



LEETON SHIRE COUNCIL

Preserving the Past, Enhancing the Future

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Director Regions, Western
NSW Department of Planning & Environment
PO Box 58
DUBBO NSW 2830

Dear Sir

SUBMISSION DRAFT RIVERINA-MURRAY REGIONAL PLAN

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on the Draft Riverina Murray Regional Plan (RMRP- the Plan). The overall Vision is supported in principle.

Council broadly agrees with Goals 1, 2 and 4. Regarding Goal 3, many smaller towns contribute to the economic and social wealth of a region and a regional city. While recognising the importance of the regional cities, the Plan should acknowledge more strongly the linkages and roles of all population centres within the region in maintaining the larger centres and the economic viability of the region.

Leeton Shire is a highly productive area with most of its employment generated by value added agricultural processing. The Shire contributes significantly to the wealth of the nation and export earnings through rice, cotton, horticulture (including nuts), wine and livestock. Leeton Shire has a GDP of \$527m which is 0.11% of NSW's GDP. Because of its productive capacity, the Shire has the potential to play a stronger role in the region in supporting and providing for social and economic development opportunities.

Currently the Plan does not adequately identify the productive potential of Leeton or facilitate its further investment in critical infrastructure to support development. Like the regional cities, Leeton has significant opportunity to capitalise on jobs, services and freight transport.

The freight generated by industry in the Leeton Shire through bulk export and containerised rail freight is higher than that produced by Griffith Shire and that by the Bomen site in Wagga Wagga.

Council is concerned that growth in the Plan is concentrated on the cities of Wagga Wagga, Albury and Griffith and that the other regional communities including Leeton, have been relegated to supportive liveable communities where future growth and development might be constrained. It is important that the plan recognises and plans

for population growth and employment in these liveable communities and to support continued sustainability and community resilience through appropriate planning and investment.

This potential development of smaller communities like Leeton needs to be more clearly stated and provided for in the Plan and recognised along with other regional priorities. Ideally the Plan would provide more commentary on each of the irrigation communities explaining the opportunity for planned industry growth and investment.

The Plan does not sufficiently recognise the growth forecast in Griffith (estimated 1300 in next 5 years, 800 of these for Baiada expansion plans).

Currently the Plan provides commentary on community access to 'NBN' without identifying the acceptable standard or benchmark of high speed broadband that should be made available by government to regional populations. The Plan should provide for and promote equity and access to broadband services that are fit for purpose in a globally changing environment irrespective of temporal or spatial considerations. For example, the current NBN rollout is planned to service part of the Leeton Shire however its coverage is limited for some existing industrial and employment lands as well as residential areas.

Council wants to ensure that all of the community has equitable access to broadband services that are fit for purpose. Given the significance of broadband to delivering education and health solutions this is a key issue which should be reflected in the Plan's proposed governance, implementation measures and reporting arrangements.

The success of the Plan should include how well the state government supports e-solutions as a milestone delivery area.

With several boarding schools, Tocal Agricultural College and Yanco Agricultural Institute Research and Development programs, the potential of Leeton as a knowledge economy centre should be recognised in the Plan as well as its potential for growth through clustering education and research services and providers.

The implementation and governance of the Plan relies on the proposed Coordination and Monitoring Committee with representation from state and local governments. There is a need to consider how well this structure will work once the Joint Organisations of Councils has been determined to ensure that all Councils have a voice. Where JOs are limited to six or eight councils the structure might be appropriate but it may be ineffective if JOs are larger, in which case another layer of representation might be required. How this Monitoring Committee relates to the State Government's Regional Leadership Group needs also to be clarified.

Given the significance of agriculture and water to the region, Departments with these portfolios should be directly represented on the Committee, the structure of which may need to be adjusted to reflect changes in state government departmental structures. The irrigation companies are key stakeholders as well in the region.

Provided that local variations are permitted, when justified on a case by case basis, Council appreciates that Ministerial s117 Directions may be applied to ensure local decision-making is generally consistent with the Plan.

The draft Plan aims to “align regional planning for housing and economic activity to existing and planned infrastructure investment”. Council would be concerned if investment priorities are focused only on regional centres at the expense of building social capital and encouraging economic development in liveable towns. Market forces will influence economic investment decisions and government funding and investment should be directed at supporting these decisions irrespective of the ‘city or town’ location for the greater good and overall regional benefit.

Housing solutions to support rural and regional communities is a key issue in our community and more needs to be done to resolve existing social housing issues, improve government housing estates and provide for affordable housing opportunities. Shortage of rental accommodation and responding to the needs of an ageing population requires strategic collaboration and investment actions that need to be identified in the Plan as well as encouraging greater housing diversity to cater for single person households, more seniors housing, support facilities and addressing the gaps in providing for contract and seasonal labour. Addressing rental shortages and the need for affordable housing is as important for facilitating economic growth in Leeton as they are in the regional cities.

