



PO Box 3572,
Level 3, 553 Kiewa Street,
ALBURY NSW 2640

Phone (02) 6023 8791
Fax (02) 6023 8169
Email rstubbs@alburycity.nsw.gov.au

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Mr Ashley Albury,
Director Regions – Western,
NSW Department of Planning and Environment,
PO Box 58,
DUBBO NSW 2830

Dear Ashley,

Exhibition and Invitation to Respond – Draft Riverina Murray Regional Plan

RAMROC appreciates this opportunity to provide a response to the Draft Riverina Murray Regional Plan (i.e. draft Plan) and in particular appreciates your attendance and presentation of the draft Plan at the RAMROC Meeting held at Jerilderie on 11th May 2016.

In general, the Member Councils of RAMROC support the four principal goals of the draft Plan, being as follows:-

- A growing economy supported by productive agriculture and sustainable use of natural resources
- Improved regional transport networks and utility infrastructure to support economic activity
- Strong regional cities supported by a network of liveable towns and villages that meet the community's changing needs
- A protected environment and a community resilient to natural hazards and climate change

This RAMROC response will address the individual Goals, Directions and Actions as set out in the draft Plan's structure and the specific content relating to the Riverina Murray region. As such, the following responses, comments and suggestions are made for the Department's consideration.

INTRODUCTION (page 5)

The text in this section needs to be updated to take account of the various Council mergers that have taken place across the Riverina Murray region, reducing the number of LGAs from 26 to 20, viz:-

- The merger of the former Corowa and Urana Shires into a new Federation Council;
- The merger of the former Deniliquin Council and Conargo Shire into a new Edward River Council;
- The merger of the former Murray and Wakool Shires into a new Murray River Council;
- The merger of the former Murrumbidgee and Jerilderie Shires into a new Murrumbidgee Council;
- The merger of the former Tumbarumba and Tumut Shires into a new Snowy Valleys Council;
- The merger of the former Gundagai and Cootamundra Shires into a new Gundagai Council.

VISION (page 9)

RAMROC Councils believe that there should be a greater mention in this Section of the absolutely fundamental importance of agriculture and manufacturing in the Riverina Murray region to the national economy and the need for substantial Government investment in infrastructure to provide additional capacity in food and fibre production and processing, manufacturing industries and road/rail transport industries across the region.

There are enormous opportunities for the Riverina Murray region to take full advantage of the new Free Trade Agreements that have already been developed and will continue to do so, and to grow our regional production capacity to provide for international population growth and the associated markets requiring clean and green Australian produce.

Water is the lifeblood of the Riverina Murray region and there surely is scope to further enhance our region's competitive advantage, by Governments having the vision to augment those advantages through new nation building infrastructure projects that will better harness and manage Australia's water resources. Nation building water infrastructure projects would mitigate the reduction in available irrigation water brought about by the Commonwealth Water Act 2007 and Murray Darling Basin Plan and position this region as a global powerhouse for food and fibre production and other goods and services.

DELIVERING THE PLAN - COORDINATION AND MONITORING COMMITTEE (page 13-15)

RAMROC fully supports the establishment and role of a Coordination and Monitoring Committee to oversee the implementation of the Plan, with Local Government representation, via the proposed Joint Organisations and / or the existing Regional Organisations of Councils.

It is likely that there will be two or three Joint Organisations that align with the regional planning boundaries for Riverina Murray. There should be one representative from each of those JO / ROC areas on the Committee.

RAMROC also agrees with the proposal for the Committee to be supplemented from other State Agencies and relevant external groups.

GOAL 1 – A GROWING ECONOMY SUPPORTED BY PRODUCTIVE AGRICULTURE AND SUSTAINABLE USE OF NATURAL RESOURCES (pages 17 33)

In the overview information, agriculture, forestry and fishing is indicated to be the third largest employer in the region, employing 11,700 people. This figure appears to be substantially at odds with statistics published in the NSW Government's e-Brief 7-2012 (NSW Parliamentary Library Research Service), which lists Murray Murrumbidgee Region Employment (average December 2010 to December 2011) on page 11 at 18,273 persons employed and 13.2% of total employment for the region. The statistics therefore warrant comparison and re-checking.

In Direction 1.1 on page 18 (*Grow the economic potential of the agribusiness sector*), there is no specific mention about the importance of irrigation water or food and fibre production in the context of the expected global demands – particularly from Asia. This reinforces the strong concerns expressed by Mayors and General Managers at your presentation to RAMROC on 11th May regarding the absence of information about the

importance of water, at which time RAMROC was surprised by the response from DPE officers that “water and irrigated agriculture” references were to be “downplayed” from the content of the original draft Regional Plan document submitted by your Western Region office.

