

10.7. Funding Rodent Control in the North Sydney Local Government Area

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ATTACHMENTS	Nil
CSP LINK	<p>Outcome 1 – A healthy environment with thriving ecosystems and strong climate resilience E1. Restore and protect diverse ecosystems</p> <p>Outcome 5 – A thriving and resilient local economy ED1. Revitalise and grow the North Sydney CBD as an accessible high-amenity top-tier office precinct ED2. Cultivate a diverse, inclusive, connected and resilient business environment ED3. Create vibrant villages and local centres that attract and retain visitors</p> <p>Outcome 8 – An effective, accountable and sustainable Council that serves the community G5. Exercise regulatory compliance responsibilities diligently to protect the environment and support our community</p>

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this report is to advise Council of ongoing efforts to manage rodent activity in North Sydney and the cost implications of doing so in the current financial context. There is a high likelihood of expenditure in 2025-26 being higher than last financial year and may result in budget overspend where savings cannot be identified in other areas.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

- Like many urban areas in Sydney, the North Sydney Local Government Area (LGA) is not immune from rodent activity.
- Management of rodent activity is an ongoing high priority responsibility for Council given how entrenched rodents are in our urban environment.
- Rodents tend to be more prolific, or at least noticeable, where reliable and regular sources of food can be found, including in and around our village and commercial centres, where rodent activity is more likely to occur.
- Rodent activity has been minimal in our bushland areas.
- Council conducts regular inspections of food-related businesses across the LGA as part of its food premises inspection program. Where rodent activity is found within a food premises, Council is obliged to close the business until the issue is satisfactorily resolved.

- Council has had a limited budget to deal with the ongoing problem of rodent management given its challenging financial position.
- Last financial year (2024-25), Council spent \$152K in pest/vermin control, much of which (\$96K) related to rodent management. This year (end October), the amount spent on rodent control is already over \$100K and expected to be greater than last year's expenditure, and likely to be in excess of \$200K.
- This report foreshadows this expenditure and brings this important budget expenditure to Council's attention.

RECOMMENDATION:

- 1. THAT** Council note this report and the significant likely variation of expenditure on vermin control, and in particular rodent management.
- 2. THAT** Council note that budget adjustments will be made through Council's quarterly budget reporting process to address additional expenditure required to address ongoing rodent control issues.

Background

Rodents in Sydney

Rats and mice were introduced by European settlers to Australia. They compete aggressively against other species for food and can breed quickly. They have proven to be highly adept at thriving in our urban environments and have entrenched their presence since white settlement.

Rodents are abundant throughout Sydney's urban areas, and their ecological impact is significant. Rats also pose serious health risks to humans, pets, and wildlife.

Council's Responsibilities

Whilst Council does not have a specific program of tracking rodent numbers in the Local Government Area (LGA), anecdotally, their numbers appear to be increasing.

- Food Premises

Council conducts regular inspections of food businesses across the LGA to assess compliance with the Food Act 2003 and the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code.

Under Clause 24 of Food Safety Standard 3.2.2, food businesses must:

- take all practicable measures to prevent pests from entering the premises; and
- take all practicable measures to eradicate and prevent the harbourage of pests within the premises.

Council officers are increasingly identifying evidence of rodent activity within food premises. In a number of recent cases, food business proprietors have reported that rodent activity appears to be emanating from Council-owned or managed garden beds and planter boxes located immediately adjacent to their premises.

Despite maintaining regular pest control services and good waste management practices, some businesses may struggle to remain pest-free if nearby public areas are not similarly maintained. Where rodents are found within a food premises, Council is obliged to close the business until the issue is resolved. This may, in turn, create a perception among business owners and the public that Council may not be adequately addressing pest issues in public spaces that may be adjacent to such premises.

- Public Spaces

Council has regular programs of rodent baiting and control throughout the LGA. Council does not monitor rodent numbers in North Sydney; however, it is speculated that the amount of building activity in the LGA in recent years (Metro, Western Harbour Tunnel and private development) may be displacing urban rodent habitat and thereby creating the impression that there may be greater rodent numbers.

In October 2025, the President of the Harbourside Liquor Accord contacted Council requesting that more be done to address the rodent problem, particularly for the members of the business community.

- Bushland

Whilst Council also has responsibility for controlling rodent activity in bushland areas, such areas have remained relatively unaffected in recent years.

Report

Councils have an obligation to maintain levels of public health and safety.

Council plays an important role in managing rodent activity as part of its broader environmental health and public safety responsibilities. Areas of responsibility and influence generally include:

- maintaining public cleanliness through effective waste management, street cleaning, and ensuring bins and public spaces do not encourage rodent activity and sustenance;
- investigating rodent complaints from residents and taking action when infestations are linked to public property;
- enforcing regulations around waste storage, food preparation and storage environments, property maintenance, and building standards to reduce rodent risks on private properties; and
- collaborating with other government agencies (such as NSW Health) when larger-scale infestations or public-health risks arise.

Whilst Council helps to mitigate rodent activity in public areas, property owners are typically responsible for managing rodents on private land, including hiring pest control services when needed.

At times, the interface between public and private land can create issues for the management of rodent activity. Council has seen various rodent hot spots that tend to be associated with village and town centre environments where there is a greater availability of either stored or disposed food. Clearly, the management of rodent activity is important for public health and community confidence.

Medium and longer-term solutions may require the redesign or changes in treatment of public spaces which discourage rodent habitat. In some instances, this may represent consideration of compromises in public domain design and treatment.

Budget Allocation

During 2024-25, Council spent approximately \$76K on planned baiting for rodent control in various locations in the LGA. In addition to this, there was approximately \$20K reactively spent on controls over garden beds, planter boxes, and similar public domain environments. In total, \$96K was spent in 2024-25 on rodent control.

In comparison, the year-to-date expenditure for 2025-26 (October) on these matters is already at \$61K (planned baiting) and \$54K (reactive control) respectively, which is significantly higher than the expenditure at the same time in 2024-25. This level of spending is already above that spent for the entire 2024-25 financial year, and this will continue to increase throughout the remainder of the 2025-26 financial year.

Clearly, expenditure on rodent control and management will need to continue to ensure high standards of public health and confidence. However, Council should also be aware that the 2025-26 level of expenditure will be significantly higher than that of last financial year, and likely to be in excess of \$200K, compared to \$96K in 2024-25. This will result in budget overspends if savings cannot be identified in other areas.

Consultation requirements

Community engagement is not required.

Financial/Resource Implications

Whilst Council's expenditure on vermin control and management is relatively modest as discussed previously in this report, it is likely to increase by at least 100% in 2025-26, to over \$200K. Additional budget allocations will be required through the Quarterly Budget Review process, along with any savings identified in other areas to offset this cost if available.

Legislation

The provisions of the Food Act (2003) and Local Government Act (1993) with regard to the care and maintenance of public land are relevant considerations in providing guidance to Council's rodent control responsibilities and actions.