

File No: 91.687  
Contact Person: Melissa Ward

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The Director Regions, Western  
PO Box 58  
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Dear Ashley

**RE – Submission on the Draft Central West and Orana Regional Plan**

I refer to the above Draft Regional Plan and welcome the opportunity to comment. It is pleasing to see a Regional Plan being developed for our central west and western areas of NSW.

**Goal 1 – A growing and Diverse Regional Economy**

Recognising the importance of agribusiness in our region is encouraged and supported. Secure economies and growth for the region is paramount and relies on the supporting nature of the other goals identified – infrastructure, housing, environment, heritage and settlement.

**Agriculture and Mining**

The Draft Plan whilst it mentions mining, is silent on the nexus between mining and agriculture as they continue to contest the same land. The Draft Plan identifies mining and agriculture as the first and second largest contributors to gross regional product for this region. Short and sometimes longer term gains reaped from mining can work well with agricultural land providing appropriate rehabilitation and future reuse of the site is considered. Scenario planning for mining across the region would be a worthwhile exercise, similar to what has been done by the CSIRO in Chile, where long term global mining trends were investigated and impacts predicted and planned before they are scheduled to occur.

**Well located and serviced industrial lands**

Employment lands are crucial to continued development, providing they are located close to good transport networks and infrastructure. Councils would welcome support to go through these strategic planning processes with assistance from the planfirst levy. Coupled with this section are the historic industrial sites which are found across all zones in NSW where they were once located in an appropriate area but are now surrounded by incompatible development. Sites may be contaminated, in disrepair and be a harbour for pests, and overall detract from the look of the local area. When providing new industrial lands, Councils, with support from the NSW Government to clean up our urban areas, could look at appropriate methods of reusing or rehabilitating these old sites for future uses consistent with the intent of the new zone for the area.



## **Goal 2 – A region with strong freight transport and utility infrastructure networks that support economic growth**

Under action 2.1.1, how will the NSW Government work with stakeholders to coordinate investment in the freight network to improve network efficiency? This section does not contain a lot of substance, particularly when it will prove to be a very important method of transporting raw materials and metals along existing and new rail networks. Immediate opportunities exist here for the NSW government to work closely with relevant local government authorities to coordinate and plan for business colocation and intermodal transport nodes at key locations on the line. For example, if an intermodal facility is located in Parkes, what are the flow on unmet needs which could be provided in other LGAs and how do we plan for that future need now?

## **Goal 3 – Agricultural Land**

Protection of productive agricultural land is of great importance to the Narromine Shire. The agricultural study by RMCG (which I understand is still being finalised) has highlighted that the Narromine Shire is consistently the strongest canola-growing area in the Orana and Central West, with Nyngan (Bogan Shire) and Parkes also being strong performers. Narromine also has consistently the most hectares sown to cotton each year of the two regions. With Narromine's proven importance for the production of food and fibre to the Gross Value of Agricultural Production (GVAP) for the region, infrastructure to support our agricultural enterprises including good road networks to transport this product to market will always be a high priority and should be made clear in the Regional Plan.

Identifying important agricultural land in the region will help in justifying future direction of land uses and give surety to investors. How this map will compare to the biodiversity mapping of sensitive areas under the new Biodiversity Conservation Bill will be interesting to note. How will the NSW Government deal with the situation of lands being included in both maps?

Guidance on the management of the interface between agricultural zones and other more intensive zones would also be welcomed.

### **Renewable Energy**

Action 3.2.3 mentions the Government increasing or supporting renewable energy generation projects. Whilst Narromine Council supports this push towards more renewable energy production, solar and wind farms are in most cases, constructed on agricultural land. Because of this push for these types of industries, the productive potential for the agricultural land on which the development is constructed is given less or no weight in the assessment of the use of the land. I have concerns regarding the subsequent loss of agricultural, or to be more direct, food producing land being temporarily converted to non-agricultural uses. Maybe the Department could investigate and possibly recommend to the Minister conducting a study into the cost-benefit comparison of renewable energy projects versus cost-benefit of food-producing industries on agricultural land. Maybe guidelines could be produced to guide Councils in assessing and determining renewable energy applications, particularly where a dual use of the land could be explored so that the agricultural potential is not temporarily sterilised.

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## **Water Resources**

Access to reliable water for agriculture is very important to the region. Narromine has the benefit of surface water irrigation when Burrendong Dam provides an allocation to farmers and groundwater bores when no allocations are available. These come at a cost, as do all farm inputs, however access to this scarce resource is most important to our economy. Balancing the use of this water for agriculture with water utilities, mines and environmental flows is a big task and spans across tiers of government.

Figure 16 in your Plan shows water planning and management spanning across federal and state government. Whilst I am not advocating that local government play a regulatory role in this process, an upward flow of information from local governments to these tiers of government with regard to this water access issue would help in ensuring the needs of local water users are heeded and hopefully accommodated.

## **Environment**

The Orana region has vast environmental values and within the Narromine Shire, we play host to wetlands, rugged National Parks including the Sappa Bulga range and Goobang, the Macquarie River and the Bogan River. We also play a part in maintaining the downstream water quality, particularly for the Ramsar listed Macquarie Marshes. Once again here I would like to reinforce the priority of ground proofing any high potential environmental mapping to ensure it is genuine and not part of an overall farm plan.

## **Flooding**

Narromine is located on the Macquarie River and is liable to flooding in certain locations. Council is continuing its work on our Levee Investigation Study following work being completed on the Floodplain Risk Management Study and Plan. Some direction on the work required by Councils when a flood occurs would benefit as each new flood can give new information on frequency and areas of inundation. Flood planning should always be an evolving process and I believe the Regional Plan should highlight this.

## **Goal 4 – Strong & liveable Communities**

### **Regional cities and their supporting towns**

Narromine Shire relies on the specialist health, transport, recreation, education and employment services and opportunities provided by the nearby city of Dubbo. Support for studies into the interaction between Dubbo and smaller fringe towns like those in the Narromine Shire and how these interrelationships can build resilience in smaller communities would be welcomed.

### **Heritage**

Support and education for smaller communities on the benefits of conserving our heritage would be very helpful in ensuring our rare examples of period construction are conserved for future generations. Lower value housing and low development interest in smaller communities means that affordable housing is often proposed for demolition and replaced with cheaply constructed homes. Return on investment is higher in cities so good design outcomes are often seen there rather than in small towns where they rely more on the quaint

village feel. Add to Narromine's example the cost of building up out of a floodplain and this further pushes development towards poor urban design outcomes. This situation is not isolated to Narromine and as such, recognition of this and a possible planning solution would be of benefit to the smaller communities in the region.

#### **Housing for seniors, rural residential and itinerant workers**

Seniors living choices and earmarking land for this type of development is most important as our population ages. Rural residential developments are often seen as the pinnacle of future development for smaller Councils – education in this area for Councils would help, including some case study work on what to look out for from prior examples. Housing of mine workers is also an area which needs more resources.

Overall I believe this is a great start to documenting a blueprint for regional planning. I am available to discuss any of the above matters with your team.

Yours faithfully



Melissa Ward  
**Manager Planning**