



Far West Regional Plan

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NSW Farmers' Association Background

The NSW Farmers' Association (the Association) is Australia's largest State farmer organisation representing the interests of its farmer members – ranging from broad acre, Livestock, wool and grain producers, to more specialised producers in the horticulture, dairy, egg, poultry, pork, oyster and goat industries.

Executive Summary

The Association supports the vision outlined noting that we feel that the contribution of agriculture may be underemphasised and we also note that key industries (goats and kangaroos) have been neglected.

Future opportunities largely depend on improved continuity of increased infrastructure investment. We further note that the government must provide clarity on funding the plan, just as it needs to provide clarity on how it proposes to fund the Far West Initiative.

It is important to note that stakeholders, including the Association, have been sceptical about the Far West Initiative. Unless and until a funding mechanism for the initiative is made clear, the community cannot possibly judge the utility of any related proposal. The information provided on page 7 of the draft Plan does not make any of these issues any clearer.

The Association supports the proposed reforms included in the new Crown Lands Act which are designed to give lease holders more flexibility. We also support increased valueadding opportunities but requests details on how the NSW Government proposes to underpin such opportunities.

A sustainable supply chain is also vital for all commercial ventures. Reliable access to markets means maintaining a passable road infrastructure to enable businesses to access markets. For this reason, the Association is focused upon seeing additional expenditure on transport infrastructure in the Far West.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Executive Summary | 2 |
| TABLE OF CONTENTS | 3 |
| Introduction | 4 |
| General Comments on the draft Plan..... | 6 |
| Interaction with the Far West Initiative..... | 6 |
| Vision..... | 6 |
| Goal 1: A diverse economy with efficient transport and infrastructure networks | 8 |
| Direction 1 – Grow the economic potential of the agribusiness sector..... | 8 |
| Direction 2 – Increase valueadding opportunities..... | 8 |
| Direction 3 – Sustainably manage mineral resources..... | 8 |
| Direction 4 – Diversify energy supply through renewable energy generation..... | 10 |
| Direction 5 – Promote tourism opportunities..... | 11 |
| Direction 6 – Unlock economic potential through improved freight transport and other enabling infrastructure | 11 |
| Direction 7 – Improve regional airport connections..... | 12 |
| Direction 8 – Enhance access to telecommunications..... | 12 |
| Direction 9 – Sustainably manage water resources for economic opportunities . | 13 |
| Direction 12 – Support new planning and land management arrangements..... | 14 |
| Goal 2: An exceptional and distinctive natural environment | 15 |
| Direction 13 – Protect the region's environmental assets | 15 |
| Direction 15: Increase resilience to natural hazards and climate change | 15 |
| Goal 3: Strong and connected communities | 16 |
| Direction 17 – Improve access to local health and aged care..... | 16 |
| Direction 18 – Enhance access to skills and training..... | 16 |
| Direction 19 – Improve public and community transport services | 16 |
| Direction 20 – Manage and conserve water resources for communities..... | 16 |
| Direction 26 – Enhance planning between crossborder communities..... | 16 |
| Appendix 1 | 17 |

Introduction

NSW Farmers is Australia's largest state farming organisation representing the interests of the majority of commercial farm operations throughout the farming community in NSW. Through its commercial, policy and apolitical lobbying activities it provides a powerful and positive link between farmers, the Government and the general public.

A large proportion of our members are located in the Far West, and these are represented by our Western Division Council and/or their local NSW Farmer branches. The Far West (Balranald, Bourke, Brewarrina, Broken Hill, Cobar, Central Darling, Walgett, Wentworth and the Unincorporated Area) comprises 40 per cent of the state. It is comprised of small communities of 2,000 to 7,000 people, with the exception of Broken Hill and a few major towns, e.g. Cobar and Wentworth.¹

The Western Division, and the Far West more generally, is a unique parcel of land which is largely untouched. Whilst there are many industries such as mining, dry land farming, irrigation and tourism, these are in the minority when compared to the overall land mass.

The Background Paper noted that the area's agricultural sector, which contributed around \$338 million to the region's economy², was a strength 'upon which to build'.³ In fact agriculture is responsible for 15 per cent of jobs in the Far West, compared with mining which is responsible for 9 per cent.⁴ And, as the draft Plan makes clear, almost all the land in the Western Division is held under 6,400 Western Lands Leases for the purposes of grazing and pastoral production.⁵ The Association has long held that the region has great potential and that the NSW Government should be not just prioritising services but truly investing in research and development. We therefore welcome the publication of the draft Plan and the opportunity to comment.

