

11 July 2016

Department of Planning & Environment

By email: [Azaria.dobson@planning.nsw.gov.au](mailto:Azaria.dobson@planning.nsw.gov.au)

Dear Azaria,

### **Comments on the draft Central West and Orana Regional Plan**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the draft Central West and Orana Regional Plan.

RDA Orana congratulates the department's staff on the production of a comprehensive, well-researched and practical document that recognises the importance of strategic planning to economic development. The overall intent of the plan and the supporting governance that is enunciated in the plan are consistent with RDA Orana's charter for facilitating economic development in the region, and we anticipate that the final plan will assist us in our efforts to promote economic development through a wide range of initiatives.

We offer the following specific comments in relation to the draft plan.

#### **Vision**

RDA Orana supports the vision outlined in the draft plan. However, while the issues are common to both the Central West and Orana regions, the plan highlights the significant differences between the two regions in terms of industry, demographics and approach to development.

Figure 4 shows rail lines within the region. We note that the line between Kandos and Gulgong is not shown. We understand that at least part of this section is now considered non-operational, however it is still dedicated rail corridor and should therefore be included.

#### **Goal 1: Growing and diverse economy**

RDA Orana works extensively in this space through identifying and promoting awareness of diversification opportunities, assisting in addressing skills gaps and workforce shortages, supporting relevant projects as they seek funding, and working with business to attract investment.

The Orana regional economy relies heavily on agricultural production, primarily bulk export of grain and cotton, and livestock production. However, value-adding these products has been identified as a key opportunity for diversification in the future, particularly in relation to export opportunities arising from Free Trade Agreements. RDA Orana has commissioned studies into the feasibility of developing an international air freight terminal in the Orana region, and concurrently, into the capability of existing freight and logistics networks that support existing and future production. The air freight study includes investigation of opportunities for value-adding existing agricultural production as a means of diversifying the regional economic base and capitalising on opportunities that have arisen as a result of emerging Asian markets.

We note that the draft plan makes a commitment for NSW Government to work with RDA Central West and Industry to prepare and implement a value-adding strategy for their area (Action 1.2.1), but no such reference is made to working with RDA Orana. RDA Orana is keen to work with relevant government agencies and the private sector to progress these opportunities.

Overall, RDA Orana supports the Directions and Actions listed under Goal 1; if implemented effectively, these will facilitate investment in the pillars of our regional economy, and encourage diversification through removal of planning barriers and avoidance of land use conflict.

## **Goal 2: Freight transport and utility infrastructure**

RDA Orana understands that improving the efficiency of freight movement is integral to increasing productivity and economic development within the region. As such, we have already undertaken or participated in several related projects:

- Golden Highway Corridor – which has expanded to include the associated rail corridor;
- Orana Infrastructure Masterplan;
- Feasibility study into the development of an air freight facility in the Orana Region (described above) and
- Freight and logistics capability study (described above).

The viability of the region's agricultural enterprises in particular is closely related to the costs and reliability of transport to markets. The capacity to expand into new products is also constrained by access to markets. As a result, RDA Orana is very interested in the directions and actions under Goal 2. Our current studies into air freight feasibility and freight and logistics capacity fit well with the NSW Government's stated actions. Publicly available information held by relevant agencies will form the baseline information for the studies.

The Orana and Far West Infrastructure Masterplan aligns strongly with Direction 2.2. However, many of the initiatives/projects put forward were unable to be quantified because they were insufficiently developed. Qualitative assessment was used instead to rate projects/initiatives in terms of maturity, economic impact and strategic fit. Among the highest priorities from the projects assessed were:

- the construction of a freight ring road that bypasses the centre of Dubbo to improve freight efficiency
- upgrades to the Golden Highway to improve freight efficiency
- Albert Priest Channel and Nyngan-Cobar pipeline to improve security of water supply
- the Solar Energy Exchange Initiative relating to the development of a network of solar farms throughout western and central NSW.

The commitments made in the draft regional plan may help to progress some of these important works.

## **Goal 3: Protection of natural resources and environmental assets**

Whilst RDA Orana does not generally undertake projects that are specifically about environmental or natural resource management, sustainability is a fundamental underpinning concept in our economic development work. The directions and actions under Goal 3 will address some impediments to achieving economic development by creating a more certain platform for investment. Protection of productive agricultural land from conflicting land uses is particularly important in a region where the economy relies so heavily on this sector. Irrigated crop production

is also important in parts of the Orana region, and its sustainability depends on appropriate management of limited water resources.

Renewable energy, emissions reduction and carbon sequestration are all encompassed in one of RDA Orana's ongoing projects; the commitment to growing renewable energy in the region is welcome and will provide extra impetus for our work in this area. The Infrastructure Masterplan for the Orana region indicates positive returns from investment in several initiatives that fit within Direction 3.2, including the Solar Energy Exchange Initiative listed above, and the completion of a wind farm at Bodangora, near Wellington.

The same Masterplan rates the installation of weather radar at Cobar highly, based on the relatively minor cost and extensive economic and social benefits, particularly for crop production, livestock management and emergency services. Better management of irrigation water for crop production would contribute significantly to Directions 3.4 and 3.5. Improved forecasting capacity and real-time information is critical during the management of incidents such as bushfires and floods, and this installation would therefore assist in meeting Direction 3.6.

Broad-based government support for initiatives that assist in meeting these goals will be important, particularly in progressing those that are unlikely to be privately funded.

#### **Goal 4: Communities**

As an organisation focused on economic development, RDA Orana does not generally deal directly with the community issues outlined in this goal, such as housing and public transport. However, we recognise that economic development and resilient communities are intrinsically linked.

The draft plan refers to working with CENTROC (Action 4.1.3) but there is no reference to OROC, which includes many of the local governments in the draft plan's Orana area. This omission implies that the Orana region will not have adaptive reuse studies undertaken. Is this an oversight?

As indicated previously, RDA Orana has recently commissioned a study into the feasibility of establishing an air freight facility in the Orana region. We recognise the link between economic growth and air services; we feel that this can encompass freight movement in addition to the strong (and growing) passenger services available within the region. We were recently invited to provide information for a regional air services study being undertaken by Sydney University; one of the key points made is the lack of scheduled passenger services to the majority of centres in the Orana region, which impacts significantly on the provision of health and education services underpinning strong communities. Maintenance of existing airport capacity, and protection of future capacity is therefore critical and RDA Orana fully supports Action 4.4.2 on this basis.

We look forward to working with relevant councils and NSW Government agencies to achieve these goals. The commitment across agencies will support RDA Orana's activities relating to economic development.

RDA Orana is keen to explore the opportunities to develop specific projects for inclusion in the final Plan. Please contact Nicole Payne, Project Officer on 6885 1488 or email [nicole.payne@rdaorana.org.au](mailto:nicole.payne@rdaorana.org.au) for further discussion if required.

Yours sincerely



Robyn Lamont  
A/Executive Officer