



# Take it to the streets

A vision for Sydney's street food scene



Committee  
for  
Sydney





## Acknowledgement of Country

The Committee for Sydney acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island peoples as the traditional custodians of the land. We pay our respects to their Elders, past and present. We recognise sovereignty was never ceded. This was, and always will be, Aboriginal land.

Aboriginal people have long hunted and gathered 'bush tucker' – native plants and wildlife – to make food and medicine that sustained their communities and culture. The Gadigal people collected shellfish by hand from the muddy shorelines of Sydney's east coast, and Dharug tribes feasted on tubers pulled from the earth.

Bush tucker is as rich as it is diverse, remaining integral not only to Sydney's food history but also to its present-day culinary landscape. There are plenty of exciting food ventures across Greater Sydney that celebrate native ingredients and traditions – we've started a non-exhaustive list here.

- Native Foodways
- Kallico Catering
- Midden
- Koori Kulcha
- BTB Kirribilli
- Bush Redfern
- Sydney Aboriginal Cafe
- The Dreaming Food Group
- The Kiosk, Art Gallery of NSW
- National Indigenous Culinary Institute



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## Our vision: a thriving street food economy that celebrates Sydney's diversity and creativity

This paper puts a spotlight on Sydney's street food economy as a vibrant and emerging part of the city's cultural identity, rich with immense potential.

It explores how street food contributes to community connection, economic inclusion and urban vibrancy, while identifying opportunities to better support its growth.

By recognising where thoughtful adjustments to policy, infrastructure and support systems could unlock greater impact, the paper sets out a vision for a thriving street food culture that celebrates Sydney's diversity and creativity.



Source: Chatswood Mall Market



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Source: SBS/Roni Bintang





# Introduction





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## A city's identity is often cooked, plated and served from its sidewalks

Visible, tangible and accessible, street food offers more than just a quick bite to eat. It directly reflects a city's culture and character, and shapes how people experience and connect with a place.

It fosters inclusivity, providing affordable dining options for residents and visitors, while also creating opportunities for new entrepreneurs – many hailing from diverse cultural or economic backgrounds face extra hurdles when pursuing traditional business pathways.

For the many food entrepreneurs who are refugees and migrants, street food offers the kind of meaningful, accessible self-employment that is an essential component of their resettlement, nurturing pride, empowerment and self-efficacy, as well as community connection and increased hope for the future.<sup>1</sup>

A thriving street food scene brings life to public spaces, boosts foot traffic, and facilitates social and cultural exchange in the public realm.

It gets people off the couch and out of the house – not just into another indoor venue, but out onto the street itself.

Restaurants and cafes are essential to a city's food culture – street food offers a different kind of energy: one that animates sidewalks, sparks spontaneous interactions, and creates a sense of street-level dynamism that's hard to replicate indoors. Vendors respond to local tastes, ingredients and trends, crafting ever-changing dining experiences that reflect the unique character of their communities and the evolving culture of the city.

Economically, street food businesses act as incubators for culinary innovation. With more independence and mobility, vendors often specialise in niche cuisines or unique fusion dishes, taking them to customers across a city and diversifying the local food scene. Many successful street food businesses blossom into larger enterprises, such as catering companies and bricks-and-mortar restaurants.

In saying that, street food businesses are economic engines in their own right. By offering an accessible, convenient connection between food, place and tourism, street food influences the profile and appeal of destinations while attracting visitors eager to experience authentic local flavours. Crucially, it doesn't just attract people from nearby – it brings them across town, introducing new audiences to neighbourhoods they might never have visited otherwise.



A thriving street food ecosystem can be a unique, profit-generating resource for a city's tourism and night time economy:<sup>2</sup>

- Parramatta Lanes, the annual street festival renowned for showcasing independent street food vendors, injected \$1.5 million into the local economy in 2023, with attendees praising the "incredible food" as a standout feature<sup>3</sup>
- The food services sector is big business, representing 63% of Australia's core night-time economy (NSW's night-time economy alone is worth \$102 billion annually<sup>4</sup>) – although street food plays a comparatively small part, it has an outsized impact on perceptions of how vibrant the food culture is.

Market trends reveal street food is positioned to thrive:

- 30% of consumers' dining choices are influenced by inflation<sup>5</sup>
- 90% of diners are prioritising budget menu options<sup>6</sup>
- Australians are embracing more adventurous flavours within Asian and Latin foods, cuisines with plenty of dishes rooted in street food culture<sup>7</sup>
- Consumers are increasingly turning to local, small food businesses, driven by a desire to support community-oriented enterprises<sup>7</sup>
- From salad giant Fishbowl releasing a range of budget-friendly 'Street Food' boxes to popular bricks-and-mortar restaurants like Newtown's A Little Lagos expanding to food trucks, many hospitality operators are pivoting towards casual, street food-inspired dining to meet this shift.<sup>8</sup>

9



Source: The Farmer Magazine

Travelling with taste: Destination NSW has identified 'good food and wine' as the top experience driver for destination choice within intrastate and interstate travel in Australia. 'Good food and beverages' is the second highest driver for international travel.

Street food businesses directly respond to these trends, positioning the sector for sustained growth as both an economic and cultural opportunity.

But the impact of street food stretches far beyond profit and revenue.

We all know that food is a powerful catalyst for cultural exchange and connection – from Cabramatta's bánh mì shops to Five Dock's Italian delicatessens, food introduces people to the heritage and history of a local community.

A more open street food environment gives entrepreneurs the agency to be their own cultural storytellers and offers a tangible way to preserve, share and celebrate multicultural heritage – something Sydney possesses in abundance as one of the most multicultural cities in the world.



