

Submission by: Carolyn McGregor, 25 February 2024

Early Childhood Protection and Care

While the reforms by the NSW Department of Planning and Environment *State Environmental Planning Policies* (SEPPs) is being used to stimulate more child care services it is not sufficient to build more centres without regard to requirements in the targeted areas.

The changes appear to give developers the decision making capacity rather than being driven by the local community or the issues around provision of childcare such as the lack of appropriately qualified staff to operate the centres already in existence. While the State Government plans for an additional 2700 child care centres across NSW it has not been possible to find plans or documented research to meet child care needs for our area that align with demand, demographics, location and best practice principles.

It appears to be sufficient for a developer to state that there is a demand without any valid data. In my Council area, according to the 2016 Census, there were currently 516 children between the ages of 0 – 4 years, and by 2021 this had reduced to 369, a significant decrease in demand. It is difficult to understand how a developer is able to conclude that it is a much needed and in demand service for the area when there is no research or documentation to support this statement Except for the changes to SEPP which is based on a NSW wide policy.

In talking to child care centres currently operating in the area it appears to show that a critical issue is insufficient numbers of qualified child care workers to fill staff vacancies to allow maximum use of existing centres. The building of additional centres without supporting research based on need and staffing will not resolve this issue.

Developers see a chink in the armour of residential zoning due to the changes in SEPPs and a chance for big business to make a profit in the lucrative child care arena that is far from the community minded service and support that was envisioned. Often these developments have changed what should have an emphasis on child care in a home like environment with a smaller number of places into institutional care with for example 100 places with no apparent limit on size.

Failure to address this issue and to base approval solely on the developer's plans meeting building legislation and regulation is injudicious and costly in both time and money and the negative impact on the community.