

19 July 2016

Director Regions  
Western  
PO Box 58  
DUBBO NSW 2830

Leeton Chamber of Commerce &  
Industry Inc.

133 Pine Avenue  
Leeton NSW 2705

Postal address  
PO Box 66  
Leeton NSW 2705

T: 02 6953 8008  
E: [admin@leetonchamber.com](mailto:admin@leetonchamber.com)

Via online submission portal: <http://planspolicies.planning.nsw.gov.au/>

Dear Sir/Madam

### **Comments of the Draft Riverina-Murray Regional Plan 2016**

The Leeton Chamber of Commerce & Industry (the Chamber) welcomes the opportunity to review the draft Riverina-Murray Regional Plan 2016 and provide feedback.

As you are aware, the Leeton Chamber of Commerce & Industry is a member-based organisation that operates across the Leeton and Narrandera Shires, with around 120 members across the two Shires. The Chamber works closely with local business leaders and represents the interests of local businesses. Through its engagement with small businesses across the two Shires and across industry sectors, the Chamber provides an important communication platform between business and policy makers be it at the local, regional, state or national level.

The Chamber is in broad support of the actions identified under the plan but makes some comment on each action item and on the direction of the plan overall and its vision to build a sustainable future, centred on a prosperous community, healthy environment and attractive lifestyle choices.

#### **GOAL 1: A growing economy supported by productive agriculture and sustainable use of natural resources**

The Chamber welcomes the focus of the plan of developing growth opportunities and developing sustainable use of resources.

While it may raise a broader issue than that being capable of being dealt with under the Draft Riverina-Murray Regional Plan, a number of Chamber

members have raised concerns regarding the impact of environmental flow controls under the *Murray-Darling Basin Plan* and the impact these controls can have on existing landholders in restricting production of rice, cotton and other crops in our region, and slowing investment in value-adding opportunities.

We do note ACTION 1.3.1 Support the sustainable use and conservation of water resources. The Chamber believes the proposed actions provide no clarity for producers on changes to and management of water allocations and calls for an end to the *Water for the Future* program.

We recognise ACTION 1.3.3 Avoid urban expansion and rural residential development on productive agricultural land and identified mineral and energy resources. The Chamber is well aware of the encroachment of uses, including residential and industrial uses on agricultural land has been a prevailing and increasing trend over the past two decades. With the absence of a robust planning framework that protects and preserves agricultural uses in their current location, agricultural land is under continual threat.

State and local governments need to show commitment to the use of land for agricultural and industrial/commercial purposes by resisting change to land use unless there is a clear strategic benefit in doing so.

Agricultural, and industrial/commercial land are important commodities and the availability of it is absolutely vital for investment, economic growth and employment in the region.

While the initiatives under the draft plan will hopefully provide a far greater capacity for local and state governments to work together in identifying important agricultural land and developing future industrial estates, it's critical that more is done to protect and support existing operations.

## **GOAL 2 – Improved regional transport networks and utility infrastructure to support economic activity**

While we obviously support investment in new transport and road links throughout the region, we also support investment in education and health infrastructure as such investment plays a critical role in terms of attracting and retaining workers and their families to the region.

We do note ACTION 2.1.1 Identify and prioritise pinch points in the freight network. We believe that a Leeton Town Centre Bypass is required to reduce the number of heavy vehicles traveling through the main centre of Leeton.

Funding for the development of a strategy to identify a suitable alternate route for heavy vehicles which may yield an alternative route is essential. The provision of the bypass would correspond with the current location of the Western Riverina Inter-modal Freight Terminal north-west of Leeton. This will move heavy vehicle traffic away from Leeton's CBD to the new site.

As noted above, the Chamber strongly support new investment in transport links to the region and the critical need for state and local government to work in a collaborative manner to increase our transport capacity and connectivity.

With that said, the Chamber does hold concerns that the Plan makes no mention of investment into further development of the Western Riverina Inter-modal Freight Terminal (WRIFT). The hub has capacity to service the movement of more than 500,00 tonne of containers per annum. Rail freight services have increased through the hub as a result of strong industry growth. The WRIFT at Wumbalgal presents a significant economic opportunity for the region and should be included in the final draft.