Any such direction at DPE head Office level is absolutely ill-founded and unacceptable to our region and detracts from the substance of the draft Plan.

In Action 1.1.2 (*Encourage value-add manufacturing opportunities across the region to increase regional economic diversification*) , RAMROC supports the thrust of the draft Plan and re-emphasises the importance of locating value-add processing and transport industries as close as possible to the source of production.

RAMROC encourages the State Government to support and provide financial incentives to secure the establishment and retention of value-adding industries within the region.

Apart from the above comments, RAMROC generally supports the proposed actions set out in **Direction 1.1 above and also in Direction 1.2 (*Manage productive agricultural lands in a sustainable way*)**

In Direction 1.3 (*Manage and use the region’s natural resources sustainably*) and Action 1.3.1 (*Support the sustainable use and conservation of water resources*), the following comments are made for your information and text re-wording:-

- The Water Sharing Plans for the NSW Murray and Lower Darling regulated Rivers and for the Murrumbidgee Regulated River have both been reviewed and replaced as at 1st July 2016 (refer NSW Department of Primary Industries - Water), and are now next due for extension or replacement in July 2026.
- In the blue box and text on page 23 (*Major Infrastructure Investment*), there is some detail relating to the Murrumbidgee system, but not to the Murray system. Can the latter be accommodated to give an overall perspective of water storages within the whole of the Riverina Murray region.
- On page 26, there is a reference to the 2010 “Water for the Future Program”. This may need checking as to whether this program name is still relevant. Certainly the reference to the “Restoring the Balance in the Murray Darling Basin Program” for purchase of water entitlements is still current, although following the decision by the Commonwealth Government to cap water buybacks at 1500 GL, this program is nearing completion, with purchases now standing at around 1,360 GL.
- In relation to the potential for increasing water storage capacities in NSW, the NSW Legislative Council Standing Committee held an Inquiry in 2012 into the “*Adequacy of Water Storages in NSW*” and is currently inviting submissions for a 2016 “*Inquiry into Water Augmentation in Rural and Regional New South Wales*”. This new Inquiry specifically invites submissions into the outcomes of the 2012 Water Storages Inquiry and also seeks submissions relating to the potential for additional storages and / or water diversion schemes for rural and regional NSW which would mitigate flood damage and provide scope for increased agricultural production.
- Under these circumstances, it would be an appropriate action for the Federal, State Government and Local Governments, together with other agencies and private sector investors, to undertake comprehensive studies into the potential to increase water

capacity for all users in the Riverina Murray region, for manufacturing, agriculture and urban / rural users.

RAMROC supports Action 1.3.2, (*Protect areas of mineral and energy, extractive and renewable energy potential*),

RAMROC supports Action 1.3.3 (*Avoid urban expansion and rural residential development on productive agricultural land and identified mineral and energy resources*)

RAMROC supports Action 1.3.4 (*Implement the NSW Renewable Energy Action Plan to increase renewable energy generation*)

GOAL 2 – IMPROVED REGIONAL TRANSPORT NETWORKS AND UTILITY INFRASTRUCTURE TO SUPPORT ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

In Direction 2.1 (*Enhance the region's freight networks through co-ordinated investment*) reference should be made to the recent announcements regarding the proposed development of Canberra Airport as an international air freight port to Asia and New Zealand and to examine opportunities that this may provide for freight exports and imports to and from the Riverina Murray region.

The co-ordinated establishment of intermodal road/rail freight terminals is fully supported, although the success of these facilities needs to be enhanced by ongoing and appropriate infrastructure investment in both road and rail, as well as the avoidance of unnecessary duplication as far as possible, both within New South Wales and cross border into Victoria.

RAMROC and REROC have both prepared Regional Freight Transport Plans and these must be co-ordinated effectively and be complementary to the suite of other NSW Government transport plans and infrastructure strategies as set out on page 35, together with the Murray River Crossings Strategy which is near finalisation and which is critically important to the road/rail movement of NSW products to the Port of Melbourne.

RAMROC supports the proposed actions as set out in:-

Action 2.1.1 (Identify and prioritise pinch points in the freight network)

Action 2.1.2 (Identify and protect intermodal freight terminals to facilitate growth in the freight and logistics sector)

Action 2.1.3 (Identify and prioritise opportunities to improve regionally significant local road connections)

In Direction 2.2 (*Improve inter-regional transport services*) RAMROC strongly supports the maintenance of the 20% of flight slots allocated to regional NSW services to Sydney airport and encourages the seeking of greater allocations in peak periods. It is absolutely critical to our region's councils and businesses that these time slots are retained and that regional NSW services are not diverted to Bankstown or at a later time to the proposed Badgerys Creek airport.

