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Hunter and Central Coast
Department of Planning
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Gosford City Council

Councillor Hillary Morris

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Dear Madam

RE: DRAFT CENTRAL COAST REGIONAL PLAN

I have lived on the Central Coast since 1984, firstly at Copacabana and since 1997, Somersby. I am a councillor on Gosford City Council and also work full time with a legal firm which has offices in both Gosford & Wyong. I am also a co-owner of a commercial premise in the Gosford CBD.

Whilst there are aspects on the regional plan I agree, I find the emphasis on extractive industry as being of the highest economic value in what is an area of prime agricultural and water catchment lands is misguided. The plan must ensure the protection of water, including both surface and groundwater ecosystems. In order to adequately protect the Central Coast's water resources, all extractive, coal seam gas and long wall coal mining activities should be banned in the Central Coast drinking water catchments. Being a resident of the mountain area, I am specifically concerned about the impact any form of mining may have on the aquifer.

My vision for the Central Coast region is to grow and diversify the regional economy in keeping with the principles of ecologically sustainable development, sustain productive landscapes and protect and manage the natural and cultural environment.

I would like the Plan to clearly identify how areas of high environmental value will be protected and maintained into the future, particularly under an amalgamated council where there are certainly quite different approaches to policy on this subject.

Being a someone who is passionate about Gosford City Council's Coastal Open Space System (COSS), I would like Regional Plan to articulate a commitment to fully implement the COSS Strategy including mechanisms to ensure the long-term voluntary acquisition of the remaining 37% of land (by area) currently identified for COSS. The NSW Government has previously made a commitment to introduce an E5 zone to be applied to COSS lands in public ownership. This must be fully implemented in the Regional Plan with an E5 zone gazetted at the same time that the Regional Plan is finalised. This would provide certainty to these important environment lands and could be rolled out to the entire Central Coast region.

The Regional Plan should outline actions to undertake investigations, develop a strategy and maps to carry the COSS forward into the current Wyong LGA.

I also think the draft Plan places too high an emphasis on biodiversity offsetting.

Biodiversity offsetting is not appropriate in all circumstances. The draft Plan must identify 'red flag' areas (e.g. coastal catchments, areas of endangered ecological communities or threatened species habitat) that are not appropriate for biodiversity offsetting. If biodiversity offsetting is to occur, it must meet best practice principles that require 'like for like' offsets, no net loss of biodiversity and offsets must be provided within the Central Coast region.

Although I understand the importance of growth, the draft Plan fails to adequately outline infrastructure improvements that will accompany growth. This includes addressing serious transport issues, traffic flow around a more congested CBD, plus the issues regarding water, sewerage, electricity and communication supply. There has already been major communication interruptions experienced by business owners in the Gosford and Wyong CBD's which will become worse as the telephone exchanges systems has more requests for lines. I note that the NBN rollout in Gosford was a disaster which some companies still not being able to access the fibre optic cable network.

In terms of our council owned water resource, I understand there is no Operating License for the Joint Water Authority for the Central Coast. The Operating License would ensure transparency and accountability within our water supply operations and protect consumers by prescribing minimum standards of service. Similar to Sydney Water and Hunter Water, the licence would include requirements for:

- water quality
- asset performance, including system performance standards
- water conservation
- environmental indicators and management
- community consultation
- performance monitoring and auditing each year, an independent audit should be undertaken to assess compliance with the Operating Licence.

I would also think the draft Plan fails to adequately plan for climate change adaptation and mitigation. The only clear action in the plan is for the State Government to continue to support councils to consider the long term implications of climate change in decision-making. There should be more emphasis in the document on climate change risks as a constraint on development. The State Government has a responsibility to the community to map areas that will be impacted adversely by climate change and protect appropriate development controls for those areas. This is particularly important for floodplains, low lying coastal areas and high bushfire risk areas.

There has been discussion that there is a desire amongst some for the development of Warnervale Airport to become a regional hub. I do not support this move and am pleased to see that the proposal for a Regional Airport has been removed from the draft Central Coast Regional Plan.

Finally, the draft Plan relies on ongoing implementation by Gosford and Wyong Councils, working with the NSW Government. I have been advised that environment and community groups in the region are concerned with the track record of both Gosford and Wyong councils in failing to adequately protect areas of high conservation value, habitat corridors and sensitive coastal environments. Appropriate oversight is needed to ensure that the relevant local councils protect the important environment and coastal values of the Central Coast in accordance with the Plan. The draft Central Coast Regional Plan was prepared without regard to the proposed amalgamation of Gosford and Wyong Councils. If the amalgamation goes ahead, this could impact on the short term capacity of the newly amalgamated LGA to deliver on the draft Plan.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input into this document.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Hillary Morris', written over a horizontal line.

HILLARY MORRIS