

## **GUNDAGAI COUNCIL SUBMISSION TO THE DRAFT RIVERINA MURRAY REGIONAL PLAN (the Plan) June 2016**

### Council offers the following comments

Overall, the Plan is a collection of reasonably sensible and obvious statements, with some good initiatives, and will not radically change or hinder the relationship of Council with NSW Planning & Environment or the State Government. The Plan as proposed will add additional considerations to the review of the LEP when undertaken each five years, but these are generally seen as being necessary inclusions in the overall planning process.

The vision of the Plan seems to be based on trickle-down economics with the concentration of effort on growing the regional cities of Wagga Wagga, Albury and Griffith which will 'distribute benefits across the wider Riverina-Murray region' (p.9). Council understands this concept but has not seen real practical benefit of this theory in relation to planning decisions in the past.

Individual councils will not have a direct role in the governance arrangements for the Plan but will be represented through either a Joint Organisations (JO) or a Regional Organisation of Councils (ROC) (p.13). This is essentially a State Government plan in which it appears local government is allocated tasks to achieve the State goals. Whilst this is the natural position of local government and is therefore to be expected, the difference is that previously the State would have dealt with each local government directly rather than through a representative organisation. Whilst this is potentially an easier route it may result in the nuances of the planning requirements of each council being missed, or at least given less importance than previously.

A Ministerial Direction will require all councils to implement and be consistent with the objectives and actions of the Plan in their LEPs (p.15). This will create a degree of uniformity and as such is welcomed, provided it does not create situations such as those created by the LEP standard definitions that are so rigid as to disallow sensible development decisions.

The Plan acknowledges in Goal 1 that agriculture is and will remain the primary driver of all growth in the region. As such the plan will require councils to identify impediments to agriculture and protect the agricultural supply chain (p.19). This is consistent with Council's position of protecting agricultural lands adopted in its Cootamundra and Gundagai LEP's and is to be applauded.

Similarly, the Government seeks to increase value adding to the agricultural product in the region and will collaborate with councils to remove any impediments in the planning system (p.20). Council is in full agreement with this goal.

In line with the desire to protect agricultural land, the Government proposes to map important agricultural land and require councils to protect this land (p.21). This will be an extension of the existing Biophysical Strategic Agricultural Land mapping, which identifies the most productive land, and includes the Wallendbeen district at present (p.25). Again, Council is in full agreement with this proposal. The Government is also proposing to increase its involvement in the management of this land and increase its direction of councils in the management of this land (p.21). There is no evidence in this council area to show that this is either necessary or helpful and it is hoped that it does not become a hindrance or encumbrance to the agricultural industries in the council area.

The Plan will require councils to review LEP land use planning and develop biosecurity risk plans in conjunction with buffer zones and zoning plans in the LEP (p.22). There is some validity in the proposals to include buffer areas in new developments but it is unclear what legislative capacity local government has to manage biosecurity risk in existing situations.

The Plan recognises the importance of water resources across the region and will require councils to adopt integrated water cycle management practices and take account of climate change (p.25). Interestingly, the Plan suggests that population and settlement growth, which account for less than 2% of water used in the region presently, will 'place pressure on the regions water resources' (p.26). There does not appear to be any serious attempt to reduce the use of water through irrigation and other extensive agricultural use.

The Plan proposes the protection of mineral and energy resources and recognises the potential for large scale wind and solar energy development (p.28). Councils will be required to protect these potential resources from conflicting development through the LEP. This will be an interesting discussion for council as the same areas are recognised as prime agriculture and potential mining in this council area.

Again councils will be required to quarantine agriculture and mining from urban or rural residential development (p.31). In this instance there will be a requirement for additional third party consultation during the LEP review process (p.32). The benefit of this approach will only be known with the detail but council has the same concern that this may prove more of a hinderance than help if not undertaken carefully.

The Plan proposes that the NSW Government will better co-ordinate and fund infrastructure development throughout the region (p.35). This will include requiring councils to protect existing and potential intermodal facilities from inappropriate encroachments (a la the recent Bomen incursion issues) via the LEP process (p.41). This is sensible and fully supported.

The Plan proposes better co-ordinating local road works to complement the State road network (p.42). This concept has been supported by Council and Federal and State governments in the recent Suttons Lane, Cootamundra upgrade, and continues to be supported by council.

The Plan commits the State to work with the Federal government to ensure the Melbourne Brisbane inland rail becomes reality (p.42). Council is in full support of this initiative.

The Plan concentrates on the regional cities (p.49) and proposes to work with smaller councils to 'build capacity and resilience' (p. 57). This capacity building will be achieved through the JO and resource sharing amongst councils, resulting in communities becoming more 'self sufficient'. If this results in improved health care services and access to tertiary education then the initiative will be fully supported by council..

The Plan recognises heritage, both Aboriginal and cultural, and suggests that Government will work with councils to undertake heritage studies, increase heritage protections, and protect heritage sites (p.58). These are admirable goals and are supported by Council.

The Plan acknowledges that there is an increasing need for public transport throughout the region and proposes investigating, developing strategies and working with local operators to, 'investigate a range of delivery models for flexible transport, to determine what works best for different areas' (p.60). The cynical might say this sounds like a very courageous idea from Sir Humphrey's civil service manual. Nevertheless, Council fully supports the need for improved public transport, particularly to those towns and villages that have limited or no public transport at present.

The Plan indicates that the region is aging with Cootamundra predicted to move from the present 26% over 65 to 32% over 65 by 2036, and Gundagai predicted to move from the present 22% over 65 to 31% over 65 by 2036 (p.63),. This will require easier access to seniors housing and councils will be asked to identify any barriers and ensure allowances for this type of development in their LEPs. This is sensible and is supported.

The Plan proposes the development of settlement planning principles for rural residential development (p.65). These are in line with Councils development principles as embodied in both the Cootamundra and Gundagai LEPs.

The Plan acknowledges that climate change will bring a raft of challenges and risks to the regions ecosystems, agriculture and rural communities (p.75). The Riverina-Murray region has been identified as one of the areas likely to be the most severely affected by variations in the climate. The Government will require councils to update mapping of hazards such as flood and fire (p.76). This initiative is fully supported.

The Plan will require affected councils, including Gundagai Council, to manage naturally occurring asbestos (p.77).

Overall, the Plan is supported by council and will bring improvements to the coordination, planning and development of the region.