Photo essay

## Street food around the world



Denmark: When these abandoned telephone kiosks were turned into cafe pavilions, they became iconic symbols of Danish city life. Source: Coffee Collective Denmark



Philippines: Flocking around a street food cart is a popular social affair, especially amongst students after a cheap bite. Source: Minda News



Singapore: Hawker centres are institutions so beloved they've been added to the UNESCO list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Source: Escape



Mexico: Tacos al pastor trace back to Lebanese immigrants in 1900s Puebla, who introduced shawarma-style cooking to Mexico. Source: Nomadic Food List



India: Streetside snacks are so popular they have their own 'family' name: chaat, which stems from the word 'chaatna' ('to lick'). Source: Joyanto Joy



USA: New York City's hot-dog stands are instantly recognisable. Source: Tasting Table



Photo essay

## Street food around Australia



Canberra: The Mandalay Bus is a storied late-night haunt in Haig Park, serving Burmese fusion to Canberrans since 1953. Source: Stephen Smith



Brisbane: Wandering Cooks was a culinary incubator precinct with a rotation of cooks serving from 'ordering stations' and a small farm gate. It helped many fledgling entrepreneurs get their start. Source: Concrete Playground



Wagga Wagga: Fusion Botanical is Wagga's first multicultural festival with street food, performances and music. Most vendors are small businesses run by migrants and refugees. Source: City of Wagga Wagga



Armidale: Enjoying a 'democracy sausage' at a polling place after voting in an election is a common Australian pasttime. Source: Yes23



Adelaide: Adelaide Central Market draws in over nine million annual visitors eager to sample regional food and produce from local artisans. Source: ExperienceOz



Melbourne: Welcome to Thornbury is a popular precinct hosting food trucks and stations with international cuisine. Source: Welcome to Thornbury



Photo essay

# Street food in Sydney



Haymarket: Fresh custard puffs sold through a small window have long enticed visitors to Sydney's Chinatown. Source: Trencherman's Travels



Lilyfield: Weekly food and farmers markets are popular throughout the city, popping up from Lilyfield's Orange Grove markets to Kings Cross. Source: Orange Grove Market



Bankstown: Produce vendors often gather in Saigon Place. Source: Kate Geraghty/Sydney Morning Herald



Martin Place: Diggy Doos brews specialty coffee from a QMS kiosk – the types more commonly used by florists and newsagents. Source: Diggy Doos Coffee



Harris Park: Wigram Street is lined with over 20 eateries and shops attached to historic cottages serving authentic Indian and Nepalese cuisine. Source: Ray White



Blacktown: More and more food trucks are taking up post in the side streets of Sunnyholt Road, making Blacktown a new hub for street food culture. Source: Oz Chai Wala



Photo essay

## Street food in Sydney



**Blacktown:** Sydney Cebu Lechon's home-cooked Filipino meals and outdoor setup is inspired by the roadside karinderias of the Philippines. Source: Sydney Cebu Lechon



**Five Dock:** Family-run Raineri's Deli is famous for its quick, affordable and delicious Italian focaccia sandwiches. Source: Janie Barrett



**Strathfield:** Spicy fried skewered meat and vegetables – a beloved Chinese street snack eaten on the go – have taken Sydneysiders by storm. Source: Richard Wu



**Manly:** Many visitors to Rollers Bakehouse opt to enjoy the cult favourite croissants while sitting alfresco in pedestrian-friendly Rialto Lane. Source: A Friend of Mine



**Haberfield:** Petrol station food truck Papi's on Parramatta Road, is known for serving up some of Sydney's best tacos. Source: Jennifer Soo



**Lidcombe:** Tomato Kimbab offers a daily selection of freshly made kimbap, a popular Korean street food snack. Source: Sydney.com



As the photo essay on previous pages shows, street food is an essential part of city life around the world – it brings people together, activates public spaces and celebrates culture and history through food.

It's hard to believe, given the great climate we enjoy in Sydney, but for a long time, our city missed out on the great opportunity of eating outside.

But Sydney is beginning to carve out its own version of a street food culture – and Sydneysiders are embracing large scale policy and development shifts:

- A wave of reforms over the past five years, including the NSW Government's Alfresco Restart Package, opened alfresco dining opportunities across the board, which have been warmly received by Sydneysiders
- Bustling 'eat streets' and food truck hubs in Sydney's west have gained viral popularity, and huge crowds have attended street festivals and night markets – showing the potential demand for more reforms that could make for the perfect recipe for a flourishing street food culture in Sydney.



#### Case study

### The Rocks: empty streets to vibrant eats

A trial allowing restaurants and bars to use outdoor public space in The Rocks helped struggling venues regain their footing after the pandemic. The above image shows the precinct before the trial, and below, you can see the changes after permanent alfresco dining. Foot traffic surged to 75% of pre-Covid levels, even without international tourists.



Source: Source: National Trust / The Rocks



#### Case study

## Roads, bricks and mortar: Roman's Deli, Maiz Mexican

For some vendors, a street food business is a launchpad to something bigger. For others, it's a deliberate choice to stay mobile, bringing their food to different communities and diversifying the local culinary landscape.

Western Sydney-born Roman's Deli operates as a food truck serving sell-out sandwiches and bagels inspired by the neighbourhoods they visit.

Rather than expanding into a permanent shopfront, they embrace mobility – meeting different communities, adapting to local tastes, and creating specials that celebrate the suburbs they serve (their 'Area Special' Yagoona sandwich was a huge success).

Maiz, on the other hand, began as a small stall selling Mexican sopes at the Flour Mill markets in Summer Hill. As demand grew, the business transitioned into a permanent venue in Sydney's inner west, earning a Good Food Guide hat in 2025.

Now, Maiz has moved beyond food service, collaborating with local and international chefs and artists to create exhibitions and culinary experiences that share Mexican culture with Sydneysiders.



Above, guests at Roman's Deli. Below, Maiz owners Juan Carlos Negrete, Marisa Negrete, Frelja Brandie and Carlos Levet.



Source: Debbie Gallulo / SMH



#### Case study

## Rolling success: Aheda's Kitchen

Migrants, refugees and asylum seekers often launch their entrepreneurial journeys in food – particularly casual dining and street food – thanks to its lower startup costs and fewer visa restrictions compared to bricks-and-mortar restaurants.

Aheda Amro, a Melbourne-based asylum seeker from Palestine, arrived in 2018 and began selling Palestinian meals during the pandemic.

Without capital or secure visa status, opening a physical venue wasn't an option – with support from crowdfunding, Aheda purchased a food trailer on Facebook Marketplace and, two years later, launched in Brunswick, Melbourne, to lines of eager customers wrapped around the block.