As such, RAMROC supports the proposed actions as set out in:-

Action 2.2.1 (*Implement local planning controls that protect regional airports from the encroachment of incompatible land uses*)

Action 2.2.2 (*identify and protect future rail corridors*)

In Direction 2.3 (*Coordinate infrastructure delivery to facilitate economic opportunities*)

the draft Plan should place greater emphasis on the critical importance of mobile phone communications and the elimination of blackspot areas, particularly on highways / major arterial roads and in areas prone to bushfire and flood emergencies.

To date, the Riverina Murray region has not received sufficient Government attention or funding in the elimination of mobile phone blackspot locations.

Whilst the National Broadband Network is being rolled out progressively, the pace of rollout is poor and it is critical for this to be progressed as quickly as possible to secure the economic future of the Riverina Murray region.

In relation to Energy, the draft Plan could be more explicit in relation to areas seeking access to natural gas, for example to the Deniliquin area. Mention could also be made of the advantages that the Riverina Murray region possesses to encourage and attract large scale renewable energy generation, particularly solar energy.

Mention has previously been made in relation to the potential for new technologies and infrastructure to expand the availability and security of water for urban, agricultural and environmental purposes.

RAMROC has two separate Local Government Waste Management Groups operating in the region (one for Murray and one for Western Riverina), concentrating on waste and resource recovery and delivery of services and infrastructure. These waste management groups receive substantial funding from EPA under the Government's Waste Less Recycle More Program.

Mention might also be made of the State Government's Container Deposit Legislation which will be implemented on 1st July 2017, in accordance with the Premier's priority action to reduce the volume of litter in New South Wales by 40% by the year 2020.

RAMROC supports the proposed actions set out in the draft Plan, as follows:-

Action 2.3.1 (*Coordinate the delivery of infrastructure to support the future needs of residents, business and industry*)

Action 2.3.2 (*Establish monitoring mechanisms to enable better demand forecasting to inform infrastructure coordination*)

GOAL 3 – STRONG REGIONAL CITIES SUPPORTED BY A NETWORK OF LIVEABLE TOWNS AND VILLAGES THAT MEET THE COMMUNITY'S CHANGING NEEDS

In Direction 3.1 (*Grow the regional cities of Albury, Wagga Wagga and Griffith*)

RAMROC recognises that Albury, Wagga Wagga and Griffith are three extremely important urban centres that help to nurture the development and sustainability of the surrounding, towns, villages and communities.

It must also be remembered however that the future of those three regional cities are intrinsically tied to the social and economic sustainability of the smaller towns and villages and agricultural enterprises that provide products and services and financial impetus to the region.

The success of the overarching Riverina Murray region is without doubt a result of cooperation and collaboration. The region enjoys an enviable mix of major urban cities, supported by a number of medium sized rural towns such as Corowa, Deniliquin and Leeton, which in turn are supported by many viable smaller towns and villages, each with their own significant heritage and cultural assets.

Importantly also is that the Riverina Murray region benefits from an extremely strong agricultural sector with prime quality productive farming land, sound water security, excellent climate and quality environmental assets, as well as ready access by road, rail and air to the capital cities of Sydney, Canberra, Melbourne and Adelaide.

As such, RAMROC supports the actions set out in the draft Plan, as follows:-

Action 3.1.1 *(Develop a regional cities strategy for Albury, Wagga Wagga and Griffith)*

Action 3.1.2 *(Implement an industrial land monitoring program to maintain a supply of well located and serviced industrial land)*

Action 3.1.3 *(Develop and deliver strategies that strengthen the commercial function of CBDs and town centres)*

In Direction 3.2 (Enhance the liveability and economic prosperity of the region's towns and villages), the earlier comments demonstrate the importance of the region working as a whole, by bringing together the strengths that the regional cities, towns, villages and rural areas all have to offer individually and collectively.

The role of ROCs has played a large part in building this regional framework and there is no doubt that the new Joint Organisations, working in a new strong partnership with the Department of Premier and Cabinet and other State Agencies, will have the capacity and expertise to deliver excellent outcomes for the future of regional and rural New South Wales.

In relation to tourism, the draft Plan needs to be re-visited in light of the recent State Government announcement to create six new Destination Networks throughout New South Wales, which includes the establishment of four new regional destinations networks, including a new "Destination Riverina-Murray".

