



21 July 2016

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

Dear Sir/Madam,

**GRIFFITH CITY COUNCIL SUBMISSION
DRAFT RIVERINA-MURRAY REGIONAL PLAN**

Griffith City Council welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the Draft Riverina-Murray Regional Plan.

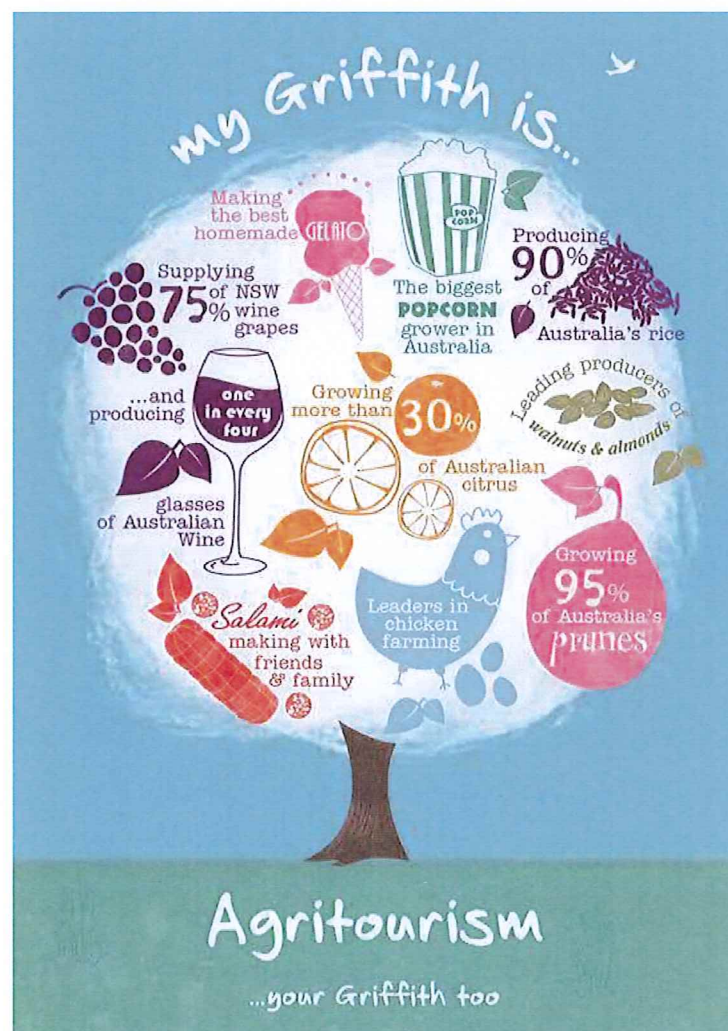
Firstly, Griffith City Council acknowledges the draft Plan as a good starting point in delivering better outcomes for the region.

We also express our appreciation in Griffith being recognised as a regional city. With a resident population of 25 681 and a population catchment of 52 016 (ABS 2016), Griffith is defining itself as the capital of the Western Riverina and in turn a major centre for a range of inland regional towns.

Importantly, the draft plan acknowledges that agriculture and natural resources underpin the regional economy with agribusiness and service industries driving employment, as they are the backbone of our region. Griffith has continued to demonstrate its resilience weathering the 10 year drought and global financial crisis due to its great industry and agricultural strength. Diversification has played an important role in Griffith maintaining its competitive advantage with industries such as cotton, olive oil, popping corn, nuts, almonds, tomato products and juicing plants. Rice, cotton and poultry processing (Baiada will soon be the biggest chicken processor in the

Southern Hemisphere) are also continuing to expand demonstrating the growth occurring in the region, as well as the opportunity and the need for government to recognise this.