Aheda has expanded her businesses to offer cooking classes and private catering.





## Case study

# Cabramatta: A Taste of Asia

Cabramatta is home to one of Sydney's most vibrant, community-led street food scenes. Fairfield City Council and its place management team actively supports this culture through targeted promotions, demonstrating the potential of Recommendation 3.

Fairfield's initiative 'Cabramatta – A Taste of Asia' (an Instagram account with more than 3,000 followers) amplifies Cabramatta's food entrepreneurs by curating content from creators, showcasing vendors and promoting must-try dishes.

It's a great example of the way marketing, storytelling and working with community can position Sydney as a city where street food thrives, while also laying the groundwork for future street food trails and directories.

Viet Hoa Hot Bread, open 24 hours on John Street, Cabramatta, is a favourite spot for locals – especially tradies up late or at the crack of dawn – for fresh, crispy bánh mì.



Ấm Thực 3 Miền, open until 2am in a small arcade filled with food and retail shops near John Street, is a popular joint for fruit-based snacks, juices and smoothies. Below, grab-and-go meals and snacks sold from outside a restaurant facing onto the public square.





## Case study

# FoodLab Sydney: more than just a kitchen

FoodLab Sydney is a not-for-profit food business incubator that supports entrepreneurs facing high barriers to entry. It shows the potential for directly supporting food entrepreneurs with cross-sector collaboration, and combining funding, infrastructure and partnerships, to expand the street food ecosystem.

FoodLab supports refugees, migrants, Aboriginal Australians and low-income entrepreneurs by offering affordable kitchen space, industry-specific resources, mentoring and sales opportunities.

Beyond shared kitchen facilities, FoodLab participants attend marketing workshops run by celebrity chefs, receive training through food safety sessions and site tours with produce wholesalers, and learn how to cook with native ingredients from the shared community garden.

Since launching in 2022, FoodLab has graduated 20 business owners who have gone on to employ more than 26 individuals from their local communities, starting ventures ranging from catering and food trucks to artisan products now stocked in major retailers including Harris Farm Markets.

By 2025, 100% of participants had progressed to further training, volunteer roles or employment, and the kitchen now supports more than 46 small food businesses with affordable space and resources.

That same year, FoodLab joined Vivid Sydney to present a series of culinary events led by graduates from migrant and refugee backgrounds. With mentorship from industry leaders, each chef designed a menu showcasing their personal stories, cultural heritage and culinary skill, bringing street food to the centre of one of Australia's largest festivals.



Source: FoodLab Sydney

**"I wouldn't have been able to do anything, like launch my business, prepare for catering jobs or learn how to be profitable, without FoodLab."**  
- Sydney food entrepreneur





## Breakout

# A penchant for precincts

Every city has its own signature street food experience — from Manila’s barbecue carts to Oaxaca’s taco stands. In Australia’s capital cities, open-air food halls and markets have become iconic street food destinations for both tourists and locals, such as Melbourne’s Queen Victoria Market and Hobart’s Salamanca Markets.

In Sydney, a more formally organised street food culture is emerging, shaped by two types of spaces worth noting: bustling markets and purpose-built street food halls. These venues offer infrastructure and regulation that support vendors while creating dynamic, accessible places to eat and gather.

## Markets

Sydneysiders love their markets, from regular weekend gatherings to festive celebrations: Lakemba Nights, Parramatta Lanes, Flour Mill Markets in Summer Hill, Hornsby Night Markets, Chatswood Mall Markets, ongoing Organic Food Markets in Marrickville, Kings Cross and across the wider city, and more.

## Street food halls and precincts

The popular Burwood Chinatown and Spice Alley in Chippendale are purposefully curated food hubs, developed to create lively dining destinations. In contrast, the foodie hub of Harris Park in Parramatta has evolved more organically, with independent businesses establishing themselves over time, shaping a food scene without the direct involvement of developers or council-led initiatives.



Source: Multicultural NSW



Source: Burwood Chinatown



## Breakout

# Car-friendly late night options

While foot traffic is so often the source of customers for street food operators, a particularly Sydney experience to be found is food trucks that are open late into the night on virtually every corner on any major road.

On main roads such as Parramatta Road, Canterbury Road, the Hume Highway, Forest Road and The Horsley Drive, these operators can often be found piggy-backing day-time businesses, such as mechanics and car yards or petrol stations, taking advantage of access to water, power, lighting and plenty of space for cars to park.

There are subreddits dedicated to tracking these enormously popular operators, and while there are plenty of great burger places (e.g. Wagyu Cart in Homebush or Marci Lou's in Cabramatta), they dole out a far wider array of cuisines and here are some of our current favourites:

- Victoria Road, Melrose Park: Berlin Food Bunker for berliner currywurst and doner kebab
- Behind Parramatta Road, Ashfield: Momo Vibe has some of Sydney's best Nepali food
- Stockton Ave, Moorebank: Black Sheep for American soul food
- Parramatta Road, Haberfield: the long queues for Papi's tacos speak for themselves
- The Horsley Drive, Merrylands: Qasmi Pakwan serves up delicious Pakistani food.







# The state of street food in Sydney





## Types of street food in Sydney

Sydney's street food scene is becoming a distinct and recognisable part of the city's identity. We've identified six key types of street food businesses commonly found across Greater Sydney:

1. Produce vendors
2. Food stalls
3. Mobile food vehicles
4. Pop-ups
5. Food kiosks
6. Streetside shop extensions

Despite varying in mobility and permanence, these entrepreneurs play a key role in Sydney's 'informal food economy,' operating outside traditional regulatory, economic or social structures.

That means they often face inconsistent regulations that are harder to navigate or standardise for their particular operations.

Figure 1 below illustrates these key types of street food businesses and their different levels of mobility and permanency.



Figure 1: Key types of street food businesses in Sydney



## 1. Produce vendors

The most 'light touch' version of street food, produce vendors are individuals who sell fruit and vegetables in public spaces around Sydney. They generally don't use physical infrastructure (like a stand or cooking facilities) or an official business name.

