

Reference: JM  
Contact: Danny Green

28 April 2016

NSW Department of Planning and Environment  
Hunter and Central Coast Region  
P O Box 1226  
NEWCASTLE NSW 2300

Attention: Mr Robert Hodgkins

Dear Sir



**Gloucester Shire Council's response to the Draft Hunter Regional Plan**

Gloucester Shire Council is pleased to make a submission on the Draft Hunter Regional Plan.

I comment on the relevant section of the Draft Plan and submit our recommended changes.

For the region itself, Goal 2, Grow the Largest Regional Economy in Australia, identifies a number of Directions and Actions which relate to the Gloucester area as identified in the Northern Tops Landscape.

These include promoting investment to grow resource industries. Protecting future access to these resources is a function of land use planning. Managing conflicting land uses to provide greater certainty for investment and the ongoing productive use of productive extractive resource lands support this.

- 1. It is recommended that Council's position on CSG be acknowledged and that CSG in Gloucester Basin is not supported and exploration licences should be permanently revoked.**

Support for the growth of important primary industries seeks to maintain the supply of strategic agricultural lands. Agricultural activities in Gloucester contribute \$52mil to the economy.

- 2. It is recommended that Council seek greater consideration of the recently completed HCCREMS Agricultural Lands Mapping of the Hunter, Central & Lower North Coast region, NSW April 2015, which provides a much greater level of detail regarding strategic agricultural lands for the Gloucester area.**

The Plan includes strategies for enhancing tourism infrastructure to increase national competitiveness and identifies the significant contribution tourism in the region makes to the economy and acknowledges the need to prioritise infrastructure that will support the tourism industry, including connections to tourism gateways and attractions such as The Bucketts Way.

The Plan also targets the protection and connection of Natural Environments to ensure the Hunter's natural environments sustain important terrestrial and aquatic ecological systems and includes a High environmental values map. Council, through its long term involvement with HCCREMS have identified biodiversity data of a much greater accuracy throughout the Hunter than the OEH data used to inform this map.

- 3. It is recommended that Council seek greater consideration of the recently completed HCCREMS Interim Biodiversity Data products (including the Hunter, Central and Lower North Coast Connectivity Assessment and Species Distribution Models), which provide a much greater level of detail regarding biodiversity values for the Gloucester area than that depicted in the Plan, particularly as it relates to the Barrington Tops to Myall Lake link focus area.**

The goal, to support robust regional communities provides a number of Directions and Actions in recognition of the importance of regional centres such as Gloucester in providing services to rural communities and managing the majority of the region's productive lands and natural assets. However in placing a focus on housing and service growth towards Hunter City and the region's existing towns and villages has important implications for regional centres such as Gloucester as it has the effect of prohibiting further rural residential growth outside of areas already identified as the region already "has a sufficient supply of land for rural living any additional areas will have to sustain the region's agricultural and environmental values and minimise the costs of providing services". This Direction recognises that the *Upper Hunter Strategic Regional Land Use Plan (2012)* identified the future land requirements for growth of regional towns, with those areas protected from encroachment of coal seam gas activities through NSW Government Policies.

- 4. In making a submission to the Plan it is worth noting that these policies and "protections" do not apply to the Gloucester landscape. Further, the Plan mentions affordable housing but sets no targets for delivery.**

Housing and associated integrated infrastructure needs to better respond to the changing needs of communities with seasonal populations in regional towns and villages and has identified a significant housing issue for the Gloucester community with a rapidly aging population combined with a growing short term accommodation market. The Plan notes 450 unoccupied dwellings in Gloucester LGA in the 2011 census, representing 18% of total dwellings. Further investigation is required to better understand the relationship between these trends and anticipate what influence this has on housing and service demands. An identified action here is to deliver housing to meet the varied needs of communities and require councils to prepare a local housing strategy that:

- Identifies the housing needs of the community, the range of housing types required to support the future population, and related infrastructure needs; and
- Identifies affordable housing needs and strategies for delivery.

- 5. It is recommended Council seek the NSW Government's commitment toward funding any such studies and strategies as required as a consequence of the Plan.**

The Plan identifies the Landscape Subregions and the priorities for each subregion. Gloucester is situated within the Northern Tops Subregion. The priorities for this subregion are summarised as:

Grow Hunters regional economy:

- develop and strengthen connections with tourist markets from within the Hunter, Sydney and overseas;
- enhance tourism infrastructure and connectivity, reinforcing the importance of The Bucketts Way/Thunderbolts Way;
- enhance links to regional services in Hunter City and Taree; and
- prioritise the provision of high quality and reliable telecommunication links to and within rural communities.

Protect and connect natural areas:

- protect water quality, rural amenity and the natural assets that characterise the region;
- monitor and manage natural hazard risks including flooding and bushfire;
- monitor and support the impacts of ageing populations on the accessibility and servicing of rural communities; and
- enhance regional-level habitat connectivity, while recognising the need to continue to accommodate rural and resource industries.

**6. It is recommended that, in light of the population pressures identified in the Plan, clear provision must be made for increasing the regions green spaces and additional measures put in place to ensure the local environment remains protected.**

Service robust regional communities

- locate growth within existing towns and villages using existing and committed urban infrastructure and services;
- provide alternative methods of service provision to cater for remote access;
- strengthen the roles of existing communities and the regeneration of towns and villages that build on their rural identity and form; and
- monitor and respond to the potential influence of future energy sector activity on local employment, housing and service demands.

**7. Other comments for the submission:**

- I. Need to consider cross border interactions – e.g. Gloucester and Forster/Tuncurry with Taree
- II. More detail needed on the Coordinating and Monitoring Committee. This structure should reflect Joint Organisations and should include private sector expertise, input from the Department of Education and Health, and draw on the University of Newcastle's research and policy expertise.
- III. Strengthen importance of Bucketts Way and Thunderbolts Way to tourism industry and as inter regional transport connections.
- IV. Provide surety to residential land and avoid lengthy resource extraction applications.

- V. Omissions from maps – e.g. Bucketts Way East, Gloucester Hospital, Manning Catchment
- VI. Manning not included in water resources section (Direction 3.2).
- VII. Needs greater consideration of social aspects e.g. supporting aging in rural areas
- VIII. Little detail on the future provision of education and health infrastructure.
- IX. No clear plan or vision for employment growth or for diversifying the economic opportunities in the region.
- X. No plan for future proofing Newcastle Airport. Better transport links to the fast-growing airport should be a priority of the plans.
- XI. No plan for diversifying Newcastle's port operations.
- XII. The plan calls for close cooperation with local government, yet the Baird Government's forced amalgamation process makes it unclear who will be cooperating with whom.

Thank you for allowing an extension for our response.

Yours faithfully,



Danny Green  
**GENERAL MANAGER**