The Western Local Land Services (LLS) region encompasses a large majority of the state's pastoral holdings. Rangeland development in other countries, such as Argentina and the USA, has been a key to economic development. This work could also have spinoffs from government investment (intellectual property rights, tourism), whilst also assisting with current LLS effort to manage biosecurity issues, control pests and weeds, and support farmers to be productive with best-practise methods.⁶

Recently the latest Australian Bureau of Statistics national accounts have revealed that agricultural growth surged by an extraordinary 27.6 per cent in 2016, following a record harvest in every state and good prices in other commodities. Meanwhile, the traditional driver of the Australian economy - mining - grew by only 4.6 per cent. While these figures are national, they underline the value of backing agriculture with

¹ NSW Office of Local Government 2016, *The Far West Initiative, Improving outcomes for the people of Far Western NSW – Background Paper*, p. 5

² Noting that we question whether this figure adequately covers the contribution of agriculture – we believe it to be much greater on the basis of individual council estimates.

³ *op. cit.*, p. 17

⁴ NSW Planning and Environment 2016. *draft Far West Regional Plan*, p. 5

⁵ *ibid.* p. 4

⁶ We note that the Department of Primary Industries is now conducting some research along these lines, see e.g. <http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/content/research/centres/trangie/key-research>

infrastructure that supports development of trade access and underpins regional economies.

General Comments on the draft Plan

Interaction with the Far West Initiative

We note that the draft Plan states that the final Plan can be delivered either “alongside the Far West Initiative (and embodying the Initiative’s major reforms) or via the establishment of a Coordination and Monitoring Committee which would coordinate and be accountable for achieving the vision and goals of the Plan”.⁷ We further note that the Government, preferring the first option, then sketches out a proposed new collaborative approach for planning vibrant places and sustainable communities.

Whilst a ‘collaborative approach’ will certainly be necessary for success, it is important to note that stakeholders, including the Association, have been sceptical about the Far West Initiative. Unless and until a funding mechanism for the initiative is made clear, the community cannot possibly judge the utility of any related proposal. The information provided on page 7 of the draft Plan does not make any of these issues any clearer.

With reference to the local government narratives section (pp 63-67), we note the ambitious priority areas, which we support, however we also note that without a clear funding commitment, it is difficult to see how these can be coordinated and achieved.

Vision

We support the vision outlined on pages 8-12, however we must point out that in the whole of the plan the word goat appears only four times, once in relation to a ‘state of the art abattoir’ which is celebrated as a ‘value add’⁸, whilst every other reference is negative, e.g. “Most vegetation has been substantially modified through the expansion of pastoralism and the effects of feral animals, particularly goats.”⁹

It seems perverse for the government to claim the economic value of the goat industry whilst being at the same time derogatory about the animals themselves. The Association does not support the use of the term ‘feral’ goats and submits that these animals should be referred to only as ‘harvested rangeland’ goats. The NSW export goat meat industry is keen to avoid any destabilisation to the market access of that industry through the use of inappropriate language.

Ongoing opportunities for the rangeland goat sector largely depend on improved continuity of supply. Opportunistic goat harvesters should be encouraged to invest in long-term business planning that protects against fluctuations in commodity prices. While the draft Plan makes mention of goats’ impact on the landscape, managing total grazing pressure across all livestock industries will be crucial in underpinning the sector’s environmental and economic sustainability.

While goats may have been considered a pest at one time, producers have adapted traditional merino and cattle enterprises to goat harvesting operations, with larger players now expanding into breeding and fattening enterprises. Since 2011 goat prices have increased by 75 per cent and there has also been a corresponding rise

⁷ NSW Planning and Environment *op. cit.*, p. 6

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 18

⁹ *ibid.*, p. 39

in the demand for land in the Western Division. The goat market has been supported by the low Australian dollar, free trade agreements and a surge in exports.¹⁰

The Government should do all that it can to encourage kangaroo harvesting and work with the Federal Government to develop markets. This would ease the burden on ecosystems. Kangaroos can do untold damage to vegetation and are currently at plague proportions. On 2016 numbers there are 12.6 million kangaroos in the Western Plains (the kangaroo monitoring zones)¹¹. Given that NSW's human population is estimated to be 7.6 million people, it would be fair to suggest that there are now at least twice as many kangaroos as there are people in NSW.

No landholder seeks no kangaroos on their tenure however a sustainable harvest would be in the best interests of everyone. The sheer numbers of kangaroos currently provides both a challenge for landowners and an economic opportunity for government and industry.

¹⁰ <http://www.theland.com.au/story/4441384/goat-country-heats-up/>

¹¹ <http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/wildlifemanagement/KMPPopulationEstimatesWest.htm>

Goal 1: A diverse economy with efficient transport and infrastructure networks

Direction 1 – Grow the economic potential of the agribusiness sector

The Association notes the finding that, despite its relatively small population, the Far West is a significant regional economy. The draft Plan cites 2011 figures indicating that the region generated \$2.8 billion in gross regional product, and 32 per cent more output per person than the regional NSW average.¹² This fact alone underlines the importance of delivering more infrastructure west of the sandstone curtain to support the development in the vision, and indeed the Government's target of growing the value of primary industries by 30 per cent by 2020.

