed concern that their already stretched specialist environmental health officers do not have capacity to continue to undertake this additional COVID role along with their existing and very important food safety regulatory responsibilities.

It is essential that the NSW Government acts to prevent this cost shifting burden on councils growing further, by ensuring councils are supported through funding to employ COVID-safe marshals for beaches and open spaces.

NSW Government – COVID Safe Summer

On Monday, 21 September, the NSW Government released the COVID Safe Summer Plan.

To access the NSW Government's COVID Safe Summer Plan, visit:

<https://www.dpie.nsw.gov.au/premiers-priorities/great-public-spaces/covid-safe-summer>

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment A: Letter from Cr Linda Scott, President, LGNSW & George Shales OAM, President, Surf Life Saving NSW, to the Hon. Gladys Berejiklian MP, Premier, requesting assistance to ensure COVID-safe beaches for communities across NSW.

Our ref: R09/0012 Out-31180

3 September 2020

The Hon. Gladys Berejiklian MP
Premier

By email: admin@premier.nsw.gov.au

Dear Premier

Ensuring COVID-safe beaches for communities across NSW

Thank you again for your stewardship of NSW during this difficult time.

We write on behalf of councils across NSW to call on the NSW Government to support council efforts to keep open spaces including beaches and popular outdoor recreation areas COVID-safe.

To prevent a reoccurrence of community concerns about the management of Sydney beaches, **LGNSW convened a roundtable with Mayors whose local government areas cover the major Sydney beaches, NSW Police and Surf Life Saving NSW** in order to establish what is needed to ensure that, together, we best manage these important public spaces during the continuing COVID pandemic as the weather continues to warm and community use increases.

Sydney's beaches and open spaces will be an increasingly popular and vitally important resource for communities across the state. We acknowledge **local government has a critical role in supporting communities to be COVID-safe as managers of beaches alongside so much of the open space in NSW; but require cooperation and partnership from the NSW Government in doing so.**

As a result of this meeting, local governments, NSW Police and Surf Life Saving NSW will work better together to share real time information about beach capacity, and share local government management plans across the beaches to ensure, where possible, there is clear and consistent decision authorities and rules for actions required. Specifically, we will aim for operational communication across and between beaches to be coordinated via Surf Life Saving NSW under the councils' direction.

As you would know, the Office of Local Government has advised councils that **it is a matter for each council to determine whether or not to open any outdoor spaces for which they are responsible and to establish conditions that apply to their use**¹. However, we cannot manage transport and access to these spaces, and do not have powers or resources for enforcement when public spaces, such as beaches, become overcrowded. As the pressures

¹ Office of Local Government, Public Health (COVID-19 Restrictions on Gathering and Movement) Order (No 4) 2020 – local government FAQs, 29 July 2020, available at: <https://www.olg.nsw.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Public-Health-Order-guidance-for-councils-29-July-2020.pdf>

on these spaces increase over the coming months, councils seek two specific actions from the NSW Government to ensure the safety of our communities.

Firstly, we request that the ***NSW Government develop and fund a Beaches and Open Spaces Communications Strategy and Campaign, in consultation with councils, NSW public service agencies and Surf Life Saving NSW***. A state led campaign is needed to raise public awareness of the need to be COVID-safe at beaches and popular public spaces, aware of public health order requirements that apply and conscious that they should not attend locations that are already at or nearing capacity.

Materials from the Communications Strategy would be used by local governments, Surf Life Saving NSW, NSW Police and other NSW public service agencies to promote public awareness of how Public Health Orders apply to our beaches, and what we can all do, together, to keep these public spaces open for longer as the weather warms and COVID continues.

As part of this, there is a strong desire for an 'App' to allow the public to easily see which beaches are crowded and/or closed to further visitors. The meeting agreed that the suitability of the SLSNSW App as a tool for communicating beach crowding and capacity to the public on a large scale basis should be considered. Government investment in providing an App or helping to modify the SLSNSW app would be appreciated, and it may be an area where Service NSW could assist.

Consistent communication about the state's beaches and improved understanding and compliance by the public would reduce the need for NSW Police to intervene and enforce Public Health Orders on our beaches, and support councils and Surf Life Saving NSW to best manage these spaces in high demand times, allowing them to remain open. It would also support Transport for NSW to reduce overcrowding on transport routes to and from Sydney's beaches and, most importantly, would reduce the risk of a COVID outbreak in these vital public spaces. The engagement of Transport agencies in a 'whole of system' approach to managing crowding at beaches and popular locations is vital in achieving a COVID-safe outcome.

Secondly, we request that the ***NSW Government fund councils with significant beaches to employ COVID-safe marshals to assist with encouraging compliance with Public Health Orders*** at beaches and open spaces and escalating non-compliance to the NSW Police Force as appropriate.

Already, we see councils across NSW building on their public community safety role, particularly through working with local food businesses that need assistance to comply with COVID-safe requirements. However, councils have expressed concern that their already stretched specialist environmental health officers do not have capacity to continue to undertake this additional COVID role along with their existing and very important food safety regulatory responsibilities. It is essential that the NSW Government acts to prevent this cost shifting burden on councils growing further, by ensuring councils are supported through funding to employ COVID-safe marshals for beaches and open spaces.

Premier, will you please commit to:

- 1. a NSW Government funded COVID Communications Strategy and Campaign for our NSW beaches and open spaces?**
- 2. Funding to support COVID-safe marshals in local government areas with major beaches?**

We would also welcome an opportunity to meet with you to discuss this matter further. Could you please have your staff contact Ms Kelly Kwan, LGNSW Executive Manager Advocacy on 02 9242 4038 or at kelly.kwan@lgnsw.org.au.

Yours sincerely



Cr Linda Scott
President



George Shales OAM
President
Surf Life Saving NSW

Cc: The Hon. Dominic Perrottet, Treasurer
The Hon. Brad Hazzard MP, Minister for Health and Medical Research
The Hon. Rob Stokes MP, Minister for Planning and Public Spaces
The Hon. David Elliott MP, Minister for Police and Emergency Services
The Hon. Shelley Hancock MP, Minister for Local Government
Commissioner Michael Fuller APM, NSW Police Force