We do note ACTION 2.3.1 Coordinate the delivery of infrastructure to support the future needs of residents, business and industry. The Chamber believes that more needs to be done to address inconsistent access to telecommunications across the region, which affects our ability to attract jobs, grow business and deliver e-programs for health and education. We encourage Federal and State governments to work with councils and servicing agencies to coordinate infrastructure planning and delivery of the NBN to the entire region.

### **GOAL 3 – Strong regional cities supported by a network of liveable towns and villages that meet the community's changing needs**

The Chamber recognises and supports the draft Plan aims to create attractive, healthy and sustainable communities which are great places to live, work and visit.

We note ACTION 3.1.1 Develop a regional cities strategy for Albury, Wagga Wagga and Griffith. The Chamber believes the Draft plan fails to identify the need for detailed strategic plans, required to maximise the role of larger towns to optimise outcomes for economic growth, efficient delivery of infrastructure, and long term planning that meets the broader community's future needs.

Leeton is the only town in the Western Riverina-Murray Region to have an abundance of educational facilities. Boasting five (5) Primary Schools and three (3) Secondary high School (two of which are Co-educational Boarding) and two Tertiary Institutions. The NSW Government should work with the Leeton Shire Council to develop a strategy that identifies the role, function and relationship Leeton plays within the region as an education precinct. Investment in educational facilities will drive growth with benefits across the region

We welcome the commitments in the plan in relation to ACTION 3.1.3 Develop and deliver strategies that strengthen the commercial function of CBDs and town centres.

The Chamber has previously raised concerns about planning and revitalisation to promote the Leeton CBD as the central place for retail and business in our town. We believe it's critical that more is done to accommodate and support growth in our regional town centres.

We do note ACTION 3.2.1 Deliver improved tools and partnerships to build community capacity in towns and villages to strengthen community resilience. The Chamber believes that ongoing and equitable access to quality tertiary education is critical to the growth of the regional economy, increasing skills, attracting and retaining a skilled workforce, allowing people to retrain to adapt to changing demands (particularly through vocational training), and encouraging younger people to stay in the region. More needs to be done to address the region's skill shortages, that affect our future economic potential.

We note and support ACTION 3.4.5 Facilitate the delivery of more affordable housing options through improved planning policies. The NSW Business Chamber has previously raised concerns with the developer contributions charged by some councils for the development of "granny flats". We believe that the development of such secondary dwellings can

play an important role in the provision of affordable housing in our region and developer contributions should not be utilised as a financial disincentive for such structures being established.

#### **GOAL 4 – A protected environment and a community resilient to natural hazards and climate change**

The Chamber recognise and strongly support the need to actively manage the Murray River catchment area so that it is available for both current and future users.

We do note however that although there is recognition under DIRECTION 4.2 Protect the region's environmental assets and biodiversity values, we believe the ACTIONS listed place more weight on environmental protection and sustainable outcomes than sustainable production economic growth.

We also recognise ACTION 4.2.2 Maintain healthy waterways and wetlands, including downstream environments. More fundamental work has to be undertaken to provide guidance, and assist in managing and protecting our important aquatic resources. Any developments should have a neutral or beneficial effect on water quality and water savings should be returned the system for productive use.

#### **Regional Cities**

The Chamber is concerned that focusing on the three regional communities classified as "Regional Cities" risks widening the economic gap between them and the rest of the region.

By focussing government attention on Albury, Wagga Wagga and Griffith the Government is encouraging the shift of services and jobs away from the smaller towns that can often least afford to lose them.

While the Chamber accepts the concept of centralising core services across the region as a way to deliver them more efficiently, we believe that picking only three winners amongst the scores of communities in the region sends a signal that they are the only three areas worthy of investment. The final Plan must acknowledge the importance of supporting the growth of the whole region.

## Monitoring and Reporting

Finally, the Chamber is concerned that there is no proposed mechanism to adequately monitor, evaluate and report on the progress of the Regional Plan. Strict timeframes for each activity and overall accountability will give industry the confidence to contribute to the Plan and invest in the region.

Once again, we thank you for the opportunity to provide input to the draft plan. Please feel free to contact us on the details below if you would like to discuss any aspect of this submission further.

Yours sincerely



President  
Leeton Chamber of Commerce & Industry  
[grahamheffer@gbusinessmanagement.com.au](mailto:grahamheffer@gbusinessmanagement.com.au)  
0447 146 882