

31 May 2016

Department of Planning and Environment
Director Regions, Northern
Locked Bag 9022
GRAFTON NSW 2460

ATTENTION: Steve Murray

Dear Mr Murray

Draft North Coast Regional Plan 2016 – Northern Rivers Regional Organisation of Councils Submission

The Far North Coast Regional Strategy came into effect in 2006 and has served the region well up to the present day. It provided clear guidance to the six north coast councils on their role in meeting the region's housing, employment, environment and natural resources needs. Settlement character and design, water and energy resources, and monitoring and review through such actions as the 'housing-monitor', are also important region-wide policy directives that have assisted councils with their long-term growth planning and infrastructure investment.

The Northern Rivers Regional Organisation of Councils (NOROC) now welcomes the opportunity to review and respond to the Draft North Coast Regional Plan 2016 (the Plan), which seeks to further the aims and objectives of its predecessor in a more collaborative 'whole of government' response, and which is currently on public exhibition.

Please note that both the NOROC General Managers and Planners Groups have worked together to identify views they have in common on the Draft Plan in the preparation of this submission. For other views formed on the Draft Plan, the NOROC Councils will be considering separate submissions at their upcoming meetings for referral to the Department.

The Plan is a welcome recognition of the role and significance of the regions and regional centres in the provision of housing and employment-generating opportunities. It champions more direct involvement of the Government, through the Department of Planning and Environment (DPE), in both the implementation and evaluative monitoring of the Plan.

The role of government within the 'whole-of-sector' approach to achieve accelerated release of residential land is seen as essential for the region as a whole and key to the efficient delivery of the housing commencements needed to meet projected targets.

Whilst the identification of a Cities and Centres hierarchy is a logical and sensible approach, there are varying views among the NOROC councils on the merits of the three nominated Regional Cities, for which more detailed views will be presented in the individual council submissions.

Through partnership with government, upfront investment in key local infrastructure will assist with addressing one of the major barriers to the development of identified urban release areas that are capable of meeting the projected employment and residential targets established in the Plan. Many of these areas have been in a prolonged state of inactivity brought about by infrastructure shortage and lacking the inertia this new Plan

NOROC

A regional voice for the Tweed, Ballina, Lismore, Kyogle, Richmond Valley and Byron Councils

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will provide through its robust framework, targeted actions, shared responsibility and new possibilities for public infrastructure investment.

Preparation of the Implementation Plan and establishment of the Coordination and Monitoring Committee, serviced by a range of issue-specific supporting groups, represents a strong initiative and response through which the Plan can be implemented, and performance monitored. This in turn will identify the strengths and weakness of the actions and strategies allowing for more tailored responses, and providing the evidence base for investment decisions. NOROC urges the State Government to provide sufficient funds to support the implementation of these actions. NOROC also feels strongly about the need for greater local government representation on the Committee, not simply two members.

Creation of activity centres and employment precincts is also supported and seen as a logical approach to planning future employment generating opportunities, and for guiding related infrastructure investment. This is further reinforced through strengthening cross-border relations with the South East Queensland councils bordering onto NSW, Queensland Government, Gold Coast Airport Limited and West Brisbane Wellcamp Airport (Toowoomba), which are key initiatives capable of leading to local, regional and national benefits.

Acknowledgement of the status of existing high environmental value and heritage areas is likewise welcomed. There is also opportunity to consider potential new areas and integration of environmental outcomes within the Plan to ensure environmental and heritage outcomes are incorporated into the action plans and LGMS.

NOROC congratulates the Government, the Minister for Planning and the Department of Planning and Environment for its pragmatism and commitment to stronger collaboration in preparing this new Regional Growth Plan.

In addition to our earlier reply, we would also like to take this opportunity to share some additional views and suggestions on the draft Plan.

1. We would benefit from further advice on the roles and accountabilities of the Coordination and Monitoring Committee, government agencies and key stakeholders, as well as the preparation of the various plans and how they will relate to each other, how they may be funded, and how they may be prioritised.
2. Community engagement is essential to the implementation of policy at all levels, and may benefit the Plan if a *standard* or *code* of engagement for work arising as an action of the Plan was detailed.
3. The review of the State and Regionally Significant Farmland to ensure consistent across the State, is supported. Appropriate flexibility in the application of State and Regionally Significant Farmland policy is also supported subject to having robust review process supported by suitable criteria that address both physical considerations as well as the local strategic planning context.

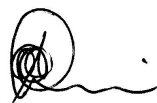
We note however that this land represents a very small proportion of the agricultural land that forms the economic basis of rural production and tourism, and that collectively is warranting of broader recognition of its value and importance to the region and its economy.

4. The draft Plan provides very little reference to east-west connectivity, in particularly road and freight movement. It is suggested that further detail be provided in the final Plan.
5. In the recent briefings on the draft Plan, Department officers advised that they were currently working on an Implementation Plan in response to questions on

the future funding of the Plan initiatives. NOROC requests that appropriate provision is made in the State Government's forward estimates for the implementation and delivery of the Plan.

The NCRP should identify specific outcomes being sought and the measures that will be used to evaluate the performance and effectiveness of such outcomes. These outcomes and measure should be clearly articulated in the Implementation Plan.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a circular loop followed by a horizontal line and a small flourish.

Ann Lewis
Executive Officer