

# *RDA Orana Submission*

DRAFT FAR WEST REGIONAL PLAN

13 MARCH 2017

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**DRAFT**  
FAR WEST  
REGIONAL PLAN

## RDA ORANA

Regional Development Australia Orana is part of a national initiative charged with leading economic development across our regions.

Our team work to identify, develop and execute strategic projects that will encourage economic growth. We are a catalyst, working to drive innovation, infrastructure and new jobs in our region.

This includes researching and identifying barriers to growth, informing policy and working with business, industry, government and community to promote the region within Australia and globally.

Regional Development Australia Orana is a not-for-profit organisation, led by a committee appointed by both State and Federal Ministers responsible for regional development.

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Director Regions, Western  
Department of Planning and Environment  
PO Box 58,  
Dubbo NSW 2830

13 March 2017

## *SUBMISSION - DRAFT FAR WEST REGIONAL PLAN*

RDA Orana would like to thank the Department of Planning and Environment for the opportunity to comment on the Draft Far West Regional Plan.

The Orana region stretches across the Central West and Western region of NSW. The Orana, meaning 'Welcome' in Wiradjuri, it is the largest and most diverse region in the State, covering an area of 25% of NSW. It services a population of over 120,000 people, encompasses 12 Local Government areas, including Cobar, Bourke, Brewarrina and Walgett.

Our work is guided by the Orana Regional Plan 2013-2016, which was developed in consultation with community, business and local government across the Orana region. Our priorities are

- Economic diversification & sustainability
- Workforce planning & development
- Business investment
- Infrastructure and
- Whole-of-government planning

With a Gross Regional Product of \$7,145.381 million (AU) and strong, growing key industries including mining, agriculture and government and community services, the region's economy is thriving, though not without challenges, particularly to the west. RDA Orana welcomes the Draft Far West Regional Plan as a valuable tool to start planning for and facilitating this future growth.

RDA Orana agrees with the forward for the Draft Far West Regional Plan written by the Hon Sarah Mitchell MLC which states that one of the key challenges for the Far West is to build resilience in local communities.

RDA Orana would like to extend an invitation to the Hon Sarah Mitchell MLC to visit the region to discuss the implementation of the initiatives and ideas raised by our submission.

Should additional information be required RDA Orana's Executive Officer (Megan Dixon) would be pleased to oblige on 02 6885 1488.

Yours sincerely,

*Megan Dixon* per

John Walkom,  
Chairman

## Governance framework

We reflect the concerns of our LG's with regard to the formation of the Far West Initiative. Our key concern being that the community of interest for Cobar, Bourke, Brewarrina and Walgett lies within the Orana region.

We note that the function of economic development sits outside the scope of proposed functions for the Far West Initiative and believe that both RDA Orana and RDA Far West should be recognised for their ability to contribute towards the successful delivery of the draft Plan through our participation in any Coordination and Monitoring Committee formed to review the progress of the Draft Regional Plan.

## Vision and goals

RDA Orana believes that the vision for the region articulates well, many of the opportunities that we have been working towards in the Orana region. The goals of the Draft Far West Regional Plan (Draft Regional Plan) are also sound i.e.

- Goal 1: A diverse economy with efficient transport and infrastructure networks
- Goal 2: An exceptional and distinctive natural environment
- Goal 3: Strong and connect communities

These goals are in line with the RDA Orana Regional Plan, which incorporates a vision for our region of elevating the value of the Orana region, advancing economic development and embracing new opportunities to create communities where people want to invest and live.

Key challenges for each LGA are unique, with Cobar facing labour shortage issues, while Bourke, Brewarrina and Walgett all face significant unemployment issues.

Changes in government (i.e. centralisation of TAFE services) and private enterprise policy (i.e. the seven on seven off roster in adopted by mining companies in Cobar) have fueled the loss of population and impacted volunteering in these communities, reducing community cohesiveness.

The vision of "new jobs attracting young families and skilled workers to relocate to or return to the communities where they grew up" will require a change in these policies, not reflected in the Draft Regional Plan.



