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Submission to NSW Planning and Environment re Draft Hunter Regional Plan

on behalf of Singleton Beef and Land Management Assoc. Inc.

Singleton Beef and Land Management Association Inc. (SBLM) is a voluntary organisation of beef cattle producers in the mid and Upper Hunter. The group has a broad range of members (over 80 members) ranging from large producers to smaller cattle properties including those producing all their income from the land, to those having off-farm work as well as a commercial beef enterprise.

The group runs educational activities including field days, seminars and study tours attracting a wide audience from throughout the Hunter Valley and beyond.

This year the SBLM group is celebrating its 30th year, indicating the success of the group and the tireless contribution of its members.

Beef Industry Recognition

It is very noticeable that beef production is scarcely considered in the Draft Hunter Regional Plan. This is despite beef production being the highest income earner of all the agricultural industries in the Hunter Valley - \$374.3 million ABS 2011 and increasing by

\$17.4 m annually since 2005. (ref: HLLS Draft Local Strategic Plan). Beef farming employee's number over 3,000 in the Hunter (plus the processing industries marketing and employee's in distribution & sales.

The importance of the beef industry is totally overlooked in this Draft Hunter Regional Plan, compared to the Viticulture industry having a value of \$210 M (HLLS Strategic Plan) which includes wine products – value added product. The viticulture industry is also declining. One of the major current problems in the viticulture industry is how to cost effectively remove vines and infrastructure.

While support of the viticulture industry is important, the emphasis on viticulture and thoroughbred horses, with no plan or comments on the major agricultural industry beef or the large dairy industry shows a lack of understanding of agriculture in the Hunter Valley and cannot lead to balanced and integrated planning.

The beef industry is currently (2015-2016) one of the few agricultural industries facing a bright and optimistic future. The value of beef has increased by over 160% since the above figures were quoted. Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA) and other bodies have forecast these higher prices to be maintained for many years, as new markets develop for China, Korea, Japan, Indonesia etc. As a major beef producer the Hunter Region has an opportunity to support the beef industry both in the domestic market and the export market.

The Hunter is currently well served by three export abattoirs in the region (Scone, Wingham and Singleton and one domestic abattoir (Kurri).

The draft plan does not place the beef industry in the significance it should have. Cattle producers in the Hunter Valley are some of the cleanest and 'greenest' in the world, yet within the Hunter Region there is no recognition of that fact.

There are four abattoirs operating in the valley (3 major exporters) which is an advantage for producers in the valley. Encouragement and development of these processing works is essential for producers in the valley, many of which

Saleyards: Scone, Singleton, Maitland, Gloucester, Denman, Wollombi, have a large throughput of cattle.

- Beef cattle producers manage more land than other industries in the Hunter.
- Produce for both the domestic and export markets
- Implement many of the land management projects in the Hunter (e.g. Landcare, Sustainable Farming, Carbon Credits etc.),
- Beef producers manage land adjoining major natural resources (e.g. Water supply, rivers, national parks etc.)

Planning needs to look at the fact that beef production is a viable and integral part of land management in the Hunter.

Beef production is also being conducted on mine land. Some of the biggest beef producers are mining companies, where buffer land is grazed by beef cattle and rehabilitated land is being returned successfully to beef production enterprises.

Beef production has the greatest chance of integration with other industries in the valley. There are few industries that provide the background of rural scenery so important for tourism, productive use of rehabilitated mining lands, productive management of land unsuitable for other industries (due to soils, landscape e.g. steep land, flood prone land and rehabilitated land).

Beef production also forms the backbone of many of the smaller rural towns in the Hunter. This is particularly true with the current decline in the grape industry and the contraction of the mining industry.

The Draft Hunter Regional Plan needs to address how the beef industry in the next 20 years will:

- Improve viability and sustainability
- Retain and improve essential infrastructure (e.g. abattoirs, market access throughout the Hunter,
- Create an environment favourable to new beef opportunities (e.g. planning for abattoir expansion, greater integration of agriculture in tourism, policies that take account of the value of beef production and the custodianship of land by beef producers (e.g. land use planning etc.).

There are opportunities to:

- Encourage labelling of product from the Hunter (Hunter Beef) – paddock to fork type marketing and product labelling
- Assess the potential of Mine rehab land for cattle production (currently several trials being conducted)
- Support beef producers from Biosecurity impacts (planning to allow separation of beef production from risk factors such as garbage tips, residential land, pest control in National Parks etc.)
- Mining biodiversity offsets- integrate beef production as part of the management of the properties. This would reduce the impact on local communities (loss of jobs and local income) as well as provide incentives to maintain pest and weed control strategies.

The Draft Hunter Regional Plan process has not been well publicised in the Upper Hunter / Rural Communities.

The plan has not received the wide review that it requires to receive the consideration required from rural communities.

SB&LM thanks NSW Planning & Environment for the opportunity to meet with their representatives late in the process (15 Feb 2016) at Singleton.

It was noticeable at this meeting that there were members of SB&LM Assoc. and representation from NSW Farmers. SB&LM has beef producer members from a range of locations (Upper and Lower Hunter) but it was noticeable that the only representative from further up the valley than Singleton was Tony Haggarty (NSW Farmers Rep). It is disappointing that views from what the Draft plan now calls the 'Western subregion – which in its words is 'an economic powerhouse' was not given the same opportunities to comment.

The integration of industries is poorly addressed in the plan and surely must be looked at in a more positive note is the Hunter Region is to maintain its strong position as an economic powerhouse as industries ebb and flow with changing market and circumstance. As the current decline in mining and viticulture production influences the Hunter, opportunities should be looked for that complement these industries or can be integrated to boost alternatives that utilise existing infrastructure/ communities. Beef production is one industry that can readily integrate and should be given the encouragement and opportunity that good planning can provide.

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