Griffith is also home to some of Australia's most recognised wineries such as Casella, which has one of the largest bottling plants in Australia; McWilliams, over 100 years of history and most recently received funding to develop a bottling plant; and De Bortoli's. Griffith produces more than 75% of NSW wine grapes, is the largest citrus region in Australia and produces 90% of Australia's rice and 95% of Australia's prunes. Much of this receives added value by processing in the region. Much of this production is freighted from Griffith to overseas markets. The draft Plan recognises the need to invest in road and rail infrastructure to provide freight efficiencies.



However, there are some key points of the Draft Riverina – Murray Regional Plan that Griffith City Council raises for consideration, summarised below and with details that follow.

1. State Government must do more than prepare the Regional Plan – it needs to seriously and genuinely commit to funding its delivery. The draft Plan falls short of that.
2. The draft Regional Plan focusses on land use and does not yet encompass a whole of government approach to the Region. It should also embrace health, law and order, education and other elements of community wellbeing. For example the draft Plan is silent on public health infrastructure for Griffith.
3. Water for agriculture and horticulture underpins the economy of the Western Riverina. The draft Regional Plan must ensure government policy preserves this principle and there be no more withdrawal of water from productive agriculture.
4. Governance of the Plan implementation must be tight and effective and not be a duplication of bureaucracy. The measures proposed in the draft Plan do not give confidence that this will be achieved.
5. The draft Plan uses out of date data which significantly underestimates economic output and population growth.

GOAL 1 - A growing economy supported by productive agriculture and sustainable use of natural resources

Figure 4 on page 17 demonstrates the strength of the Riverina Murray in terms of its Gross Regional Product (GRP) of agriculture, forestry and fishing in NSW. However, we would like it to be noted that the Western Riverina, of which Griffith is the capital, is the biggest contributor to the GRP. Government should consider allocating resources to regions on the basis of regional productivity. Further, the data is from 2010/11 which significantly underestimates current production levels.

DIRECTION 1.1 Grow the economic potential of the agribusiness sector

Whilst we agree with the importance of the agribusiness sector and are pleased it has been highlighted as a key industry, we would also like other major industries such as manufacturing, retail and engineering to be noted due to their volume and strength in our region.

We also believe there are other contributing factors influencing on the agribusiness sector which should be included:

- Lack of transparency in water policy
- Water market speculation
- Lack of transparency in use of and benefit from environment water flows
- Poor implementation of employment terms and conditions for employees
- Poor Work Health and Safety conditions in agribusiness sector for employees

The Regional Plan should also support creation of the Centre of Excellence in Irrigation hosted by Deakin University Centre for Regional and Rural Futures in Griffith. This has significant potential in its own right to achieve the intent of Direction 1.1.

ACTION 1.3.1 Support the sustainable use and conservation of water resources

Griffith City Council would like to see mention of the long term Land & Water Management Plan (LWMP) development in Murray, MIA and CIA since mid-1980s by irrigators, using private irrigator expenditure to improve water and irrigation efficiency on-farm. This is not a recent phenomenon in response to "Water Scarcity and Climate Change". There have been very significant private resources expended into improved LWMP and water efficiency rollout for the last two decades.

Council also suggests the relocation of the Murray Darling Basin Authority to Griffith. Griffith's agricultural and horticultural production is worth over \$281 million per annum and is anticipated to grow (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2010-11). It is easy to see how important water is to our community as agriculture and food production are paramount to the success of Griffith, the region and NSW. Establishing an office in Griffith would allow the MBDA to engage more effectively with the irrigators that it is impacting most on, as well as local councils and industry experts and vice versa.

Page 26 notes that the State Government will "purchase" water entitlements from irrigators looking to sell. Council's view is that no further purchases, strategic or otherwise, should be made by State and/or Federal Government. Further water savings should be achieved through investment of public funds in water infrastructure efficiency improvements.

Griffith City Council is also of the view that additional water storage or diversion schemes have not been fully explored. The current rain event and even the ones over the last few years would mean additional water would have been captured for future dry periods.

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

We are pleased that improved regional transport networks and utility infrastructure to support economic activity has been recognised as a goal but there are some areas that need further clarification as well as errors that need amending.

