

VOTE FOR FOOD!

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS 2024

Australian local governments undertake a range of activities that can contribute to a healthy, sustainable, and equitable food system. However, their engagement in food system governance is highly uneven, and only a handful have developed dedicated food system policies.

Why?

Despite constraints on their powers and jurisdiction, some Australian local governments (LGs) are leveraging existing opportunities to address food system issues (Carrad et al., 2022a).

For example, a very high proportion of LGs in NSW incorporate actions to prevent or minimize food waste into a range of (non-food-specific) policy documents (Carrad et al., 2022a). In addition, they undertake a broad range of activities related to health and wellbeing, sustainable and local food production, economic development, food safety and hygiene, and affordable housing.

Promoting local, sustainable agriculture and associated employment opportunities are important, for both peri-urban LGs (such as Penrith), and more rural areas (eg. Gwydir) (Carrad et al., 2022b). Some LGs have identified the preservation of agricultural land from residential and industrial overdevelopment as a mechanism for protecting food production in their region, a vital concern because of the important role of agriculture in the local economy. For

example, residents' desire to promote regenerative agricultural practices was a key driver in Gwydir LG for the creation of The Living Classroom project. Founded in 2011, this transformed 150 hectares of public land into a learning centre for food and agriculture. It is home to a primary industries trade training centre and a site of interactive learning for community members and visitors.

State and federal government-level factors are barriers to food policy development at the local level.

There is currently no national food policy, nor a NSW state food policy. Lack of clarity at federal and state levels leads to uncertainty about the role of LG in food systems. In most cases, each LG determines for themselves what is in or out of scope based on local-level circumstances. While many states have a legislative mandate to act on health and wellbeing, NSW public health legislation does not require the creation of local public health plans. Similarly, existing state-level planning schemes, which determine LG land use control, also inhibit the ability of LGs to positively influence food access.



Having either **local government (LG)** or **community-based** individuals who **champion** food system initiatives and bring their passion for **food systems transformation** to the LG is an important driver of developing a dedicated **food policy** (Carrad et al., 2022b).



Prof Karen Charlton: karenc@uow.edu.au

Kelly Andrews, CEO, Healthy Cities Illawarra
Dr Katherine Kent, UoW
Suzy Pickles, PHD Candidate, UoW



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How?

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Three weeks prior to the local government elections being held on 14th September 2024, researchers from the University of Wollongong requested information from all candidates who were standing for election across the Illawarra (Wollongong, Shellharbour, Kiama) and Shoalhaven LGAs.

