

# **A Response to the Draft Central Coast Regional Plan**

## **By Mountain Districts Association**

The Mountain Districts Association (MDA) is pleased to have the opportunity to review the Draft Central Coast Regional Plan. As expected the focus of the plan relates to the coastal urban areas of our region where the bulk of the population lives, with only limited consideration of the farming and rural communities west of M1 which we represent and who have significantly different needs.

**It is respectfully noted that several suggestions from previous submissions have been incorporated in the Draft Plan including:**

Creating provision for people to “age-in-place”

Protecting and developing the region’s agribusiness and animal biosecurity by maintaining areas of critical mass for industry and creating buffer zones

Clustering of services in rural villages

Planning strategies to improve community safety in emergency situations such as bushfires

Sustainably managing and protecting surface and ground water

The maintenance of bio-diversity networks and protection of natural environments

However, the details of how these goals are to be achieved are very limited, vague or general, and some rely on existing plans that may need reviewing.

**It is also noted that there are some issues we previously raised that have not been addressed in the draft plan. These include:**

The need to improve rural infrastructure including main arterial roads (which provide alternative access to and from major urban areas in the event of an emergency), telecommunication services and the development of a Hinterland Village Centre

The need to develop strategies to mitigate the environmental and economic impacts of climate change

The need to unequivocally protect Central Coast water supplies and underground aquifers from the threat of contamination by CSG mining

The creation of opportunities to research and develop renewable energy production as fossil fuels begin to be phased out

**Some further points that have arisen in discussion with community members include:**

This document does not seem to provide a vision for the future but rather a continuation of what already exists. In fact some of the content is already outdated or superseded. (eg. plans to up-grade the intersection of Central Coast Highway and Brisbane Water Drive which is already operational.) Are changes in community attitudes and expectations adequately considered? What does this indicate about plans and a vision for our future over the next decades?

How will this draft plan be implemented? Most of the actions indicate that plans will be carried out in consultation with local authorities. Does it therefore follow that the role of local government is being phased out? Following the amalgamation of most Local Councils throughout NSW will State government take greater control over what local authorities are able and required to do? And will this limit the ability of local communities to have input into the governance of their local region?

What is the plan for the Protection of Drinking Water Catchments? With the expected increase in population of the Central Coast what plans have been made to ensure adequate potable water supplies for the future? Will the threat of contamination by CSG Mining be ruled out especially as large areas of the catchment are included in or adjoining Identified Mineral Resource areas in Figure 8?

The map in Figure 7 has created a lot of concern for the farming communities of the Mountain Districts. Two issues have been highlighted. One is that the localities of Mangrove Mountain, Kulnura, Peats Ridge and Somersby where the bulk of farming enterprises currently exist are classified as non-urban areas. Does this indicate that these districts are intended for Rural Lifestyle zoning? It would seem that the NSW Government has failed to “identify and protect significant agricultural lands...and activities” and has not recognised and protected the economic potential of productive agricultural land to facilitate future agribusiness opportunities as Action 3.1.1 suggests.

Secondly, areas of Biophysical Strategic Agricultural Land indicated on the map on Figure 7 exist in areas that are already developed as Rural Lifestyle blocks where limited agricultural activity currently occurs. It is hoped that these anomalies can be re-examined at this draft stage. In the past planning policy has seen the loss of valuable agricultural areas in Greater Sydney so it is hoped that we can sustainably maintain food security in our region.

Serious concern exists about land use information on the map in Figure 8. The areas indicated as either Identified or Potential Mineral Resource coincides with areas of current Agricultural Activity. There is concern that the production of construction materials and agricultural activity cannot co-exist as the process of obtaining sand and hard rock destroys the surface soils and underground aquifers used for agriculture. Will the Mountain Districts be mined for construction resources to develop urban areas at the expense of viable agricultural lands and water supplies? A land use conflict exists between farmland and resource extraction. Will areas for various activities be further defined in the final plan so that businesses can proceed with plans for capital investment in farm infrastructure or construction resource development in the future with some certainty?

Waste management is another issue that is of concern to local residents. Illegal dumping of construction waste has been occurring in the local area and a mound of domestic waste also exists in an environmentally sensitive part of our local area that has the potential to contaminate water sources. Taxes and levies imposed by the NSW Government for the disposal of waste impact on how Waste Operators dispose of products causing the potential for significant environmental pollution that can easily proceed unchecked by regulators. Planning policy could help safeguard our environment and resource useage.