ACTION 2.1.1 Identify and prioritise pinch points in the freight network

Griffith City Council acknowledges that the Griffith CBD By Passes have been acknowledged however we propose that the terminology 'By Pass' be changed to 'Industrial link Road'. This terminology more accurately defines the purpose of this infrastructure being that of improving freight linkage efficiencies.

Currently the area generates in excess of 250,000 twenty foot equivalent units (TEU) of road freight annually, with an additional 36,000 TEU transported from the existing freight terminal situated in Griffith's CBD (GHD Report 2014). The increased use of containers for grain as well as local wine production and other commodities will continue to contribute to this growth. Lacking adequate infrastructure will have detrimental impacts on potential future growth opportunities.

The proposed Northern Heavy Vehicle Industry Link Road will complete heavy vehicle links between the north, east and west of Griffith. The link road will significantly reduce the traffic pressure on Rankins Springs Road, Willandra Avenue and Watkins Avenue and reduce the amount of traffic entering the CBD of Griffith as it travels along the Kidman Way, Burley Griffin Way and Irrigation Way.

The provision of the Southern Heavy Vehicle Industry Link Road also corresponds with the relocation of the Griffith Freight Terminal. The relocation of the freight terminal to a "green field" site outside of the City will result in the transfer of heavy vehicle traffic away from Griffith's Central Business District. The investment of \$27m in this project will result in significant economic growth for the City and Region.

Griffith would appreciate acknowledgement from the State Government via this draft Regional Plan of a commitment to accelerate the funding of this infrastructure.

ACTION 2.1.2 Identify and protect intermodal freight terminals to facilitate growth in the freight and logistics sector

In regards to intermodals, the draft plan has provided a map that illustrates Yenda as a proposed site with two operating intermodals listed a) on the outskirts of Griffith, and b) between Beelbanger and Whitton. Griffith requests that the Yenda site be removed from the map, the approved Widgelli Rail Hub be added and the Patrick Intermodal facility be mapped accurately.

The Widgelli Rail Hub and Logistics Park will see Griffith City Council and the Col Rees Group working collectively in securing tenants which will encourage a further shift between road and rail as rail becomes an efficient alternative. This enabling piece of

infrastructure will allow Griffith City Council to continue to attract investors to our region and assist in growing the economy of NSW.

Australia's population has reached 24 million and this milestone has been achieved 17 years earlier than previously anticipated. Population trends continue to drift to metropolitan areas and unless this trend is addressed, unsustainable congestion will occur in these cities.

Griffith City Council is of the opinion that the State of NSW and Australia require the development of population settlement strategies. The development of these documents will give an orderly expansion of future population growth of this State and our Nation.

The first step in developing the settlement strategy should be a forward 10 year projection of capital infrastructure spending to service existing metropolitan growth projections. The second stage of the strategy is to prepare capital expenditure projections based on retargeting future population growth between metropolitan areas and regional NSW.

This financial analysis will identify opportunities for public expenditure to be redirected to the regions and take up existing infrastructure capacity. In doing so, metropolitan growth will occur at a more sustainable rate. Council therefore requests that the development of a "State Population Settlement Strategy" be included as an action.

