THE COUNTRY MAYORS ASSOCIATION OF NSW INC

"What we want is nothing more than equity"

COMMUNIQUÉ

Country Mayors Association of NSW
Roads, Transport and Disaster Recovery forum
Ballina 1-2 July, 2026

The Country Mayors Association of NSW (CMA) held a Roads, Transport and Disaster Recovery conference from Wednesday 1st to Thursday 2nd July in Ballina. Ballina Shire provided warm hospitality and professional event management.

About 65 CMA Members from across rural, remote and regional NSW attended.

Welcome drinks on the Wednesday evening took place at the lavishly restored Shaws Bay Hotel. We were treated to a spellbinding performance by local barbershop choral group "The Headliners".

Host Mayor and CMA Board Member Sharon Cadwallader and Acting CMA Chairman Mayor Russell Webb addressed the function.

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The Ramada Hotel and Suites on the Richmond River was an ideal venue.

The first speaker on the Thursday morning was **NSW Minister for Roads and Regional Transport, the Hon. Jenny Aitchison MP**, whose passionate and earnest approach was well received.

Minister Aitchison said a $5.5 billion damage bill for roads impacted by disasters led to a tri-partite agreement and an improvement in delivery efficiency. She promoted the road infrastructure spending from her Government outside of Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong.
The Minister announced the awarding of Great Western Highway contract and expressed her frustration with some of the criticisms, particularly the false statements that the Highway is closed – there is a 20-25min diversion. The Minister said she and her team have worked as hard and as fast as possible to resolve this complex infrastructure issue.

Minister Aitchison also described the complexity of a permanent fix for the Waterfall Way but said the $20-30mil detour upgrade funding was delivered.

NSW Minister for Recovery, the Hon. Janelle Saffin MP

Minister Saffin began by highlighting the disaster recovery roles of Councils and that there should not be politics in recovery and reconstruction.

In August 2023, the Reconstruction Authority was established and tackled record breaking disasters. They need to improve how they tell their story.
Reactive to adaptative is a process we need to focus on for years to come. Betterment or building back smarter now exists.

The Colvin Review has a preliminary response from the Federal Government, regarding disaster funding with 65% from the Federal Government and 35% from NSW, so there is concern about the Federal Government's recent proposal for a funding change to 50-50.

Minister Saffin said that mitigation, resilience and prevention measures are a core focus, statewide.

Members sought support for Central West communities impacted by the Great Western Highway. Members also offered to assist with the lobbying to retain the 65-35 Federal-State disaster funding arrangement in NSW. Strong advocacy to the Federal Minister was requested by Minister Saffin.

Members expressed grave concerns about the proposal to increase the minimum eligible State expenditure required to trigger Commonwealth disaster support from $240,000 to $2.7 million, as part of the Albanese Government's overhaul of the Disaster Recovery Funding Framework.

LGNSW CEO Mr David Reynolds said that he and the Insurance Council have started looking into what the proposed changes might mean for Council premiums.

NSW Nationals Leader Mr Gurmesh Singh MP was next on the agenda.

Mr Singh recalled that when they were in Government, they rolled out disaster funding for things that Councils normally do themselves, like sporting fields.
He described the recent approach of not funding for betterment as stupid.
Mr Singh said the proposed change to the 50-50 funding split is a huge concern

Mr Singh commented that Byron Bay felt the housing crisis first, the people who work there cannot afford to live there but that is becoming the case for much of coastal NSW. He said you're lucky to find a family home for under around a million dollars on the coast and this will be one of the biggest challenges for the current and coming generations.

The NSW Coalition's 25% regional infrastructure funding guarantee – that's a minimum but the break up has not been determined yet.

Retention basins in Coffs were put in over a decade ago and they have made a difference. Governments should do that kind of work. The mitigation in the CSIRO report should be worked on.

Asked what are we going to do to get the population out of Sydney but into less disaster-prone locations, Mr Singh said Australia does not have large populations outside of the capitals, like other countries (with a few exceptions). We need to nurture and promote opportunities in regional centres.

The final three presentations have been distributed to the CMA Membership.

Essential Energy's Head of Operations – North, Mr. Robert Ridley gave a data-rich presentation. Mr Ridley assured Lachlan Shire Mayor and CMA Board Member John Medcalf OAM that there are no depot closures on the horizon. Blayney Shire Mayor Reynolds voiced concerns about reaching capacity and was advised that network planning is occurring. Essential Energy had their disaster response vehicle on show for CMA members. Getting the power back on is a priority but powering up devices provides practical and immediate support.

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NRMA Policy Advisor – Transport & Data, Mr Jonathan Malota, and Mr. Michael Kwok from Compass IoT announced exciting new data technology soon to be at the fingertips of CMA members. There were some concerns about 'big brother' data collection but members were assured that the data is aggregated ensuring individual data is anonymous and secure.

Reconstruction Authority CEO Ms. Kate Fitzgerald said that the Reconstruction Authority has come a long way in a few short but gruelling years. Disaster recovery funding processes have become more efficient.

In regards to the Federal Government's proposed new Disaster Recovery Funding Framework, Ms Fitzgerald said the Queensland Government has made their objections known. Victoria is neutral to support but the NSW Government is still investigating the implications and financial figures before putting forward its position and the case for it.

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The CMA Roads, Transport and Disaster Recovery event concluded (appropriately) with a bus tour.

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