

Lightning Ridge Miners' Association Ltd.

ABN 36 001 204 726

P O Box 177
3 Morilla Street
LIGHTNING RIDGE NSW 2834

Phone: (02) 6829 0427
Fax: (02) 6829 0830
Email: manager.lrma@bigpond.com

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

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: Draft Far West Regional Plan

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Draft Far West Regional Plan.

The Lightning Ridge Miners' Association Ltd (LRMA) was incorporated in 1974 to represent the opal mining community. It represents opal miners in general and its members in particular, in dealings with government and non-government bodies in affairs affecting their economic and social welfare.

Following are a number of comments on behalf of the opal miners of Lightning Ridge.

Lightning Ridge is based in the far west region's east and is more than likely the second most important town in the far west region after Broken Hill. It is the only place in the world where black opal is produced in economic quantities, there are over 3,200 mining titles in the area and the opal mining industry contributes approximately \$70 million per annum to the region. The NSW government recently invested over \$6.8M in a voluntary surrender scheme to alleviate land use conflict between mining and grazing thus demonstrating the importance of the opal industry to the State of NSW.

In 2016 over 33,300 tourists passed through the Visitor's Information Centre in Lightning Ridge and even with a modest multiplier this would equate to over 50,000 visitors per year.

Yet Lightning Ridge barely rates a mention in this regional plan. It is not even listed on the mining map (figure 3). It is listed on the tourist trail, as it should be, as one of the most popular tourist destinations in the region with huge potential.

Lightning Ridge is not mentioned as a local centre on page 64 even though it has a larger population than Bourke, Brewarrina, Walgett and probably Cobar. In the 2011 census Lightning Ridge's population was 2,492 (compared to Bourke 2,047, Cobar 3,817 and Walgett 2,267) although it is

generally accepted that the population is closer to 5,000 as around that number collect their mail from the Post Office.

One of the most important potential projects should include the Australian Opal Centre yet it is not mentioned in the Potential Far West Projects. The Australian Opal Centre is an extraordinary \$30M national project being developed to preserve, display and research the greatest ever public collection of Australian opal, opalised fossils and the colourful history and heritage of the Australian opal fields. It has been designed by world renowned architects Glen Murcott and Wendy Lewin and the Centre owns over \$4.5M worth of opalised fossils that have international scientific significance.

The Australian Opal Centre would have a most positive effect on the whole of the far west and generate increased visitors to the whole region. The Australian Opal Centre deserves major mention and support through the Far West Regional Plan.

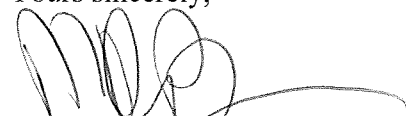
In regards to delivering the Plan, the LRMA is hopeful the Far West Initiative is no longer an option with the change of the NSW Premier. The initiative adds a fourth layer of government with the resulting costs that could be better utilised at the local government level and it proposes undemocratic representation. Delivering the plan could simply be left to participating local councils who could meet once per year.

Broken Hill is and would continue to be the regional centre for the unincorporated area, Central Darling and neighbouring areas in South Australia however it is unrealistic and a waste of resources to push for Broken Hill to become 'the regions strategic centre' for the whole of the Far West. Broken Hill is simply too far away from many towns in the region. The eastern region use Dubbo as their regional centre and are likely to continue to do so into the future and the southern area use Mildura as their centre.

Similarly we believe it is unrealistic and wasteful to devote resources to 'grow Cobar as a service hub for the region's east'. Geographically the only areas Cobar is likely to service would be the Bourke and Brewarrina areas. The region's east use Dubbo as their service hub.

Aside from the major mining companies most other businesses in the agricultural, tourism and opal mining sectors are owned and managed by small businesses. Small business is the heart of the Far West Region. Efficient transport and communication networks will greatly assist the region develop but to grow the region there must be a comprehensive effort to minimise regulation. Planning regulations are quite onerous for small businesses who do not have the resources to employ consultants to decipher the various regulations, codes etc. when attempting any sort of development. Onerous regulation is a major impediment to strengthening the local economies in the Far West Region and this issue should be addressed in the Far West Regional Plan.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Maxine O'Brien', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Maxine O'Brien
Secretary/Manager