- Example: Produce vendors in Cabramatta's John Street.

## 2. Food stalls

Mostly found at markets and street festivals, food stalls are temporary setups offering quick meals. They have cheaper startup costs than a food truck.

- Example: Many stalls at Chatswood Markets sell just one specific dish, often a specialty from a particular East Asian cuisine.

## 3. Mobile food vehicles

Portable and versatile, these businesses operate food trucks, carts and trailers, often with cooking facilities, to bring food directly to customers in different locations. They are popular at markets, festivals and events, and play a key role in activating quieter, more industrial pockets of Sydney, such as parts of Parramatta Road, by creating new food hubs in industrial areas more likely to be accessed by car.

- Example: Island Boys Foods, a food truck often parked in Marrickville, serves Jamaican jerk chicken and burgers.



Source: Paddy's Markets



## 4. Pop-ups

Typically informal and temporary dining events, mainly run by independent cooks and food entrepreneurs, using unconventional locations, such as backyards or art galleries, or sharing space within existing restaurants or cafes. Some pop-ups are created as community events to fundraise for charities.

Pop-ups fit within Sydney's broader street food scene as they provide an informal platform for independent and emerging cooks to experiment and connect with diners in non-traditional and transient spaces, enriching Sydney's casual dining culture and its accessibility.

- Example: Eat For Good<sup>9</sup> is a series of casual 'food-focused fundraisers' held in backyards and community spaces, such as Greenhouse Studios in Petersham. They are run by young cooks who create an exclusive, one-night-only menu with sliding scale prices to ensure affordability for everyone. They also focus on celebrating trans and genderqueer talent in Sydney's food industry.

## 5. Food kiosks

Food kiosks take up less space than traditional bricks-and-mortar stores and require less setup and pack-down than food stalls. While mobile food trucks can move around, kiosks offer vendors a fixed location, helping them build an ongoing customer base in a specific area.

- Example: On A Roll (pictured right), a small kiosk tucked inside an alleyway in Crows Nest, sells up to 100 sandwiches a day. Kiosk at Art Gallery of NSW sells coffee and light snacks inspired by bush tucker (native Australian ingredients).

## 6. Streetside shop extensions

Some bricks-and-mortar eateries are adding a front window directly facing the street, allowing people to order food from outside.

- Example: Hungry Bear Acai in Surry Hills, Rob's Burgers in Rozelle and Tianjing Bun Shop in Campsie have takeaway windows and food displays facing the street, making it easier for people to take 'grab and go' food items.

On A Roll is a tiny, no-frills kiosk serving brisket sandwiches in the middle of Crows Nest Arcade, an unassuming alleyway in Sydney's northern suburbs.



Source: Brown Paper Nutrition





Source: Hungry Bear Acai

Hungry Bear Acai in Surry Hills is connected to Golden Pide, a dine-in restaurant, but uses a streetside shop extension to serve acai bowls to customers. Below, Eat For Good hosts pop-up food events that aim to bring people together, through food, for a shared cause.



Source: Eat For Good



Source: Priscilla Cui for George Street RSL

To launch an independently published cookbook, creative food project George Street RSL hosted a pop-up event at Redfern Town Hall. Below, popular takeaway burger shop Eat at Rob's operates out of the front window of Darling Street Meats, Rozelle.



Source: Eat at Rob's



## Breakout

# A different way to dine

Pop-ups, supper clubs and restaurant kitchen 'takeovers' are becoming more popular in Sydney, appealing to the increased demand for a different type of dining experience – something more casual, communal and experimental.

Preparing for a food and art collaboration at PHIVE Parramatta, which hosts pop-up cultural events often with conceptual catering by local artists.



Source: City of Parramatta / feral4eats



Source: Danish Ravi for Welcome Merchant

Chef Sangee of Sangee's Kitchen at their 'Chindian Night' takeover of Ho Jiak Town Hall. Below, a pop-up lunch celebrating the launch of a recipe book by independent Singaporean publisher The Slow Press, hosted at Magenta House – a private home opened up for community and cultural events.



Source: Magenta House



## How did we get here?

Sydney's growing street food culture reflects the city's multicultural identity and a post-pandemic resurgence in demand for street festivals, markets, outdoor dining and casual, communal eating experiences.

This evolution has been supported by planning and regulatory reform, as well as initiatives from local councils, private organisations and state government.

Here is a non-exhaustive summary from the past five years:

### 2021-2022: Fun SEPP reforms – NSW Government

- Approved outdoor dining on footpaths for pubs and small bars as exempt development, streamlining approvals and eliminating duplication. This saved businesses time and money, enabling them to provide more outdoor dining spaces without submitting separate applications – however, they still require council approval.<sup>11</sup>
- Extended trading hours for food trucks operating on land adjoining a residential zone, as well as for dark kitchens (spaces used to produce food exclusively for delivery), expanding opportunities for mobile and casual food businesses.<sup>12</sup>

### 2021-present: Ongoing support initiatives from public and private organisations

- Transport for NSW's vibrancy initiatives focus on activating public spaces, such as streets and transport hub precincts. Programs include grants, partnerships and creative placemaking projects, which have provided more opportunities for food vendors to operate as part of festivals and street parties.<sup>13</sup>
- The Office of the 24-Hour Economy Commissioner's vibrancy reforms created more welcoming regulatory environments for nighttime activations and operations, supporting many food vendors in the process.<sup>14</sup>
- City of Canterbury-Bankstown's 2021-26 Night Time Economy Action Plan states a commitment to reviewing policies to make them more 'business-friendly' for outdoor dining and night time activations, including food trucks, small-scale cultural gatherings and pop-ups.<sup>15</sup>
- FoodLab, a social enterprise, collaborated with University of Sydney and City of Sydney to train food business owners from vulnerable backgrounds – providing commercial kitchen use and mentoring. This has allowed entrepreneurs employing more than 26 individuals to start prominent street food businesses, including Sangee's Asian Kitchen, Racha's Syrian Kitchen, Olotl and African Food Feasts, all operating as market stalls or pop-up kitchens.<sup>16</sup>