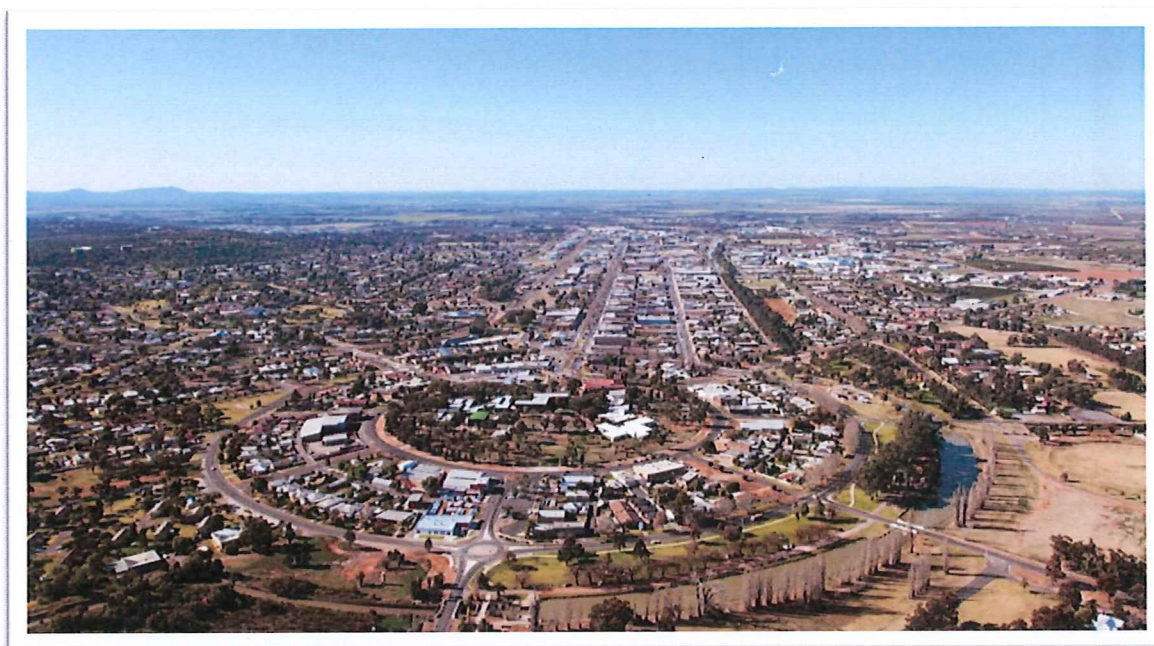
On page 17 of the document the Gross Regional Product of Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing in NSW (2011), identifies the Riverina – Murray has the highest producing region in NSW. There is no evidence to suggest that State and Federal infrastructure investment in the Riverina – Murray area is commensurate with Figure 4 on page 17.

Without the competitive based funding grants that Council has largely applied for with matched funds, the region would have received very little to assist in growth. Federal and State governments need to prepare long term capital expenditure plans that are transparently exhibited to the public in order to inform scrutiny of appropriate allocation of resources. These capital expenditure plans will also serve the purpose of aligning with future plans by Local Government, Business Sector and the community generally.

Regional capitals are delivering on Government outcomes but require consistent support and assistance from State and Federal Governments to be able to do this effectively and at a sustainable rate. Regional capitals like Griffith underpin the value of investing in regional capitals to deliver outcomes to grow the national economy and support the national policy agenda.

Griffith City Council therefore proposes that the plan include an action that the State Government prepares a Long Term Detailed Capital Expenditure Plan which is exhibited to the public.

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



ACTION 3.1.1 Develop a regional cities strategy for Albury, Wagga Wagga and Griffith

Griffith City Council supports development of a regional cities strategy.

The cities of Wagga Wagga, Albury and Griffith already work collaboratively in driving economic growth for the nation and ensuring the broader regions benefit. For example Riverina City Councils (Albury, Wagga Wagga & Griffith) collaborate with workforce development programs. Another example where Griffith City works in a collaborative mode is our membership of the Riverina’s peak tourism body Riverina Regional Tourism (RRT) or its successor.

We are also pleased to see recognition of the construction of St Vincent’s Private Community Hospital Griffith but insist the Regional Plan acknowledge the need to develop a new public base hospital in Griffith, not just occasional upgrades of existing facilities.

ACTION 3.2.1 Deliver improved tools and partnerships to build community capacity in towns and villages to strengthen community resilience

The future of agribusiness education and training needs to focus on a future high technology agricultural industry where agribusiness employment will no longer require labour provision (i.e. for manual labouring) as is currently required. As the agricultural industry becomes more automated towards technologies involving service provision, e.g. agri-mapping and monitoring, higher end technology driven agribusiness labour skills will be required. In addition much of this service provision will be provided in good part from off-farm.

