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Submission re Draft Central Coast Regional Plan

Total Environment Centre (TEC) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Draft Central Coast Regional Plan. TEC has long been concerned by the failure of both Gosford and Wyong Councils to protect the environment and natural values of the Central Coast. The Regional Plan must therefore act to embed the principles of Ecologically Sustainable Development (ESD) into Planning on the Central Coast by protecting areas of high conservation value, habitat corridors and sensitive coastal environments; and achieving greenhouse, local air quality and waste reduction targets. We are disappointed, therefore, that the draft Plan fails to provide details on how this will be achieved.

TEC strongly believes that the vision and goals of the Plan should be amended to clearly state that the principles of ESD will guide Planning on the Central Coast. Failure to do so will undermine confidence in the Plan and create the appearance that it is simply designed to facilitate development.

We note that that draft Plan identifies areas of high conservation value; however we are disturbed that there is little detail on how these areas will be protected. The Plan should include protections such as restrictions on development and no-go zones for high conservation value lands, habitat corridors, sensitive coastal areas and drinking water catchments. Protection of drinking water catchments should include prohibitions on mining and coals seam gas extraction. Reliance on offsets is a poor approach (see below).

The Plan should also include a commitment to fully implement the Coastal Open Space System (COSS) including the immediate introduction of E5 zones on all COSS lands in public ownership. Furthermore the COSS should be extended to cover Wyong Shire.

TEC is also concerned that the strategy fails to include detailed targets for improving public transport. We note that parts of the Central Coast are poorly serviced by public transport with resultant car dependency. Projected increases in population and development should be clearly tied to improving public transport infrastructure i.e. development should not be allowed to proceed unless adequate transport is in place to meet likely travel demand.

We are also concerned that the Plan places a heavy reliance on biodiversity offsetting. Offsetting should be used as an adjunct to protecting areas of conservation importance from inappropriate development, not as a means to facilitate development of areas that would otherwise be protected. To this end the Plan should identify 'red flag' areas where offsetting will not be permitted. Offsetting should also be subject to stringent 'like for like' principles and not allow any net loss of biodiversity.

We also believe that the Plan should rule out the development of a Central Coast Regional Airport. TEC does not believe that any clear need for a regional airport has been demonstrated. Furthermore, development of such a facility would require substantial environmental disturbance including the loss or damage of sensitive ecological communities.

TEC urges the department to amend the Plan to address these serious shortcomings.

Yours sincerely

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Campaigner