- City of Parramatta developed a tailored user guide to simplify the approval process for food truck vendors, with a clear checklist to explain complex requirements.<sup>17</sup>
- Africultures Festival, held annually at Sydney Olympic Park, is Australia's largest festival celebrating African arts and culture – and places a huge emphasis on profiling African food vendors not commonly found in ongoing market events.<sup>18</sup>
- Powerhouse, amongst other efforts to promote Western Sydney's culinary culture through its food program, commissioned fbi.radio for an interview series with renowned local food vendors participating in Parramatta Lanes.<sup>19</sup>

#### **2023-2024: More recent investments and reforms**

- Open Streets Program: Transport for NSW's Vibrant Streets Package supports local councils to temporarily close streets to vehicles and host free community events. These events have helped showcase local food providers, such as at Randwick's Spot On festival, Burwood's Lunar New Year Street Party and Wander on Q in Campbelltown.<sup>20</sup>
- Permanent outdoor dining exemptions: Exempt development was extended for outdoor dining on private land, allowing venues to utilise laneways, car parks and similar spaces without planning approval, provided they meet safety standards. Council approval is still required for dining on public land.<sup>21</sup>

- City of Sydney's Dixon Street improvement grant funds shopfront upgrades that bring food preparation to the window and open up the restaurant to the street.<sup>22</sup>
- Permit/Plug/Play Pilot Program: Transport for NSW's Vibrant Streets Package is partnering with 17 pilot councils to help streamline approval processes and deliver enabling place infrastructure to help reduce the cost and complexity of delivering street-based events.<sup>23</sup>

What feeds our street food culture also fuels bigger shifts across the city. Many of these reforms and initiatives (and this is a far from complete list!) are focused on encouraging activity after dark, bringing life to public spaces, and drawing people together in low-cost ways.

Consequently, they improve perceptions of safety in the city, foster stronger community connections and make our streets more walkable, welcoming and interesting. What benefits a food truck or market stall can often lead to broader urban transformation, influencing how cities are designed, governed and enjoyed by all.

We've come a long way in a short time in terms of nurturing and supporting our street food scene, and three key opportunities could help create a street food culture that not only thrives, but works even better for everyone – from vendors and customers to local businesses, councils and communities.





# Three opportunities to supercharge Sydney's street food culture





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## Opportunities

# Three opportunities to supercharge Sydney's street food culture

The reforms and initiatives introduced to date have laid a strong foundation for Sydney's street food scene. However, barriers remain. Consultation with stakeholders revealed three key opportunities ripe for the picking, as detailed below.

For Sydney to elevate its burgeoning street food culture, we must take hold of these three key opportunities to reap the rewards of the entrepreneurship, innovation, tourism and cultural vibrancy that street food enables.

1

**Simplify and clarify regulatory processes**

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2

**Build trust and enthusiasm for street food culture by thoughtfully integrating it into Sydney's business and cultural landscape**

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3

**Recognise street food entrepreneurs as pioneers of culinary innovation in Sydney, and back them with the right infrastructure, funding and programs to help them flourish**

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## Opportunities

### 1. Simplify and clarify regulatory processes

Regulations on where, when and how vendors operate play a crucial role in balancing business needs with public interests. Clear, well-structured rules help create a thriving street food culture that benefits vendors, local communities and governments alike.

However, the complexity and inconsistency of existing regulations – spread across multiple authorities, varying in different parts of the city, and even just being spread across multiple websites – can make it challenging for vendors to navigate the system, leading to operational difficulties and, in some cases, inadequate compliance. This also places a significant administrative burden on local governments responsible for enforcing these rules.

By streamlining regulations across different jurisdictions, adjusting unnecessarily restrictive provisions, and improving how they are communicated, we can do away with unnecessary barriers, improve compliance, and make it easier for street food vendors to contribute to Sydney's urban life.

**"We want to do the right thing, but it can be really hard to figure out what the rules are, or who we go to if we need help."**

- Sydney street food entrepreneur

## Opportunities

### 2. Build trust and enthusiasm for street food culture by thoughtfully integrating it into Sydney's business and cultural landscape

Street food has the power to enrich a city's social and economic life – the commercial success of Burwood Chinatown and the popularity of Harris Park testify to this.

Studies show street food can help people feel more connected to their neighbourhood, and complement established businesses by bringing in more foot traffic, activating underutilised spaces and adding to the touristic appeal of a place.<sup>23,24</sup>

If this is what we want for Sydney, it makes sense to rally support for actions that will help us get there.

However, concerns about mess, overcrowding and increased competition with existing businesses can create hesitation among councils, industry and local communities, hindering a full embrace of street food and restricting opportunities for growth.

This paper outlines strategies to shift these perceptions by building understanding, awareness and excitement about street food as a key partner in placemaking, economic development and cultural vibrancy.



#### Opportunities

### 3. Recognise street food entrepreneurs as pioneers of culinary innovation, and back them with infrastructure, funding and programs to help them flourish

The food entrepreneurs identified in this report operate at a fascinating intersection of the creative, cultural, food and hospitality industries. Some are mobile vendors bringing life to empty parking lots, others young chefs running pop-up events in galleries and retail stores.

Collectively, they shape Sydney's 'informal food economy,' working outside traditional regulatory, economic or social structures. This independence enables creative control, bringing fresh ideas, diverse cuisines and often more affordable dining experiences to Sydney's culinary scene.

Yet, this informality means the street food industry is often overlooked and lacks the infrastructure, funding and support available to formal businesses. Many entrepreneurs also come from minority or marginalised backgrounds with limited access to capital, training and business networks.

Without the right support, some resort to high-risk practices – operating from home without approval, purchasing substandard equipment, or signing commercial leases fraught with hidden costs or exploitative clauses – placing them at financial and legal risk, while limiting the growth of Sydney's street food culture and potentially causing harm to customers.<sup>25,26</sup>

This is a chance for Sydney to lead, recognising street food entrepreneurs as drivers of our city's culinary and cultural innovation.

Sydney already has an enviable repertoire of cafes and restaurants that draw people in – imagine what could happen for our culture, tourism and global reputation if we boosted street food in the mix.