## Planning context

It is important that all levels of Government, as well as other regional stakeholders such as RDA Committees, universities, business and community groups work together to collectively identify and plan for the development of the regions. While it is desirable and in many instances important to have alignment in key priorities and initiatives, it is unrealistic that a single plan can, on its own, encapsulate the wide range of strategic themes and actions that our communities require. This is particularly the case when a variety of State and Commonwealth Government departments are involved to various degrees in regional planning in respect of the provision of services and infrastructure.

The release of the draft Plan by the Department of Planning and Environment is to be commended. It is an important part of the broader regional planning framework and landscape. However, it is by no means the only regional plan for the Far West region and such much be read and reviewed in context of being a structure planning document only.

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### General comment

RDA Orana strongly agrees that diversifying the economic base of the Far West is paramount. This is a particular challenge as many local economies in the region have their gross regional product (GRP) dominated by one industry - be it mining or agriculture both of which are vulnerable to volatile markets conditions.

RDA Orana takes its role of ensuring a strong and diverse economy very seriously. Value adding opportunities in agriculture, development of new industries, as well as access to equitable infrastructure including water supply will be critical to the region's future.

### Direction 1: Grow the economic potential of the agribusiness sector

RDA Orana supports the actions to better grow the agri-business sector. RDA Orana welcomes the idea that the New South Wales Government will protect agricultural activity.

RDA Orana believes that additional actions should include the following:

- identify any transport pinch points within and outside the regions that hinder the development and investments in agricultural industries.
- promote the sustainable management of the goat population and investigate potential economic opportunities associated with goat meat production through policy and legislative mechanisms
- facilitate participation in projects such as the Cobar Bio Hub, and develop and implement on farm programs that ensure production gains from participation in such projects

### Direction 2: Increase value-adding opportunities

RDA Orana believes that the pursuit of value adding opportunities within the region will be a key part of our economic future. These opportunities need to meet market and consumer demand, not just with Australia, but also internationally.

Our own studies and work with investors has shown that co-location to source is important, but equally important is access to markets. For these reasons we believe that additional actions should include:

- identify agribusiness value-added industries and opportunities and ensure that the appropriate land use strategies are facilitated.
- identify and resolve transport pinch points within and outside the region that will facilitate market access for value added agricultural products
- facilitate investment in value added activities.



### Figure 4 – Tourism Assets

Figure 4 on page 26 and 27 of the Frax Regional Plan shows tourism assets for the region.

It is recommended that

- the Kidman Way tourism route that connects Griffith, Cobar and Bourke be included on the map.
- Lightning Ridge be recognised for art and culture.

### Direction 17: Improve access to local health and aged care

RDA Orana agrees with this initiative, and believes that it should also be extended to include children's services.

One of the key issues that we hear about in our smaller and remote communities is the high demand for both preschool and childcare services. This demand is fueled by both lack of services and lack of qualified staff.

An additional action, in line with this would be to include the following:

- facilitate access to early childhood education and opportunities

### Direction 18: Enhance access to skills and training

RDA Orana recognises that issues around workforce participation are two fold. In communities such as Cobar, there may be labour shortages, while in our other communities access to education opportunities are real and relevant issues.

RDA Orana welcomes the actions that have been identified for addressing skills issues in our communities. We do believe that there may be an opportunity to facilitate demand aggregation for education and training.

### Direction 20: Manage and conserve water resources for communities

RDA Orana notes that water security for Cobar is forecast as a critical issue, with Bourke, Brewarina and Walgett also predicted to have issues, to a less extent.

Whilst the document acknowledges that some funding has been allocated to Cobar to improve water supply, RDA Orana questions whether the amount of funding allocated will be enough, and that no actions have been identified for Bourke, Brewarina and Walgett.

RDA Orana sees water security as an essential element for communities to prosper. We believe that it should be a collaborative responsibility of all levels of Government and be managed for not only urban use but also industry and agriculture.

It is recommended that the following action be incorporated into the plan:

- coordinate the delivery of water infrastructure to support the future needs of residents, business and industry



### General comment

RDA Orana welcomes the inclusion of Local Government Narratives in the Regional Plan, which allows for differentiation and identification of priorities within the sub-regions of the Far West.

The general priorities established for the the region's east align with RDA Orana's regional plan

The economic opportunities priorities should be expanded to include the following:

- establish a goat meat facilities
- facilitate aboriginal economic development
- facilitate access to early childhood education and opportunities