

Draft Hunter Regional Plan

Draft Plan for Growing Hunter City

NSW Planning and Environment

Submission March 2016

Introduction

The Hunter Business Chamber is the largest regional business chamber in Australia and was established in 1886. The Chamber represents almost 2,000 member businesses to all levels of government. The Chamber is the peak industry association in the Hunter which represents all sectors of business in the region.

The Hunter Business Chamber works as an integral part of the Chamber network in NSW and represents business at local, state and federal level to advocate for an improved operational climate for businesses in this region.

The Hunter is well recognised as home to Australia's most resilient and diverse regional economy. The Hunter region in NSW just north of Sydney covers over 31,000 square kilometres and has over 660,000 people or 9% of the state's population.

An unparalleled cross section of industry calls the Hunter region home. Newcastle is the eighth largest city in Australia and is renowned for being the world's largest coal export port. The contribution to the region, state and nation from the port's operation has grown exponentially over the past ten years with even greater capacity still available.

The Hunter Business Chamber has long been an advocate for appropriate local and state planning strategies that integrate with other national planning strategies to provide a solid framework and actions for accommodating future growth of the Hunter and its growing centres.

The Hunter Business Chamber welcomes the opportunity to provide a brief submission to this paper.

Vision

The Chamber welcomes this 20 year plan in guiding the delivery of homes, jobs, infrastructure and services to support the growing and changing needs of the Hunter. While the vision statement itself could be much more bold and active (for example "The Hunter is internationally recognised as a great place to live, work and do business") it is recognised that the vision is nonetheless importantly supported by four main goals being to: Grow Australia's next major city; Grow the largest regional economy in Australia; Protect and connect natural environments; and Support robust regional communities.

Structure, Operation and Delivering the Plan

This is an important aspect of the overall regional plan and due consideration should be given to the final implementation schedule and responsibilities for actions. While a Hunter Regional Plan Coordination and Monitoring Committee is a welcome inclusion, it should be supported by a clear charter detailing representation, roles and responsibilities and review and reporting requirements.

Review processes should take into consideration any future changes in the economic environment and be conducted in a suitable time manner to accommodate these changes. If this plan in its final form is to replace current plans such as: the Lower Hunter Regional Strategy released by the NSW Government in 2006; the Mid North Coast Regional Strategy released by the NSW Government in 2009; and the Upper Hunter Strategic Regional Land Use Plan released by the NSW Government in 2012 then consideration needs to be given to ensure it consolidates all considerations across the LGAs currently covered under those plans.

Planning

The Chamber notes the plan's acknowledgment of the Hunter City area and the important role this area plays in state and national economies. It welcomes the initiatives discussed in the Draft Plan for Growing Hunter City but would like to see more specific actions and outcomes in relation to provision of necessary infrastructure to respond to and accommodate predicted growth.

The Chamber has long advocated for effective transport and connectivity solutions for this region and while the Plan makes mention of some projects underway there are other needs in terms of the Glendale Interchange and connection to our primary centres of activity that need addressing. The Plan discusses the need for attention to a Broadmeadow precinct and while the Chamber is supportive of growing this area, it will also need to be included in transport and infrastructure planning needs.

Inter-regional transport connections are equally important and the Chamber looks forward to further work and detail around the identification of and delivery plan for transport corridors that enhance inter-regional networks.

The Plan rightly discusses centres of activity including the airport and Port of Newcastle but more recognition should be given to the Port's untapped capacity and planning should accommodate future diversification of this centre and the contribution it will make to regional growth.

It is also encouraging to see attention being paid to improving the provision of and access to health and education centres however there is more detail required as to how this would be achieved. In the map detailing the definition of Hunter City boundaries we would question the rationale behind excluding the growth corridors along the new Hunter Expressway and clarity is required as to how these areas fit into the timeline for infrastructure investment and priorities.

The Hunter is one of the most economically diverse regions in this country and it is positive to see planned objectives around growing and connecting service based industries to support regional communities and provide a competitive edge for business. The Plan identifies key points of provision of appropriate planning controls and the right regulatory environments for this to occur but further actions and accountabilities are required for these to be effective.

Overall, consideration has been given to the many necessary elements needed to be accommodated for future planning of the region and while the plan repeatedly notes that Government will work with local councils and communities to deliver these objectives there is more work to be done in providing concrete actions, timelines and accountabilities. There is also a lack of detail around prioritisation of needs and funding of necessary infrastructure. There are some areas that would appear to sit outside local government responsibility that are earmarked for collaboration work with Government so we would question the effectiveness of this as an action or objective, potentially some clarity could be provided with specific detail.

This is a significant 20 year regional plan which should contain evidence based strategies, timelines and accountabilities with flexible review processes.

Conclusion

The Chamber welcomes the opportunity to provide comment on these plans and would equally welcome any further engagement throughout the process.

It should be acknowledged that the Hunter Region contributes significantly to the wider state and national economies.

The Hunter has significant untapped capacity and predicted growth. It is important that regional planning recognizes this as well as the potential for changing economic environments in order to provide the foundations for a region that is globally recognised as a great place to live and do business in.

Contact

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