Cities like Singapore, Bangkok and New York have embraced policies that provide vendors with infrastructure, funding and support programs. From subsidised kitchens and vendor grants to dedicated street food zoning and mentorship programs, as well as best practices around packaging and the like, these strategies support street vendors in a way that unlocks new economic opportunities and strengthens each city's reputation as a global cultural destination.



By the people, for the people: Queensberry Street Cooperative in North Melbourne is a workers' cooperative designed to empower under-supported individuals in the food and hospitality industry. By renting a shared space, members can share resources, equipment and labour, as well as legally prepare and sell food while splitting overhead costs.



## Opportunities

### Turning opportunities into action

Realising these opportunities will require more than good ideas – it calls for coordinated, sustained action across all levels of government, industry and community.

Encouragingly, there are already many councils, organisations and entrepreneurs doing important work to support street food in Sydney. This momentum provides a strong foundation to build on.

The following recommendations aim to complement and scale these efforts, providing a framework for more consistent regulation, greater public support and targeted investment in the infrastructure and programs needed to help this industry thrive.

**"There's so much opportunity in street food in Sydney...people think, 'Oh, there's no street food in Australia', but that's wrong. Go to Chinatown, Lakemba, Harris Park, even old carparks on Parramatta Road... we have it, it just needs more promotion and investment."**  
- Kevin Cheng, Soul of Chinatown



Source: Sally Sitou MP on Facebook





# Recommendations





## Recommendations

# We've translated these three big opportunities into policy actions, grouped into four key recommendations

1

Improve digital resources and processes to provide clear, consistent guidance for street food vendors

### Apply for a mobile food vending business approval

At least \$400 – The application fee is not refundable.



#### When you need to do this

If you're starting a mobile food vending business, there are 2 types permitted in our area:

- **Food vans:** restricted to serving food that's not potentially hazardous or involves low-risk practices such as frothing milk for coffee or selling ice-cream.
- **Food trucks:** selling potentially hazardous food that's cooked to order or required to be maintained at temperature.

2

Review planning controls to make it easier for street food vendors to operate

### 2.8 Temporary use of land [optional]

- (1) The objective of this clause is to provide not compromise future development of the amenity or environmental effects on the
- (2) Despite any other provision of this Plan, development on land in any zone for a to *another number*] days (whether or not c
- (3) Development consent must not be granted —
  - (a) the temporary use will not prejudice on the land in accordance with this P

3

Strategies to increase public support for street food, boosting its profile and credibility as a vital part of our economy and global brand



4

Expand funding, infrastructure and partnerships to directly support food entrepreneurs, and strengthen the ecosystem





## Recommendations

### 1. Improve digital resources and processes to provide clear, consistent guidance for street food vendors

#### Action 1a

Commit to 'mutual recognition' approvals, with central database and portal including standardised fact sheets, step-by-step guides, application forms and criteria to streamline vendor approvals with easy access to regulatory information.

- We welcome development of a 'mutual recognition' framework,<sup>27</sup> and urge its formal establishment as soon as possible following community consultation – with a centralised database for approval and compliance, allowing councils to access approvals issued by other councils (this is noted as a future consideration, but should be expedited to help councils quickly adjust to the new process)
- Since vendors must still comply with each council's specific conditions and fees even after securing mutual approval, differences should be clearly outlined with standardised fact sheets, step-by-step guides and application criteria on one webpage to ensure clarity and ease of use (a 'one-and-done' style annual payment for temporary food traders in all NSW LGAs should be considered as a next step)
- A digital tool allowing vendors to reserve trading spots in advance, and providing a clear view of available locations across participating councils, would enable better business planning.

**Lead actors:** Office of Local Government NSW, with councils

#### Action 1b

Deliver toolkits and fact sheets that clearly outline local policies, approval processes, best practices and business and marketing tips for street food vendors.

- Easily accessible on council websites, translated in languages commonly used within the local government area (for example, Figure 2 shows a City of Parramatta fact sheet with easy-to-read guidelines and checklists to assist mobile food vendors, which was translated in commonly spoken languages, including Hindi and Bengali)
- Alongside vendor resources, councils can build broader community understanding by creating communications and engagement materials for residents and neighbouring businesses
  - Global success stories, practical case studies and best practices – including clear information on how waste and cleanliness are managed in the local area
  - Highlights street food's cultural and economic value, and helps build trust and shared excitement about what it can bring – setting everyone up for success, vendors, customers and communities alike.

**Lead actors:** Councils with coordinating support from Office of Local Government NSW



## Recommendations

### 1. Improve digital resources and processes to provide clear, consistent guidance for street food vendors

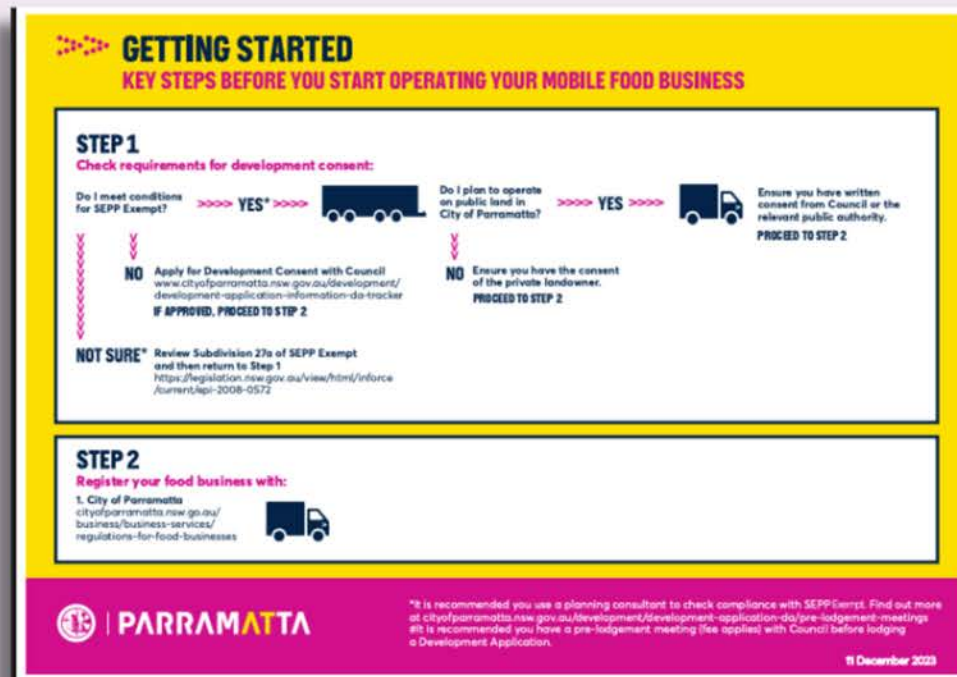


Figure 2: Flowchart from City of Parramatta's fact sheet on how to operate a mobile food truck.