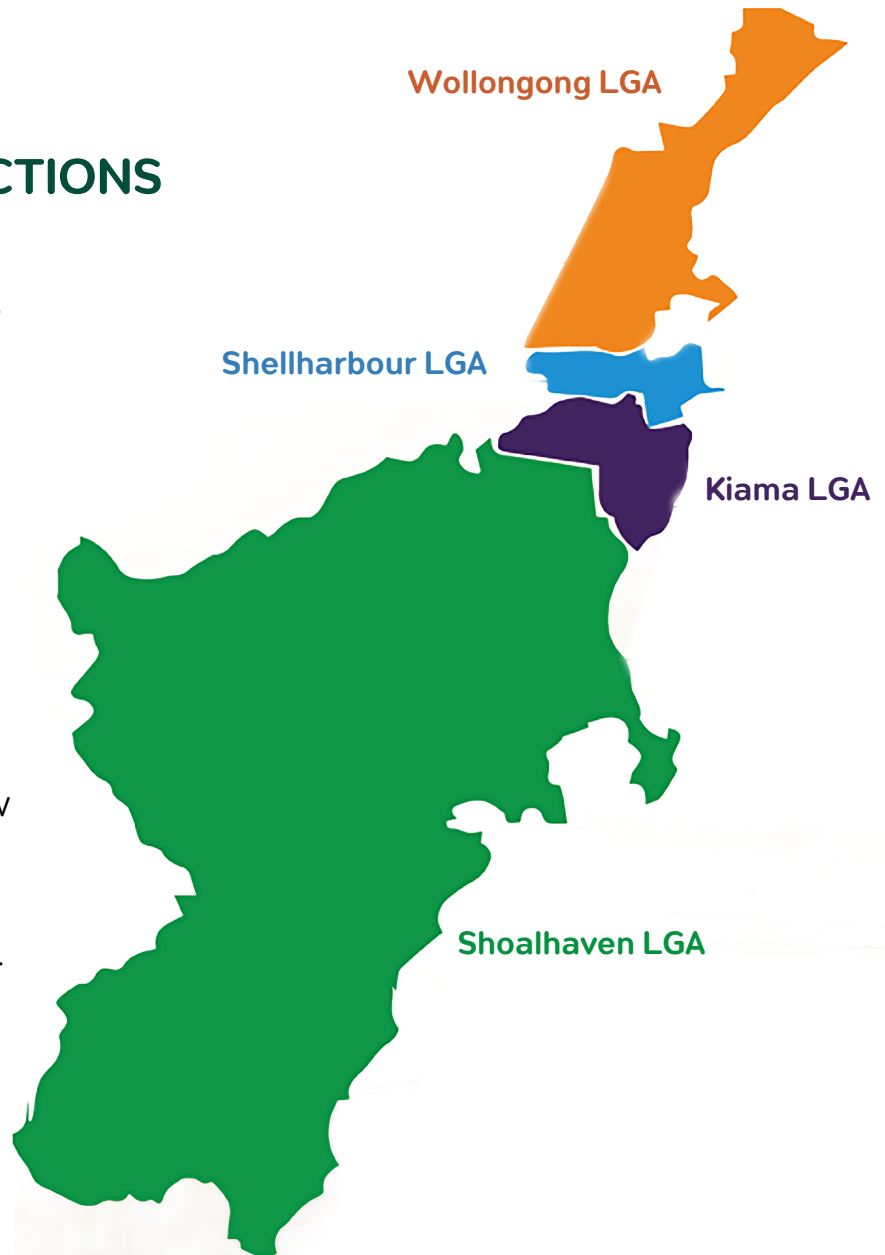
Letters were sent to publicly available email addresses. Candidates were asked to provide responses to eight of the 36 recommendations provided by the NSW Legislative Council Committee on Environment and Planning (EPC) report on their 2022 Inquiry into Food Production and Supply in NSW regarding creating a more resilient, sustainable and fair food system in NSW.

We received responses to the questions from **Labor** and **Greens** Mayoral candidates from Wollongong and Shoalhaven LGs as well as two **Independent** candidates for Wollongong LG Ward 1.

Responses are summarised on the next pages.

References

- Carrad, A., Aguirre-Bielschowsky, I., Reeve, B., Rose, N. & Charlton, K. (2022a). Australian local government policies on creating a healthy, sustainable, and equitable food system: Analysis in New South Wales and Victoria. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Health Policy*, 46(3), 332–339. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1753-6405.13239>
- Carrad A., Turner, L., Rose, N., Charlton, K., & Reeve, B. (2022b). Local innovation in food system policies: A case study of six Australian local governments. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2022.121.007>



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Results

1. Food Security

Addressing income poverty and food insecurity

Wollongong Labor recognises that Council plays a role in reducing cost of living pressures and offers a range of free or subsidised services such as libraries, community transport, sporting and recreational facilities (including outdoor BBQs) and access to community spaces and events. **Labor** will defend and expand these. Within Wollongong Council's Community Strategic Plan 2032, the following is stated within Goal-5.3: "Work towards enabling all people in our community to have access to safe, nutritious, affordable and sustainably produced food. Partnering with Non-Government Organisations, Environmental Groups and Community." **Shoalhaven Greens** party agreed that the main cause of food insecurity at present is income poverty. Their policies aim to increase childcare opportunities so parents can work, increase social and affordable housing so families have homes and disposable incomes, and finally increase community uptake of solar and energy efficiency measures to reduce household energy bills. **Independent Ryan Morris** supported the establishment of a First Nations and Botanic Gardens-led initiative to remove noxious weeds from the coastal zones and be resown with native edibles, thereby providing a free food source while also providing educational opportunities for schools. **Independent Suzanne de Vive** is committed to implementing a "Food Forest for the Soul" initiative. This would empower individuals and communities to grow their own food, connect with each other, reduce reliance on food relief and create a more sustainable, self-sufficient and connected community.

