Local community concerns have been considered and addressed through the independent panel review into the Sutherland Shire’s draft local environmental plan (LEP), a spokesperson from the Department of Planning and Environment (DP&E) said today.

The independent panel’s report found the draft Sutherland Shire LEP met legislative requirements but made a number of recommendations to tighten council processes and enhance community confidence in local decision making.

The independent review was established in response to community concerns about the way in which the draft LEP was made and consisted of two highly-respected planning experts – Dr John Roseth and Meredith Sussex AM.

The panel was charged with assessing whether the Sutherland Council prepared the draft LEP in accordance with state planning laws, to assess provisions contained in the draft LEP that was exhibited in late 2013, and to examine changes made to the draft LEP in a Mayoral Minute.

The panel concluded the council had prepared the draft LEP in accordance with relevant legislation and that it was sound overall, but that a number of provisions should be amended or reconsidered in conjunction with additional evidence.

Most importantly, the panel said Mayoral Minutes were not an appropriate substitute for planning reports and that due consideration must be given to submissions arising from the exhibition of a draft LEP.

“In response to Mayor Steve Simpson’s request, the government endorsed an independent panel to review Sutherland Shire’s draft local environment plan in late 2013 and provided the terms of reference,” the spokesperson said.

“In conclusion they found the draft Sutherland Shire LEP to be sound, meeting Environmental Planning and Assessment Act requirements, but made a number of recommendations for council to consider.

“The Sutherland Shire community and local council can now work towards finalising the draft LEP.”

During the independent review nine public hearings were held attracting nearly 100 people and the panel considered 253 individual submissions and over 650 letters.

In addition, the panel closely examined changes made to the draft LEP by Mayoral Minute No 6/13-14 and over three thousand submissions made during two previous exhibitions of the draft LEP.
The report has now been forwarded to Sutherland Shire Council for consideration. The final draft LEP is due to be submitted to DP&E for finalisation in August 2014.

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