

24 March, 2016

General Manager,
Hunter and Central Coast
Department of Planning and Environment

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: Draft Hunter Regional Plan & Draft Plan for Growing Hunter City

The wording in the draft plans too fluffy

These draft strategic plans provide an opportunity for DP&E to adopt good planning principles to optimize appropriate land use and to minimize land use conflicts in the Hunter. Although there are many encouraging words in these draft plans they are so open in nature that they give very little guidance to communities, developers, councils or to the DP&E itself. What these strategic plans are saying about land use in many locations is unclear.

One result of this is that it is a trivial exercise for the words in these draft plans to be used to support any planning proposal for spot rezoning at most locations. Therefore these draft plans are more likely to contribute to land-use conflicts than to provide a solution to them. Additionally it is forcing councils (or the Responsible Planning Authority) to do assessments on a development by development basis which is a far cry from the plans offering a guiding framework.

This vacuum of guidance means that it is open slather for developers to make rezoning planning proposals and the resulting windfall profit.

Local problems that need avoiding

I am a long-term resident of Black Hill and have observed how poorly the planning system has attempted to deal with a multitude of land-use conflicts as a result of spot rezoning planning proposals and State Significant projects. These have included two proposals to export Sydney waste to this area, 3 gravel quarries, 3 coal mine applications and 2 industrial spot rezoning proposals. One of these is the current planning proposal by the Catholic Church for a spot rezoning from rural to (mostly) industrial at Black Hill.

There has been a desperate need for a sub-regional plan for the Black Hill area for a very long time. These current plans on exhibition do not make any provision for sub-regional plans even in priority areas like Black Hill.

Identification of issues with planning proposals for rezoning to industrial

I am choosing to respond to these draft plans by using the example of how these plans make provision for industrial lands. Through the industrial lands example I intend to demonstrate how the spot rezoning process to industrial land is currently totally broken and how the draft plans could improve the situation.

According to the draft Hunter Regional Plan page34

"The region has around 15,000 hectares of land zoned for employment purposes. Approximately 7400 hectares are estimated to be suitable for industrial use."

Now let us look at this statement in combination with the statement in The Lower Hunter over the next 20 years: Discussion Paper 2013 *"This (take up rate for employment land for the Lower Hunter) equates to demand for a further 960 hectares of employment land from 2011 to 2031."*

So, the demand for employment land (including industrial land) is less than 1000 hectares for the 20 year period to 2031. Even assuming the upper Hunter demand is another 1000 hectares, a back of the envelope calculation, has the current supply of industrial land lasting more than 70years. The system is so far out of whack there should be a moratorium on further rezoning to industrial land until the system is fixed.

This demonstrates that the demand side of the demand and supply equation is being totally ignored by Councils and the JRPP and hence the current rezoning process has produced more than 300% the amount of land rezoned as there is demand for the next 20years.

The result is that developers have gained spot rezoning approvals on three times the area of land than is required. This also means that they are gaining three times the windfall profit that they would have if the DP&E had good record and data systems in place to guide the consent authority and require them to consider demand.

Councils and the DP&E has let the spot rezoning process for industrial land run out of control for a very long time and in the process it has also sterilized thousands of hectares of land that could have had productive uses. Altogether, I think this is a scandal that needs fixing immediately.

Ways the draft plans could solve problems of rezoning land to industrial

The draft Hunter Regional Plan, page 34, has the following action:

ACTION 2.2.3 Identify and manage supply of industrial lands to support manufacturing, construction, transport and supply chain industries

This remains an unbalanced way of dealing with industrial land where all the emphasis is in looking at the supply side with no consideration of the demand

side. This could be easily fixed by the addition of the words 'and demand' after the word 'supply'.

The draft plan on page 35 goes on to state that *"The release of zoned employment land to the market is influenced by a number of factors, including demand and the strength of the economy."* This is a good statement, but for the demand side to be considered at the planning proposal stage the Coordination and Monitoring Committee would need to deliver on these sections in the final plan. This would mean giving priority to doing the studies and setting up data collection systems for the supply and demand statistics. Directives to the consent authorities to consider the supply and demand data in determining rezonings to industrial land would also need to be written. Again, this solution is easily achievable if the Coordination Committee gives it priority.

Consequences of the draft plans for the current planning proposal for industrial rezoning by the Catholic Church

The draft plans no longer have the land between John Renshaw Drive and Black Hill Road tagged as "Employment Lands". This is an appropriate change from the previous Lower Hunter Regional Plan for many reasons. One of these reasons is that the need for this additional industrial land was not established.

This now allows for a more balanced approach to achieve the best land use from a range of alternatives.