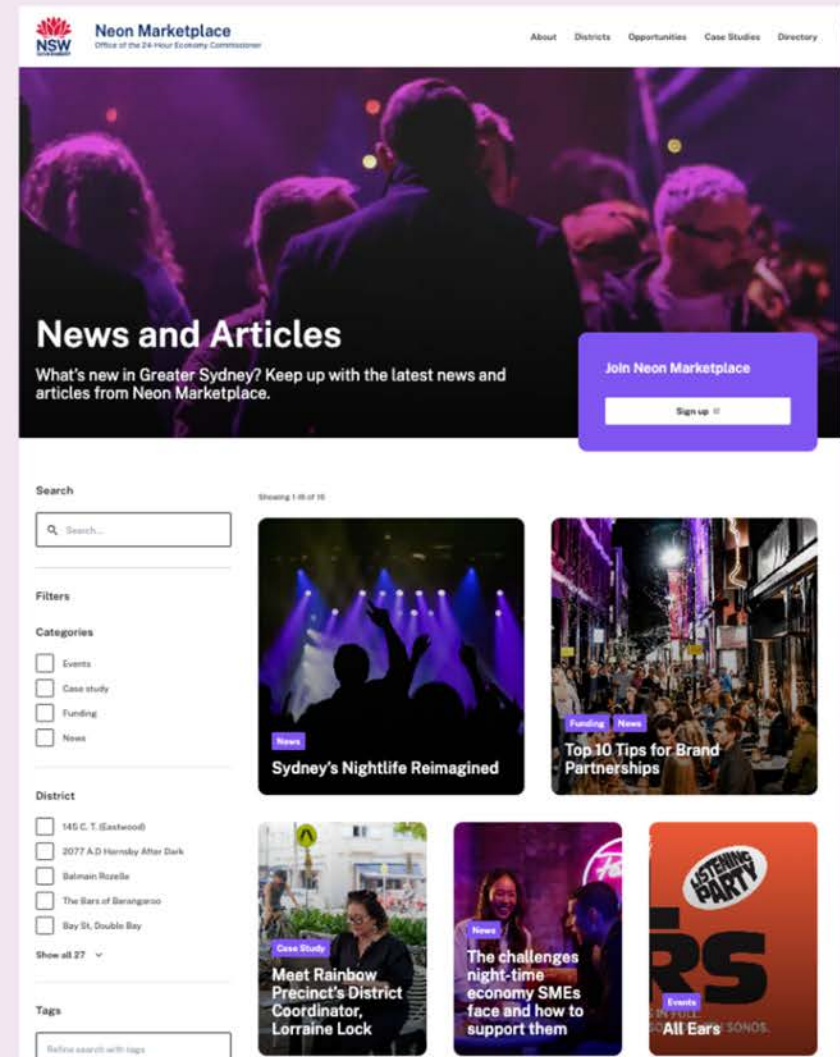


Figure 3: Neon Marketplace, a NSW Government B2B platform, is a good example of an all-in-one digital portal designed to help business owners connect with each other and stay updated on news about 24-hour economy initiatives.



## Recommendations

### 2. Review planning controls to make it easier for street food vendors to operate

#### Action 2a

**Review the Permit/Plug/Play Pilot program to ensure it enables street food vendors to operate and expand**

- We support this pilot program, as advocated in our Everyday Culture series – with this recommendation, we encourage policy makers to extend the 'local problems, local solutions' approach taken in the pilot to ensure global pre-approvals within event sites are open to, and consider the needs of, food entrepreneurs operating on the street outside specified events
- This approach would reduce repetitive and time-consuming individual approvals by streamlining approvals for street food vendors or bricks-and-mortar operators opening onto the street in key precincts or locations.

**Lead actors:** Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure, Transport for NSW, councils

#### Action 2b

**Update provisions in the Exempt and Complying Development Codes SEPP 2008 to create a more welcoming and opportune environment for street food vendors**

- Although well-intentioned and mostly reasonable, several provisions can be updated to address challenges faced by street food vendors and entrepreneurs



Source: Reactivate Consulting

- Refer to Figure 4 (p38) to view the current provisions and proposed changes.

**Lead actors:** Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure

#### Action 2c

**Remove limits on the number of days allowed for 'temporary use provision' in the Standard LEP**

- Section 2.8 of the Standard Instrument Principal Local Environmental Plan (2006 EPI 155a) limits temporary uses to a "maximum period of 52 [or another number] days (whether or not consecutive days) in any period of 12 months"
- Removing this clause would allow multiple uses of a site, such as special events where there is already a weekly market, or a daytime market on a Sunday and a night market on a Friday.

