



COONAMBLE SHIRE COUNCIL

RESPONSE TO

DRAFT CENTRAL WEST & ORANA REGIONAL PLAN

JUNE 2016

Introduction:

Council is grateful for the opportunity to provide a response to the Draft Regional Plan and would particularly like to acknowledge NSW Planning & Environment Central West & Orana for:

- allowing a reasonable timeframe for consideration and response,
- delivering information sessions direct to Councillors and staff in our own town, and
- offering multiple opportunities for questions, discussion and input.

The following information has been formulated in discussion with Council's Economic Development Committee and Councillors.

OVERALL:

Key principles within the Plan are not applied to the region as a whole but seem to focus on major urban areas and specific sectors. The plan appears to contain almost no strategies to support a “strong, diverse and competitive economy” in localities such as Coonamble outside the major regional centres.

The Plan appears to be based on a premise that decline is inevitable and that there are few/no opportunities to support sustainable development and improve the social and economic outlook for smaller more remote communities. Council does not support this assumption and is concerned that if the current Plan is adopted and used to guide government in terms of policy and allocation of resources, then opportunities will be lost, the efforts of local business, communities and local government towards positive, sustainable change will be thwarted and difficulties will compound.

We need to plan with a positive outcome in mind, and ensure that there is a comprehensive, strategic and broad-based approach to genuinely address the challenges confronting our regional communities and to capitalise on the multiple strengths and opportunities in the more remote localities. This approach should underpin all Regional Plans developed by various NSW Government departments.

COMMENTS/QUESTIONS:

- 1. Regional boundaries** – it is confusing to discover that Bourke, Brewarrina, Walgett and Cobar are not included in the Orana Region for the purpose of this document but are recognised and active participants in other Orana structures (eg. Regional Development Australia, OROC), services and projects.
Orana Councils, along with other partners, have collaborated and invested in long-term projects and joint activities with these now “Western” Councils. There is a risk that this boundary reconfiguration will de-rail these projects.
The exclusion also creates questions around the regional data used and the conclusions drawn.
Combining the Central West and Orana Regions into a single plan also makes it difficult to get a clear picture of the true nature of the economy and subsequently the strategies needed for each region. For example, see 4. Below.
- 2. Regional Drivers of Change** – investment by government in economic and social infrastructure and on-the-ground services outside regional centres is also a significant driver of change in smaller communities.
- 3. Vision** – is articulated from the perspective of regional cities as supporting or being supported by smaller towns and villages. There is no vision for smaller towns and villages apart from their relationship with regional cities. There is no recognition of the often negative impact of regional cities on smaller centres. Strategies could be included to acknowledge and counter this. Eg. streamlined or more flexible planning approval processes reflecting varying levels of impact and complexity.

4. **Top Industries** – p19 – text indicates that “mining was the biggest contributor” to GRP, but mining is not shown in figure 6 – Orana Top 5 Industries by GRP. Combining the two regions, Central West & Orana, and especially when other “Orana” districts are excluded, paints a very different picture.
5. **Direction 1.1 Grow the economic potential of the agribusiness sector** – p20/21 - separates agriculture and agribusiness when the two are intrinsically linked. I.e. there are no separate statistics for the ‘agribusiness’ sector. All graphs show the value of ‘agriculture’ but there is no direction outlined for the ‘agriculture’ industry.

It is unclear why Councils will be required to “undertake local strategic planning to protect the agricultural supply chain” when only parts of that network of infrastructure is within Councils’ mandate to manage and maintain. Surely it would be beneficial for there to be agreement between all three levels of government and other owner/stakeholders of supply chain infrastructure.

The Plan cites examples of major projects, such as saleyards. This suggests a centralised approach to infrastructure development which, given the vast distances involved, is unlikely to encourage industry growth across the breadth of the region. All stock selling facilities, large and small, are valuable contributors to the region’s economy. Strategies are needed to ensure that a strong network of suitably-scaled infrastructure is sustained throughout the region to support important industries.

6. **Direction 1.2 Transform the region’s manufacturing sector...** - The Plan states that the NSW Government proposes to “prepare and implement a value-adding strategy for the Central West area” only. Surely there is scope for the development of a comparable strategy in the Orana region.
7. **Action 1.4.1 – p25** – Council would welcome the inclusion of further strategies to support ‘ageing in place’ in the context of smaller communities.
8. **Action 1.4.2 – p26** - “Communities need to identify skills gaps and resource capabilities, to prepare for future workforce demands”. Council agrees that local communities are well-placed to determine appropriate responses to meet their workforce needs. Strategies could be developed to identify how ‘communities’ would be encouraged to undertake this work and the pathways available to link the gaps and needs identified at the community level to government or other agencies responsible for the delivery of education and training.

Council believes that it is critical to retain a functional TAFE presence in our community, as “localised community-based” education and training facilities have equivalent capacity to “reduce the projected population decline in some smaller communities by retaining locally based services, easily accessible to the community” as described in the context of healthcare facilities on page 26.

Council would welcome further detail on how the “NSW Government is working to deliver better community access to quality vocational education and training to support global competitiveness and innovation” in our area.

It is unclear what planning barriers might currently exist at the local government level that prevent the expansion of the education and training sector.

9. **Action 1.4.3 – p27** – Again the focus is on major events and tourism assets, when Council believes that it is the vast network of events and tourism assets and experiences, large and small, across the region which combine to attract visitors, generate investment and encourage visitor spending in this sector. Statements and strategies could be included to acknowledge and further encourage diversity with the tourism sector.

Warrumbungle National Park should warrant inclusion in this section.

Destination Management Plans and the opportunities they create for regional collaboration are invaluable. Coonamble Shire Council is concerned at the demise of Inland NSW Tourism as the lead agency in the delivery of the DMP.

Our Council currently has a limited role in relation to ‘tourism-related transport services’. Council would welcome assistance in expanding passenger access by both air and rail to our Shire.

Council would welcome the opportunity to work more closely with the NSW Government to plan for improved telecommunications and tourism infrastructure, including signage.

CORRECTIONS:

1. Page 7 – Figure 2: Orana
 - does not show Castlereagh Highway – Dunedoo, Mendooran, Gilgandra, Coonamble, Walgett.
 - does not show main roads Warren to Coonamble, Coonamble to Coonabarabran, Warren to Quambone, Coonamble to Pilliga and others.
 - [in fact these are not shown in any of the maps]