Future provision of education and training for this region really needs to focus on technology focused agribusiness skills development. Deakin University (& other universities) for example would be ideally suited to this type of service provision

ACTION 3.2.3 Deliver enabling planning controls to diversify regional tourism markets and increase tourism opportunities

Tourism, as is recognised in this draft Plan, plays an important role in the economic development of our region and the state with this industry contributing \$851 million to direct expenditure in 2013 and 3.5 million visiting the region.

However, whilst the draft Plan states the need for Councils to align local tourism planning with the applicable regional destination management plan, which is certainly commendable, the reality of life is that regions like Griffith and the Riverina that are not thought of as "top of mind" tourism destinations need a significant marketing investment. The region has some great opportunities that need to be told, which in turn will further bolster economic development as well as assist in delivering on the State Governments goal of doubling overnight visitation.

It needs to be acknowledged that whilst Councils are the lead agent in helping to deliver the tourism story, they can only do so much from an ever overburdened budget.

ACTION 3.2.5 Identify opportunities to provide improved and increased transport connections between the region's towns and villages to the regional cities

Canberra Airport is about to receive direct international flights commencing with Singapore Airlines flying directly into Canberra. With the close proximity of Canberra to our Riverina Murray region it is important to consider how we transport potential international visitors out of Canberra to visit and experience our regions. Direct Canberra to Griffith flights would be a good transport / tourism enhancement option to consider bringing international tourist directly to our City.

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

Griffith City Council advises that some sectors of the community identify with the term “climate variability” more than the term “climate change”.

ACTION 4.1.1 – Actively manage settlement and competing land uses along the Murray River

Griffith City has noted that discussion surrounding this action is in relation to the significance of the Murray River only. The Murrumbidgee River is not mentioned in terms of current and future planning, nor mentioned as a high profile longer term potential development precinct which would require the same planning priority and protocol as the Murray River. The importance of the Murrumbidgee River needs to be highlighted in this section.

DIRECTION 4.3 – Increase the region’s resilience to natural hazards

Some of the most vulnerable ecosystems in Australia are located in the Riverina Murray Region and are expected to be significantly affected by climate change, for example the inland freshwater and groundwater systems will be subjected to drought, over allocation and altered timing of floods.

Griffith City would like to see over allocation removed from this dot point as over allocation is not a consequence of climate change.

In Summary

Griffith City Council notes there are 19 Actions where the NSW Government will require Councils to do certain things. These actions predominantly relate to LEP type controls (for which the Minister has already issued Directions for Regional Plans more advanced than this one), compared to 29 Actions where the NSW Government will “work with” other agencies.

There are 58 Actions, apart from the ones that Council's will be required to do, where the NSW Government will investigate, assess, explore opportunities, identify, promote, prioritise, consider, prepare a strategy/plan/framework, develop tools, coordinate, prepare criteria, review or update something. Griffith City Council has also only been able to locate 5 Actions where the NSW Government will actually do anything on the ground other than what is already covered by existing competitive programs (plus the newly announced Fixing Country Rail). Griffith City Council is already delivering on

government outcomes through its own strategic delivery plan. Griffith City Council expects other levels of Government to genuinely commit to improved regional outcomes. The draft Regional Plan does not yet achieve this.

Investing in infrastructure in a regional capital such as Griffith will provide economic benefits and flow on effects to a wider regional community – as well as having a greater impact on National productivity, particularly if invested in removing Heavy Vehicle Freight bottlenecks. This investment must be done strategically and the fact that Griffith has now been recognised as a regional capital is not only a great outcome for the region, but also NSW and Australia.

Council proposes that in revising the draft regional plan, a renewed commitment to regional capitals is included as it will ensure that these centres are well resourced to implement significant infrastructure and service projects which will deliver on major government priorities.

Once again thank you for the opportunity to provide our feedback.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Brett Stonestreet', with a stylized, looped flourish at the end.

BRETT STONESTREET
GENERAL MANAGER