



Sustainability evaluation checklist

For strategies, plans & major development proposals

This checklist can be used by community groups as a simple guide for evaluating regional or local plans and strategies. It can also be used in relation to major development proposals.

The purpose of the checklist is to help identify those aspects of a plan or proposal that do not promote sustainable outcomes for the region and the locality. These deficiencies can then be conveyed to relevant agencies and decision-makers in a positive way.

Evaluation is grouped under six separate themes:

- economic and urban structure
- biodiversity
- land and water
- environmental design
- social
- planning process.

Each theme presents a set of simple questions relating to specific issues. The adequacy with which each issue is addressed can then be explored and identified, and a simple numerical score applied. These scores can be added up, giving an overall sustainability rating:

100+ points	Nirvana
75 - 99 points	Far-sighted
50 - 74 points	On the road to sustainability
25 - 49 points	Back to the drawing board
0 - 24 points	Back to uni!

Assessment synopsis:

Description:	Review of draft Hunter Regional Plan and draft Plan for Growing Hunter City	
Prepared by:	Hunter Environment Lobby (HEL)	
Proponent:	NSW Department of Planning and Environment	
Date:	February 2016	
Evaluated by:	HEL	
Evaluation theme:	Score	General comment
<u>Economic & urban structure</u>	2	The plans do not meet fundamental requirements of a regional plan to support a long term economically and environmentally sustainable settlement structure for the region. Key issue missing is regional transport planning.
<u>Biodiversity</u>	3	Biodiversity is recognised as a significant issue, but no planning measures or mechanisms have been included to resolve these issues, and to support protection of regional biodiversity.
<u>Land & water</u>	4	Little attention has been given to land development constraints and land and water issues.
<u>Environmental design</u>	1	Environmental design issues are secondary in importance in a broad regional plan, but should at least have been identified as a consideration for local plan making.
<u>Social</u>	7	Identifies most of the major social issues needing attention, but fails to take measures to support regional identity and governance.
<u>Planning process</u>	8	Normal plan making process has been followed, but there is a lack of data supporting the decisions, and consultation has been superficial.

TOTAL 27

Overall rating [Back to the drawing board](#)

Theme 1:

Does the plan promote a sustainable economic and urban structure for the region?

Issue	Has the issue been addressed? Comment on adequacy	Score 3 excellent 2 good 1 neutral 0 inadequate
1a. Does the plan promote a regional economic structure based on renewable resource use?	While the plan does recognise biophysical strategic agricultural lands (Action 2.1.2), it continues to focus on coal and gas extraction, and other extractive resources. The plan fails to support the social, economic and land use framework required for sustainable agriculture, with only limited actions such as mapping and identifying important agricultural lands (Action 2.1.3)	0
1b. Does the plan limit growth in the size of the region's 'urban footprint'?	The plan does not limit the region's urban footprint and proposes an expected population increase in 'Hunter City and its hinterland' by 320,000 to 750,000 people over the next 40 – 50 years. 60,000 new homes will be needed in 'Hunter City' by 2036.	0
1c. Will the layout and density of development support a sustainable transport system?	This is hard to comment on, as no information on transport is included in the plan. The current transport system is already highly car dependent and the fragmented structure of Hunter City is make it even more difficult to support a sustainable transport system.	0
1d. Are major travel generators (retail, commercial, tertiary education, health facilities, entertainment) and residential areas oriented to a regional public transport system (rail, tram or busway)?	Major travel generators are oriented to cars. The only major travel generators with good, accessible, and networked public transport are the University of Newcastle (train and bus) and the proposed new Maitland hospital (train). However, the 2014 closure of the Newcastle rail line has reduced accessibility, especially for the University of Newcastle.	0
1e. Have public transport corridors and interchange sites been identified and reserved?	No public transport corridors have been identified or reserved, although road corridors have been recognised (Action 2.3.1) The high speed rail proposal is identified as an economic opportunity rather than a transport proposal requiring land use decisions (Direction 2.3).	0
1f. Is provision made for sustainable freight transport within and through the region?	This is recognised in the plan as an important economic issue, but no specific actions are proposed (Action 2.3.2).	1
1g. Is provision made for necessary infrastructure to support town centres, local employment, social and recreational facilities?	No specific actions are proposed, only broad statements of support, and the need to work with local councils and communities.	1
Score: Economic & urban structure		2

Theme 2:

Does the plan protect the region's biodiversity and its ecological processes?

