



NGAA Submission on the Productivity Commission's Interim Reports

The National Growth Areas Alliance (NGAA) is the peak body for local governments in Australia's outer metropolitan growth areas. We represent more than 30 local councils on the edges of our major capital cities, which together are home to over 5.8 million Australians.

Our communities are experiencing some of the fastest rates of population growth in the nation, yet have historically faced chronic under-investment in infrastructure and services. The result is significant disadvantage in transport, employment, health, education, digital connectivity and community facilities.

Our members are the local governments on the frontline of growth, tasked with planning, delivering and advocating for the infrastructure and services needed to support rapidly expanding populations. The NGAA provides a unified voice for these councils, bringing evidence and lived experience to national debates about productivity, liveability and resilience.

The need for place-based reform

NGAA's purpose is to urge governments to commit to coordinated, long-term, place-based investment in growth areas. This includes dedicated growth areas infrastructure funding, integrated settlement and transport planning, and recognition of local government as a key partner in shaping sustainable communities. By addressing the systemic underinvestment in our fast-growing suburbs, governments can unlock economic potential, enhance productivity and deliver fairer outcomes for millions of Australians.

Our advocacy provides a national framework to ensure that population growth is matched with the right infrastructure and services, delivered at the right time and in the right places.

In responding to the Productivity Commission's interim reports, NGAA has identified areas where the Commission's directions align closely with the needs of growth areas, and areas where further reflection is required to ensure equity across place. This submission sets out our analysis of each interim report, highlighting key alignments and gaps, and puts forward targeted recommendations to ensure national reforms deliver maximum benefit in Australia's fast-growing outer suburbs.

A spatial lens is needed

Across all five pillars, NGAA sees substantial alignment with the PC's intent to lift productivity by cutting regulatory drag, investing in people and technology, and achieving net zero at least cost. Our consistent message is that reform must be grounded in place.

NGAA asks that the Commission's final reports explicitly incorporate a growth-areas implementation lens: measure regulatory and approval time savings where the projects and people are; tie skills and care reforms to transport and digital access; require digital-

economy assets to lift local jobs and infrastructure; and embed equitable, place-based funding for net-zero transport and housing resilience.

Creating a more dynamic and resilient economy

The PC's focus on removing regulatory drag and improving investment settings mirrors the frustration growth-area councils face with slow, complex approvals and costly compliance. We particularly welcome the emphasis on whole-of-government regulatory stewardship and measurable burden reduction, which would speed up project delivery in fast-growing corridors if implemented with states and local government.

Any corporate-tax re-design should be tested for distributional effects across place. Reforms to regulation should set explicit targets to cut end-to-end approval times for city-shaping projects in growth areas, while resourcing councils to participate as true regulatory stewards.

NGAA recommends:

- a place-based implementation plan for growth areas within the regulatory reform program;
- a parallel commitment to long-term, targeted infrastructure funding for outer-metropolitan corridors; and
- co-design with councils on sequencing major projects.

Building a skilled and adaptable workforce

The PC's proposals to make skills pathways more fluid—credit transfer, recognition of prior learning, and targeted support for training in SMEs—directly address barriers faced by growth-area residents and employers. We also support a national platform for high-quality curriculum-aligned lesson materials.

Workforce adaptability hinges on access: in many suburbs, the constraint is reliable transport and digital connectivity to reach training and work. Skills reforms should therefore be linked with place-based investments.

NGAA supports the PC's skills package and recommends:

- piloting Growth-Area Skills Compacts that bundle national reforms with local training, and
- micro-credential pipelines into health, care, logistics, construction and clean-energy roles.

Harnessing data and digital technology

We share the Commission's ambition to use data and digital to lift productivity and strengthen consumer data rights. But to realise these benefits, universal digital access and fit-for-purpose local infrastructure must come first.

Data centres, while nationally valuable, have large footprints and low labour intensity; without safeguards they can crowd out job-rich industries in precious employment precincts.

NGAA recommends:

- a national Digital Inclusion First test: before digital-only services scale, governments should ensure reliable connectivity in growth areas and co-invest in enabling infrastructure.

Delivering quality care more efficiently

The PC's plans to align safety/quality regulation across aged care, NDIS and veterans' care; embed collaborative commissioning; and establish a prevention investment framework are practical ways to improve outcomes while using scarce care resources more effectively.

Integration and prevention succeed when they are place-based and resourced at the local level. NGAA supports the proposed national prevention framework and recommends:

- embedding outer-metro demonstrators that combine prevention funding with co-commissioned local models, linked to targets for reducing preventable hospitalisations.

Investing in cheaper, cleaner energy and the net-zero transformation

We support technology-neutral, least-cost pathways, consistent incentives post-2030, improvements to the Safeguard Mechanism, and accelerated approvals for priority clean-energy projects—paired with better information on climate risk and resilient housing.

Net-zero must be implemented equitably across place. Outer-metropolitan communities need integrated land-use and transport planning and affordable public/active transport options.

NGAA recommends:

- reframing the transition at the local level as **integrate, enable, innovate**: integrate land-use and transport; enable safe, affordable public and active transport; and innovate in technology where it adds value.

More information

A national productivity reform agenda will only succeed if it is delivered through a spatial lens and a place-based approach that recognises the unique challenges and opportunities of Australia's fast-growing outer metropolitan areas. More information can be provided by Bronwen Clark, Chief Executive Officer, National Growth Areas Alliance ([REDACTED]), and further research and resources are available on our website at www.ngaa.org.au .