**Lead actors:** Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure



## Recommendations

### 2. Review planning controls to make it easier for street food vendors to operate

Current provisions in Exempt and Complying Development Codes SEPP 2008	Proposed changes and reasons why
Subdivision 27A – Mobile food and drink outlets, 2.54B	
(d) not be located within the canopy of, or result in damage to, any tree growing on the land or on adjacent land	Protecting trees and the natural environment is important, and tree canopies can also provide much-needed shade for customers and staff, particularly in warmer months when outdoor dining is more popular. This provision should be reviewed to allow vendors to operate within the canopy of a tree, provided they do not damage or come into direct contact with the tree. A balanced approach would support both environmental protection and the viability of street food businesses.
Division 2 – Exempt and complying development, 1.16	
(c) must not be carried out on land that is, or on which there is, an item that is listed on the State Heritage Register under the Heritage Act 1977, or that is subject to an interim heritage order under that Act, and	This restricts opportunities for state heritage sites to host temporary food stalls and contribute to local activations. Exempt development should be considered for non-physical works to support appropriate, low-impact uses – such as temporary food trucks and stalls with their own waste disposal systems that don't come into contact with the land on the heritage site.
(1b) If an item listed on the State Heritage Register is not located on, or does not comprise, the whole of the relevant land, subclause (1)(c) applies only to the part of the land that is described and mapped on that register.	Planning controls can be complex and difficult to navigate for food vendors and business owners without a background in planning or law.
(1c) If an item not listed on the State Heritage Register but identified as an item of environmental heritage in an environmental planning instrument does not comprise, or is not located on, the whole of the relevant land, any restriction on carrying out development on the relevant land on which the item is located applies only to the part of the land that is described and mapped on that instrument.	Providing a simplified guide, checklist or short explainer video that breaks down key requirements in clear, everyday language would make this information more accessible – ensuring vendors can easily understand and comply with regulations.  For example, the City of Sydney publishes 'Easy Read' versions of its city strategies to help people with disability better understand the plans that affect them. A similar approach, tailored for street food vendors, could provide clear, practical guidance without the need for specialist knowledge.

Figure 4: Proposed reviews to the Exempt and Complying Development Codes SEPP 2008



## Recommendations

### 3. Deliver strategies that increase public support for Sydney's street food culture, elevating its profile and credibility as a vital part of Sydney's global brand

#### Action 3a

**Highlight street food precincts, projects and vendors in local and international marketing campaigns to position Sydney as a city where street food thrives**

- Destination NSW's 2030 Visitor Economy Strategy prioritises developing and promoting 'accessible tourism products, experiences, and visitor precincts'
- A digital campaign could feature self-guided walking food tours and illustrated maps showcasing Sydney's diverse street food offerings, from Vietnamese food<sup>28</sup> in Cabramatta and Mediterranean delis in the inner west to historic Chinatown haunts – this could be done in partnership with relevant organisations, particularly local Uptown Precincts<sup>29</sup>
- Local promotional materials should also address 'hot button issues' such as cleanliness and waste concerns by highlighting vendor compliance with health and waste regulations.

**Lead actors:** Destination NSW (in collaboration with Destination Networks), NSW Treasury, Infrastructure NSW, Office of the 24 Hour Economy Commissioner, Transport for NSW, food media, councils

#### Action 3b

**Create and promote officially recognised street food trails and directories (for mobile vendors who aren't locked into one place)**

- Official recognition from councils or Destination NSW would add credibility and build trust in vendors and food trucks, assuring customers of quality, hygiene standards and compliance with local regulations
- This recognition could also grant vendors access to high-traffic areas, marketing support and inclusion in tourism promotions, further legitimising street food as a key part of Sydney's dining culture.

**Lead actors:** Councils, Destination NSW, food media



## Recommendations

### 4. Expand funding, infrastructure and partnerships that directly support food entrepreneurs, strengthening Sydney's overall street food ecosystem

#### Action 4a

**Review policies and procedures of creative grants and programs, and consider how they can better support food entrepreneurs and relevant organisations that champion their work.**

- Despite the growing popularity of independent, small scale food ventures like pop-ups, market stalls, supper clubs and temporary, experimental dining experiences, existing grant programs rarely focus specifically on support for the sector.
- Councils and other government bodies should review grant programs to better support food creatives running projects, offering initiatives similar to:
  - > Inner West Council's Creative Town Halls program, which allows creatives to apply for full-fee waivers at town halls with industrial kitchens.
  - > Expanding fee waivers and subsidies for emerging street food vendors, reducing financial barriers by waiving or subsidising permit fees, development application costs, and public space hire for first-time food vendors and social enterprises.

- > Creating a 'street food hub' pilot program in high-traffic areas, designating specific public spaces or underutilised sites such as council carparks as street food hubs with rotating vendors, shared seating and integrated cultural programming.

**Lead actors:** Councils, Department of Creative Industries, Tourism, Hospitality and Sport, private and public sector organisations

**"Having a triage officer to specifically support or lobby on behalf of small businesses, including street food vendors, helps their access, network and knowledge. And it makes it easier for us at council to get these events and activations running smoothly."**

**- Miguel Asuncion, City of Parramatta**



## Recommendations

### 4. Expand funding, infrastructure and partnerships that directly support food entrepreneurs, strengthening Sydney's overall street food ecosystem

#### Action 4b

**Plan for plug-and-play infrastructure to be retrofitted in key sites and delivered in new developments, ensuring they support food vendors as they aim to do with musicians and performers.**

This may include:

- More dedicated parking spots and bays, giving street food vendors priority access to car spaces with time extensions (as we now have for musicians)
- Requiring new developments to include sheltered spaces, open areas and essential utilities like electricity and water to support mobile vendors – will also support ongoing market activity, benefitting residents and bringing developments to life
- Actively integrating food vendors into parklet initiatives, ensuring consultation with nearby businesses – for example, by clustering complementary vendors, such as dessert stalls, near restaurants serving savoury dishes – to provide variety without direct competition.

As well as dedicated infrastructure, we can take a more creative and place-based approach to public space by unlocking underutilised areas and enhancing the everyday experience of eating on the street. This includes exploring innovative uses of council-owned assets, such as underused car parks and laneways or dead spaces behind retail strips, as evening street food destinations.

These spaces can help improve perceptions of safety after dark and offer low-cost activation opportunities with a high social return.

We strongly encourage investment in comfortable public seating and pedestrian-friendly streets, which improve the experience of alfresco dining, whether the food has been purchased on the street or from bricks-and-mortar outlets. Taking these actions to create streets where people can linger, eat and connect is essential to cultivating a welcoming and thriving street food culture.

**Lead actors:** Councils, Transport for NSW, precinct developers

The Langston precinct in Epping was intentionally developed with infrastructure and services for temporary and ongoing food experiences and activations.





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