Community gardens and Urban agriculture

Both **Labor** and **Greens** parties have made an election commitment to support more community gardens. The **Wollongong Greens** party has committed to a dedicated position in Council to encourage community gardens, crop swaps and urban farms to boost Wollongong's resilience and development of local food systems. **Shoalhaven Greens** councillors will support policy and actions that provide community workshops on home composting, worm farming and backyard vegetable growing. **Independent Suzanne de Vive** would expand the "Food Forest for the Soul" central hub, with sub-branches in strategic locations to provide spaces for urban agriculture and provide hubs for food innovation.

Job creation: Building skills and workforce in food production

Labor stated that it does not have the financial muscle to undertake labour market reform nor the skills to transition this industry generally. It does support the Council's Botanic Gardens and other staff in building community capacity in community gardens or in resident's own gardens.

Donation/food relief

Shoalhaven Greens - the donation budget of Shoalhaven City Council could be used to support food relief services.



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2. Regional Food Policy Group

When asked whether they would support the development of a regional body, such as a local Food Action Group or a Food Policy Group with representatives from local government, industry and community to address issues related to the local food system, both the **Greens** and **Labor** party candidates indicated that the Illawarra Shoalhaven Joint Organisation (ISJO) would be a suitable body to auspice such a Group. The proposed NSW State Independent Agriculture Commissioner was identified as another resource that could work on food strategies with all levels of government.

3. Food Waste

It is noteworthy that all three Illawarra LGs offer a Food Organics Garden Organics (FOGO) weekly household waste collection. This is not currently offered in Shoalhaven LG. **Labor** (Wollongong) indicated that a regional response through ISJO may be the best way to support food waste initiatives. Applications for external funding for food waste reduction education campaigns would be supported by Wollongong LG. **Independent Suzanne de Vive** would like to implement more circular economy approaches to reduce food waste, such as the development of a biogas plant to convert food waste into energy.

4. Land Use and Zoning Mechanisms

Labor supports and collaborates with the State Government's Illawarra Shoalhaven Regional Plan, 2041, that covers the issue of land-use. Apart from Council's statutory responsibility for health inspection of food preparation businesses, both **Labor** and **Greens** (Shoalhaven) stated that they have a limited mandate to prevent fast food and unhealthy food outlet developments and no jurisdiction (either through the Local Government Act or Planning Act) to restrict advertising of unhealthy foods on public resources, such as transport, near schools, or on billboards, etc. **Shoalhaven Greens** councillors have argued strongly for the preservation of agricultural land and keeping it free from tourist developments and strongly support building skills in this sector. However, due to "the currently significant shortfall in operating funds, I am not willing to make any commitments of support until this situation is resolved." (Kaye Gartner. Mayoral candidate Shoalhaven (Greens))

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"I am committed to implementing initiatives like **"Food Forest for the Soul"** where people can learn to propagate and grow their own plant foods, including indigenous plant foods. I also plan to introduce a **"Front Yard Farming"** initiative to encourage residents to transform the often-unused grass in their front yards into **productive garden spaces.**"

Suzanne de Vive
Independent Candidate
for Mayor, Wollongong

"We have made an election commitment to support more **community gardens.** We also encourage regular and affordable access to Council's nursery for **native edible plant stock.**"

Tania Brown
Labor Candidate for
Mayor, Wollongong

"The Greens will **recharge the local food economy** with our plan to fund a dedicated position on Council to act as a mediator for local food production and swaps. This role will be the point of contact for people wanting to start a **community garden, a crop swap or other event** based on local food production"

Jess Whittaker
Greens Candidate for
Mayor, Wollongong

"I will work with the state conservation area authority to **identify areas for micro farming** that can help provide industry subsidised healthy option for cost price, nominal amount or free depending on the size and scope of the product."

Ryan Morris
Independent Candidate for
Mayor, Wollongong,

"Shoalhaven Greens are 100% committed to protecting traditional knowledge of food held by First Nations people, and supporting leadership and ownership by **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples** in the traditional foods industry that reside within Illawarra and Shoalhaven."

Kaye Garter
Greens Candidate for
Mayor, Shoalhaven

