

JR

21 July 2016

**EDWARD
RIVER
COUNCIL**

NSW Department of Planning and Environment
PO Box 58
DUBBO NSW 2830

Dear Sir/Madam

DRAFT RIVERINA MURRAY REGIONAL PLAN

I am writing in relation to the Draft Riverina Murray Regional Plan. Council has considered the draft plan at its meeting on 21 July 2016 and the following comments are made.

The production of the draft plan is a great step forward and should help integrate development across the wider region producing improved liveability outcomes for local communities.

Regional Centres

It is a great document for the communities in the eastern half of the region but it does not adequately meet the needs of communities in the southwest region. The plan assumes that the three identified growth centres of Griffith, Wagga Wagga and Albury provide services and has interaction with the whole region but this is not the case, particularly in the southwest. The size of the region versus the location of these three regional centres means that their importance to the Council is challenged by the presence of regional centres that are closer to Deniliquin but are located in Victoria eg Shepparton, Bendigo and Echuca. Albury provides some regional health services and Albury and Wagga Wagga provide university education opportunities. Other than that, there is no social, economic or business interaction with south western communities with these regional centres.

Investments in major services, facilities and industrial activities that are or will drive growth in Albury, Wagga Wagga and Griffith do not necessarily distribute benefits across the wider Riverina Murray region particularly as you move further away from the centres.

The plan would have more credibility if the NSW Government recognised that Moama and Deniliquin are growing in population and that Deniliquin in particular, is the premier service centre for south western communities.

Population

In the introduction it states that *"the draft plan is underpinned by a strong evidence base."* This is vital if the plan is to deliver realistic and vital outcomes for the region as a whole.

If the data and evidence in relation to population growth and change has been supplied by the Department or is derived from the 2011 census then the draft plan will be as flawed as the data supplied due to the distortion caused by the temporary millennium drought.

All correspondence to be directed to the General Manager

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Council has previously, on numerous occasions, made the Department aware that their population projections for our local government area have been distorted by the effects of the millennium drought. Their data has not factored in recent population growth and positive jobs forecast for Deniliquin underpinned by two state significant development projects and post drought recovery in major industries.

This issue must be addressed prior to adoption of the plan.

Agriculture

It is pleasing to note in the foreword to the report by Parliamentary Secretary for southern NSW, Katrina Hodgkinson her comment that *"Capitalising on the region's strengths in the Agribusiness sector is a priority given the global demands for food and fibre."*

Although, she also states that *"The sustainable use and conversation of water resources is a priority and that a regional planning approach is proposed to conserve the nationally significant Murray River."*

It is difficult, given these two competing priorities, to understand how the plan will enable southern irrigation districts to increase production and economic contribution to the region.

The plan recognises the Murray Darling Basin Authority as being responsible for *"promoting the use and management of the basins resources in a way that optimises economic, social and environmental outcomes"*. Many communities, within the basin do not believe that the MDBA is committed to achieving this outcome which is evidenced by reduced cereal crop production in the irrigation districts. Council does not believe that the draft plan gives adequate consideration to the Murray Darling Basin Plan and the negative impacts resulting in reduced water availability for productive farming and the significant negative impacts on the local and regional economy.

The plan would have more credibility if the NSW government committed to providing improved infrastructure, such as natural gas, to ensure continued development and jobs growth in the south west of the region.

Decline in the agricultural sector in the region can be attributed to the millennium drought and uncertainty in water not just advances in technology as stated in the draft plan. Third party decisions such as the recent changes to milk pricing also have significant impacts on our agricultural sector. Access to technology is a significant issue for our entire local government area as mobile phone reception is limited and internet access is expensive and unreliable and prevents the efficient operation of these businesses.

Impediments to agribusiness diversification exist within planning and also beyond. In relation to planning, until recently there were two state significant development applications with the Department and Council considers the current assessment process for State significant development as a significant impediment to agribusiness diversification.

Transport Networks and Utility Infrastructure

It is vital that local and regional transport links and infrastructure are adequately identified and funding is provided to maintain infrastructure in rural areas to facilitate efficient transport and resources for the production and transport of agricultural goods and produce to major processing centres. Transport links are not only between major regional and urban centres but involve many rural road and urban road infrastructure networks that need to be identified at a local level to ensure important links are not missed.

The impact on road infrastructure will only increase with the construction and operation of the abattoir, ethanol plant and the use of the Deniliquin airport as a freight terminal (for which Council has recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding with a potential operator). This is in addition to the impact of local roads from the presence of the rice mill and grain storage facilities in Deniliquin.

The draft plan states that the region relies on high quality information and communications technical to service industries and drive future economic competitiveness. As previously stated mobile phone reception is limited and internet access is expensive and unreliable and prevents the efficient operation of businesses in our local government area.

Council has lobbied for a number of years for access to reticulated natural gas. Council believes that the availability of this energy resource in Deniliquin will assist in establishing new industries in the town. As stated in the draft plan deficiencies in the energy network impede future business development.

Regional Cities and Liveable Towns and Villages

As previously stated the benefit of investment in regional cities does not necessarily deliver benefits across the region particularly as you move away from these centres. It also downplays the relationship between towns and villages in the region with Victorian regional centres.

The draft plan does not highlight the role that towns like Deniliquin have in their immediate area. Deniliquin supports its surrounding community through the provision of a number of services and generating economic activity. The villages within our local government area also play an important role given the economic activity that is generated within these communities particularly through agriculture. Council does not believe that Albury, Wagga Wagga and Griffith *'function as the core of an interconnected and interdependent network of settlements'* for the entire region.

Council supports the continued identification and protection of the region's heritage. In particular Council welcomes the introduction of the Heritage Near Me Incentives Program which is providing funding for those heritage items that have difficulty in attracting funding. This will significantly increase the protection of and accessibility to, heritage in the region.

Council supports any improvements to public transport across the region. Public transport provides opportunities to all our residents to link with other communities and acknowledges that the draft plan recognises the importance of public transport links into Victoria.

Council also recognises that the draft plan highlights the importance of planning for aspirational growth within communities and allowing Councils to discount existing zoned land which does not have market appeal for whatever reason.

Environment, Hazards and Climate Change

Council supports the repeal of the Murray Regional Environmental Plan No 2 as it is outdated and does not align with the current planning legislation. Council supports the review of land use planning for rivers but will not support the introduction of setback controls for the river in the Deniliquin Local Environmental Plan 2013 and Conargo Local Environmental Plan 2013.

Through the process of reviewing land use controls for the river Council hopes that State Government agencies with an interest in river development

will move towards an overall understanding of the varied functions of the river particularly in their responses to river related development.

Council supports the production of hazard mapping particularly through flood studies as they provide important information for land use planning decisions and appreciates the financial and technical support that is provided by the Office of Environment and Heritage.

Council thanks the Department for the opportunity to comment. Should you have any further questions in relation to this submission, please do not hesitate to contact Council's Manager Environmental Services, Julie Rogers on (03) 5898 3111.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Des Bilske', with a large, stylized loop at the end.

Des Bilske
GENERAL MANAGER