One of the major impediments for resolving seasonal labour requirements is the lack of public transport. The Plan Action 3.2.5 needs to acknowledge the importance of community transport solutions in resolving transport issues in regional communities which are required to be appropriately supported and funded by government.

Action 1.2.1 in the Plan mentions the 2014 Biophysical Strategic Agricultural Land (BSAL) protection for agricultural land in the Upper Hunter/New England region. Given its productivity potential a similar level of protection should be given to the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area.

The Regional Agricultural Development Strategy should be developed in consultation with Councils and provide for tourism opportunities associated with agricultural production and value adding industries. Action 3.1.2 needs to ensure that Leeton has ready supply of available industrial land to take advantage of future development opportunities.

The Plan states that the NSW government will “require councils to adequately address agricultural production issues such as water supply, waste management, biosecurity risks, energy needs, quality of transport routes and intensive agricultural production systems in local planning strategies”. While this is supported in principle Council can only do this with appropriate levels of government assistance and funding.

It is imperative that Council be included in any Regional Agricultural Development Strategy and Mapping exercises.

Government funding and support is also required by Action 3.3 to support Aboriginal communities and Local Aboriginal Land Councils to deliver socio-economic improvements in their communities through business case development.

The Plan doesn't mention the level of servicing provided by Government to support local communities in regions. DPI (Crown Lands) is just one example of a state government department limited in its capacity to assist regional communities resolve local issues because of limited resourcing, slow response times and overregulation. Council would appreciate the Plan identifying clearly the State government commitment to regional communities by ensuring minimum service levels.

The Plan has a focus on the Murray River with little mention of the Murrumbidgee River. There are also limitations in the current spatial representation of the mid Murrumbidgee Wetlands in the National Wetlands database. The Spatial mapping of nationally significant Mid Murrumbidgee Wetlands is therefore incomplete and may relate to areas between Narrandera, Leeton and Darlington Point with State Government investment in these values and communities warranted.

Leeton hosts Fivebough and Tuckerbil Swamps, a Ramsar listed wetland. The Plan aims to protect biodiversity assets such as the wetland, but doesn't comment on the existing or desired future condition of regional biodiversity assets which appears to be deficient, given the attention to roads, bridges, telecommunications and other services and facilities in the region as future investment indicators.

Griffith to Narrandera via Leeton has been identified as a major commuter connection however the Plan ignores the freight transport potential of this route and its easterly connection to Port Botany. Council would like the Plan to address this possibility and the required funding to secure its potential development for the benefit of Leeton and Narrandera. This includes investment in a bridge structure in Narrandera on Irrigation Way.

Currently Council is in discussion with RMS about a heavy vehicular bypass of the Leeton Town Centre and a "road swap". The bypass is required to be identified within the Plan.

While \$3.1 billion has been made available for water buybacks to restore the balance, the Plan needs to provide more commentary and actions to ameliorate any adverse impacts on productive agricultural potential through socio economic planning and investment. Water policy is both a federal and a state matter and needs to be front and centre of any regional plans in areas of irrigated agriculture.

The adequacy of the local and regional rail network in Leeton Shire to cater for regional passenger transport and freight transport needs to be commented upon and addressed through the Regional Plan, particularly given the lack of existing public transport options. Passenger rail through local Shires has not been adequately addressed for connections to the regional rail network.

Leeton Council has only completed stage 1 (Flood Study) of its Flood Planning Programme. Government funding is required as a priority to finalise flood risk

management planning to guide local development decisions and protect public interests which should be identified in Action 4.3.1

Some of the Figures in the Plan require amendment as follows:

- None of the double page Figures within the Plan indicate the names of major water ways such as the Murrumbidgee River.
- Figure 11-In relation to the Bridges for the Bush program, the canal bridge on Main Road 80 between Narrandera and Leeton has not been identified in the draft Plan as a choke point or missed opportunity for freight movement. This bridge currently prevents B Double and larger road transport servicing areas west of Narrandera accessing major highway (Newell and Sturt) routes at Narrandera.
- Figure 11 also doesn't show road flooding issue between Darlington Point and Narrandera and no roads in Leeton area identified for improvements. Roads which will need to be improved to facilitate freight movement include:
 - Main Road 80
 - McQuillan Road
 - Canal Street
 - Yarmwal Road
- Figures 8 and 17-The Fivebough and Tuckerbil Swamp Ramsar wetlands are missing.
- Figure 10 - The Western Riverina Intermodal Freight Terminal (WRIFT) is not mentioned in the Plan and its location is misplaced in Figure 10.
- All figures – we are uncertain as to why Leeton, Yanco and Narrandera are identified as cross-border towns.
- Airports outside of regional cities should also be identified in relevant figures on transport (there is an airport in Narrandera).

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the draft plan. Council looks forward to working collaboratively for the benefit of the region while still retaining the opportunity to determine its own future.

Should you require any points in this submission to be further clarified, please contact me on 0417 256092.

Yours faithfully


Jackie Kruger
GENERAL MANAGER