As such, RAMROC supports the actions set out in the draft Plan, as follows:-

Action 3.2.1 *(Deliver improved tools and partnerships to build community capacity in towns and villages to strengthen community resilience)*

Action 3.2.2 *(Support the continued identification and protection of the region's heritage)*

Action 3.2.3 *(Deliver enabling planning controls to diversify regional tourism markets and increase tourism opportunities)*

Action 3.2.4 *(Deliver regionally specific urban design guidelines)*

Action 3.2.5 *(Identify opportunities to provide improved and increased transport connections between the region's towns and villages to the regional cities)*

In Direction 3.3 (*Enhance the economic self-determination of Aboriginal communities*)

RAMROC supports the draft Plan Action 3.3.1 (*Conduct a strategic assessment of land held by the region's Aboriginal Land Councils to identify priority sites for further investigation of their economic opportunities*)

In Direction 3.4 (*Provide a continuous supply of appropriate housing to suit the different lifestyles and needs of the region's population*), RAMROC supports the following actions proposed in the draft Plan:-

Action 3.4.1 (*Deliver enabling planning controls that facilitate an increased range of housing options including infill housing close to existing jobs and services*)

Action 3.4.2 (*Facilitate a more diverse range of housing for seniors*)

Action 3.4.3 (*Develop a framework to facilitate a range of accommodation options for seasonal and itinerant workers*)

Action 3.4.4 (*Develop and implement principles for rural residential development*)

Action 3.4.5 (*Facilitate the delivery of more affordable housing options through improved planning policies*)

In Direction 3.5 (*Enhance connections and planning between cross-border communities to improve service quality and infrastructure delivery*) RAMROC has already developed collaborative networks cross-border with Victorian Councils and their communities through ACSUM (Allied Councils and Shires of the Upper Murray) and the Murray Group of Councils (MRGC) in the Central and Lower Murray, which embrace the LGA areas from Moira Shire west to Mildura Rural City.

These cross border council groups provide an excellent forum for networking and collaborative advocacy and projects. It is certainly intended that they will continue to be a key component of the new Joint Organisations, working in co-operation with both the NSW and Victorian Governments and with the NSW Cross Border Commissioner.

The draft Plan text in the second paragraph on page 67 regarding the Cross Border Commissioner could be re-visited to clarify that cross-border anomalies have been under consideration for a great many years, through various bodies such as the Cross Border Anomalies Committee and subsequent mechanisms, leading to the initial appointment of a NSW Cross Border Commissioner (Steve Toms) in March 2012.

Perhaps the current Cross Border Commissioner James McTavish may care to provide additional information and input into Direction 3.5 of the draft Plan (if he has not already done so).

RAMROC supports the following actions set out in the draft Plan:-

Action 3.5.1 (*Investigate opportunities to improve cross-border planning outcomes, including infrastructure and service delivery*)

Action 3.5.2 (*develop a cross border land monitoring program*)

GOAL 4 – A PROTECTED ENVIRONMENT AND A COMMUNITY RESILIENT TO NATURAL HAZARDS AND CLIMATE CHANGE

In Direction 4.1 (*Protect the nationally significant Murray River*), RAMROC supports the importance of protecting a healthy Murray River system and all related Murray Valley environmental landscapes and wetland systems and forests, taking into account the importance of achieving a triple bottom line balance (Environment, Social and Economic), which has due regard to other valuable ingredients of sustainable communities, the social and economic fabric of those communities, as well as heritage, culture, tourism and recreation facilities.

On that basis, RAMROC supports the draft plan Action 4.1.1 (*Actively manage settlement and competing land uses along the Murray River*)

In Direction 4.2 (*Protect the region's environmental assets and biodiversity values*), RAMROC supports the following draft Plan actions:-

Action 4.2.1 (*Facilitate improved access to quality information relating to high environmental values, to avoid, minimise and mitigate the impacts of development on significant environmental assets*)

Action 4.2.2 (*Maintain healthy waterways and wetlands, including downstream environments*)

In Direction 4.3 (*Increase the region's resilience to natural hazards*), RAMROC supports the need to effectively plan for the anticipated impacts of climate change.

In relation to community exposure to floods, there is a need for mapping and risk management planning to be undertaken on a catchment basis, simply because floods generally traverse multiple LGA areas.

RAMROC supports the following actions set out in the draft Plan:-

Action 4.3.1 (*Review and map natural hazard risks to inform land use planning decisions*)

Action 4.3.2 (*Support communities to build resilience to the impacts of natural hazards and climate change*)

Action 4.3.3 (*Minimise the potential impacts of naturally occurring asbestos on communities*)

SUMMARY

RAMROC is pleased to provide comment on the draft Plan and exhorts the New South Wales Government to take ownership, provide leadership and work collaboratively with Councils across the Riverina Murray region to implement the actions that have been proposed.

RAMROC Councils would also be pleased to provide any additional input or information as may be required by DPE, prior to the Final Plan being submitted to Cabinet.