Issue	Has the issue been addressed? Comment on adequacy	Score 3 excellent 2 good 1 neutral 0 inadequate
2a. Does the plan protect existing habitat?	Plan includes broad statements of intent rather than any new protection. Does not really do anything, and fails to identify additional areas requiring protection such as national park extensions, the Lake Macquarie Coastal Wetlands Park proposal, or Crown lands with native vegetation. Main focus is on improving biodiversity information.	1
2b. Does the plan provide for restoration or reinstatement of degraded habitat?	No attention is given to the need for restoration of degraded habitat. Figure 12 suggests that mining and development will improve habitat connectivity.	1
2c. Does the plan support the protection of regional habitat corridors?	The plan recognises that regional habitat corridors require protection, but it is not clear how the actions in the plan will achieve this (Figure 12).	1
2d.		
2e.		
Score: Biodiversity		3

Theme 3:

Does the plan protect the region's land and water resources from degradation?

Issue	Has the issue been addressed? Comment on adequacy	Score 3 excellent 2 good 1 neutral 0 inadequate
3a. Does the plan address hazards such as flooding, bush fire, coastal hazards, acid sulfate soils, salinity, etc.?	Superficial attention only given to this issue.	1
3b. Does the plan include measures to protect the region's streams, wetlands, waterways, groundwater, estuaries, marine environments and fisheries?	Superficial attention only given to this issue.	1
3c. Does the plan support the retention/restoration of environmental flows in rivers and streams?	Not considered in the plan. Focus is only on coastal landscapes (Direction 3.2).	1
3d Does the plan promote development on (degraded) 'brownfield' sites rather than (undeveloped) 'greenfield' sites?	Plans are silent on this issue, but it appears that there is less focus on greenfield sites than in the Lower Hunter Regional Strategy 2006.	1
3e. Is provision made for 'integrated' water infrastructure systems that enable treatment and utilisation of stormwater and reclaimed water?	Not addressed in plan	0
Score: Land & water		4

Theme 4:

Will development be designed according to sustainable design principles?

Issue	Has the issue been addressed? Comment on adequacy	Score 3 excellent 2 good 1 neutral 0 inadequate
4a. Does the plan promote good urban design?	The plan is silent on good urban design.	1
4b. Does the plan promote heritage conservation and protection of scenic landscapes?	There is no mention of heritage conservation or scenic landscapes.	0
4c. Does the plan promote energy efficiency?	The plan is silent on energy efficiency.	0
4d. Does the plan promote water efficiency?	The plan is silent on water efficiency.	0
4e. Does the plan promote waste minimisation?	The plan is silent on waste minimisation.	0
4f. Does the plan address urban noise impacts (main roads/ heavy vehicles/ rail/ airports)?	The plan makes no reference to urban noise impacts.	0
4g. Does the plan promote building durability and adaptability?	The plan makes no reference to building durability and adaptability.	0
Score: Environmental design		1

Theme 5:

Does the plan meet the community's social needs and expectations?

Issue	Has the issue been addressed? Comment on adequacy	Score 3 excellent 2 good 1 neutral 0 inadequate
5a. Does the plan provide for local participation, engagement and autonomy in decisions that affect the region?	Community engagement is part of the planning process, but it is hard to gauge how effective this is	1
5b. Does the plan promote local/regional community identity?	Plan does not recognise the need for promote local/regional identity, and key planning decisions are not locally based, thereby making this more difficult.	1
5c. Does the plan promote equitable access to facilities and services within the region?	Plan does not recognise or promote equity as an objective.	1
5d. Does the plan respect cultural diversity?	Plan does not recognise or promote cultural diversity as an objective.	1
5e. Does the plan take into account indigenous interests?	Direction 4.4 is to strengthen the self-determination of Aboriginal communities	2
5f. Does the plan provide for affordable housing in accessible locations?	Action 4.2.3 addresses this issue but relies on local council housing strategies. Provides little guidance on what is needed.	1
Score: Social		7

Theme 6:

Is the plan the product of a sound planning process?

Issue	Has the issue been addressed? Comment on adequacy	Score 3 excellent 2 good 1 neutral 0 inadequate
6a. Does the plan express appropriate objectives?	Plan is based on a vision, directions and actions. Does not have specific objectives, and therefore lacks clear direction. Primarily	1
6b. Is the plan consistent with other plans for the region?	Recognises other regional planning documents, but does not identify existing local strategic plans.	2
6c. Has the plan considered options or alternatives?	No. The plan is primarily a statement of policy rather than reviewing options and a preferred land use pattern.	1
6d. Is the preferred option the best option?	Other options exist, and key land use issues have not been identified.	0
6e. Does the plan apply to the right area? (Should other areas also be included?)	Areas and boundaries identified are vague and the basis is unclear. This is unhelpful in supporting detailed planning.	1
6f. Does the plan consider the cumulative impacts of implementing the plan ('strategic assessment')?	Cumulative impacts of the proposals have not been considered or referred to.	0
6g. Does the plan include adequate mechanisms to achieve its objectives?	The plans are a set of policies to prepare plans, and to guide plan making by local councils. No new mechanisms to achieve the vision are included.	1
6h. Is there a process for reviewing implementation of the plan?	The need for co-ordination and monitoring is recognised in the plan, but the existing governance structure does not support this in practice.	2
Score: Planning process		8