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Online Submission

Mar 24 (21 days ago)

S To:

Submission to the Draft Hunter Regional Plan

I am primarily concerned that the Plan does not resolve conflict between different land uses, both existing and potential, from environmental values, primary industries and minerals extraction. Deferring actual planning and impact management is no solution.

I am also concerned that identified areas of high value, both environmental and agricultural, are not excluded from exploration for minerals or developments that would impact on them, as they always do in reality. They need genuine protection.

Where environmentally valued areas are concerned the use of offsets is more often only a paper solution, is not genuinely 'like for like', and results in a net loss of biodiversity in reality. The draft Plan must identify areas (e.g. coastal catchments, areas of endangered ecological communities or threatened species habitat) that are inappropriate for biodiversity offsetting.

There is also not enough emphasis on mandating habitat corridors in the region.

And the Plan fails to address the critically urgent issue of climate change, apart from supporting councils to do so. The state should be mapping areas that will suffer most, like floodplains, low-lying coastal areas and high bushfire risk areas, and 'plan' now to mandate development controls there.

There should be acceptance of the need to mine and export less coal to fuel global warming, yet the opposite is encouraged.

There is no acknowledgement of the structural decline of the coal industry; instead there is explicit support for an expanding industry, which has already been shown to be the detriment of so much of the Valley.

Where are the commitments to renewable energy projects and the encouragement of zero carbon technologies and industries and related training for the Hunter workforce to transition from its over-dependence on coal?

Any responsible Plan must incorporate a commitment to this and action on it. The social and economic fabric of the Hunter is already being seriously impacted by job losses from the dying coal industry and support businesses. It is the most important issue on the Hunter NOW, because successive governments have failed to address its coming.

NO development that impacts on water quality or quantity should be permitted. It should also mandate that no longwall coal mining or coal seam gas extraction be permitted in water catchment areas, as promised by the O'Farrell government pre-election.

It is not acceptable that 30 final voids are permitted for the Hunter. Such issues for all coal mining and other heavy metal extractive industries need special plans for the future, as leaving the outcomes to whatever happens via market forces means a potential disaster for land management.

Coal mining growth needs to be curtailed, since its impacts on salt and heavy metal loads in the Hunter are increasingly impacting on possible types of crops.

A regional plan needs to have overview power from the state and not be left to individual councils to implement, especially given the unresolved amalgamation issues.

And a region needs to be connected! The public transport system in the Hunter has grown worse, not better. It is supremely regrettable that the much-admired Newcastle line was cut off. To be able to bring people from the Hunter all the way to within walking distance of the beach was a public treasure of an amenity that has been thrown away for 'development'.

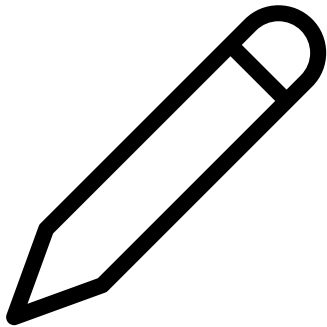
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Other public transport systems like light rail must be considered to link the various facilities of the region. A sustainable system would focus on less fossil fuels, not more.

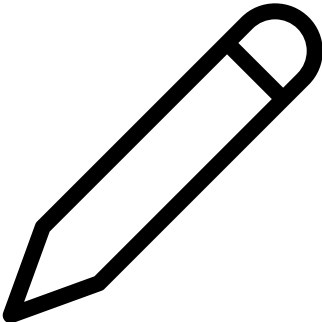
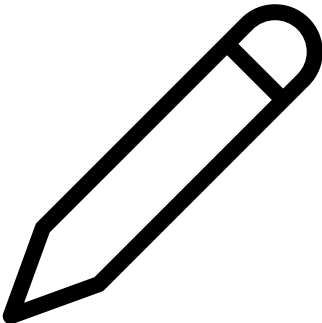
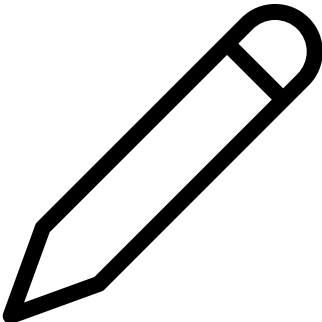
Hunter Environment Lobby has an excellent proposal for a Hunter LinkRail, providing a climate change proof route through the Hunter using the Cockle Creek – Kurri Kurri – Maitland route, along old mining rail corridors. It is worth considering that.

We have had Draft Strategic Plans from governments that have not dealt with the serious landuse conflicts; this one does not seem to either.

To avoid the current and ongoing situation on this matter is negligent, and to avoid the all-too-real issue of climate change is equally so.



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