Direction 2 – Increase valueadding opportunities

The Association supports increased valueadding opportunities but seeks details on how the NSW Government proposes to underpin such opportunities. It is also vital that commercial ventures are built on a sustainable supply chain. Commercial ventures need reliable access to markets which means maintaining a passable road infrastructure to enable businesses to access markets.

Direction 3 – Sustainably manage mineral resources

Land use conflict

Access to land for agricultural use is one of the primary issues facing agriculture in NSW. Pressure from urban expansion, environmental restrictions and conflict between agriculture and the extractive industries has led to declines in the amount of land in productive use across the state. The scarcity of good soil and reliable water on the Australian continent must be taken into account when strategic planning is undertaken. Many Australians are not aware of this, and as a result we have a planning system that has allowed low density housing, extractive industries and poorly planned environmental restrictions to permanently alienate some of our most productive land.

During a consultation period for a proposed new planning system for NSW in 2012¹³, the Department of Primary Industries, through the Primary Industries Ministerial Advisory Council (PIMAC), devised eight key requirements for the NSW agriculture and aquaculture sector. The Association's policy echoes these and we reproduce them below:

1. Sufficient flexibility to accommodate a variety of activities allowing for modifications;
2. Provisions to enable growth in industries and recognition that not all land is equal;
3. Sufficient provisions so that existing use can continue. Appropriate mechanisms to avoid pressure for land use change arising from unreasonable nuisance complaints;
4. If community needs change and a decision is made to re-zone land, it should be done through a full cost benefit process and provide sufficient lead time to transition;

¹² *ibid.*, p. 13

¹³ http://planspolicies.planning.nsw.gov.au/index.pl?action=view_job&job_id=5927

5. Recognition of the positive effects such as provision of ecosystem services and scenic amenity enabling rural based tourism, and provision that protect these amenities;
6. Sufficient provisions so that agriculture and aquaculture are not impacted by the externalities of other industries;
7. Consistency in application of planning rules across the State and a streamlined DA process; and
8. Recognition that the competition for access to resources from other land uses varies across the state; 'tailoring' of approaches to better balance these competing demands.¹⁴

The Association is advocating for more explicit action to protect and promote, rather than restrict, food and fibre production in regional planning policy at all levels: local, regional and state.

We have long held serious concerns with the Strategic Regional Land Use Policy (SRLUP), the state wide policy rolled out in 2012, designed to protect strategic agricultural land and water resources, and provide certainty to landholders and miners.¹⁵ The SRLUP is failing its mission. In one Planning and Assessment Commission (PAC) determination on an extension of an open-cut coal mine project located in NSW's Hunter Valley, the PAC made the following observations about the process at hand:

During the course of its review the Commission has identified a number of areas of the NSW planning framework that could be improved or enhanced, in the context of the issues confronted on this application. Greater clarity and planning certainty needs to be provided to the mining industry, the community and other industries that exist within mining regions.

NSW Planning and Environment, NSW Department of Industry's Division of Resources and Energy and other relevant government *agencies need to collaborate to develop a strategic framework for the coordinated release of exploration licences* and a suite of effective planning tools to provide reasonable exclusion zones or buffers to protect other industries and sensitive land uses within those parts of the state that are rich in coal, gas and/or mineral reserves.

In particular...resources need to be allocated to allow relevant Departments to undertake the work required to:

- i. identify sensitive land uses and resources (such as important agricultural land, water resources, places of special Aboriginal cultural significance or of significant conservation value) that warrant protection from mining; and
- ii. to determine appropriate buffers, exclusionary zones or preservation measures for those land uses and areas of other significant value;

...the Gateway process needs to be strengthened and its remit widened to ensure it has the cap...¹⁶ (our emphasis).

¹⁴ Gomez-Fort, R. Office of Agricultural Sustainability and Food Security, NSW Department of Primary Industries, PowerPoint presentation, *New Planning System Presentation to and discussion with the agriculture and aquaculture industries*, Meeting host: PIMAC, 25 June 2012.

¹⁵ <http://www.nsw.gov.au/initiative/strategic-regional-land-use>

¹⁶ NSW Government Planning Assessment Commission *Drayton South Open Cut Coal Project Review Report* November 2015 page v available at file:///C:/Users/moara/Downloads/Drayton_South_Review_-_Main_Report.pdf

With the PAC itself expressing a lack of confidence in the system, it is obvious that the SRLUP is not fulfilling its objectives, nor is it providing certainty to mining companies, let alone landholders and regional communities.

We are aware that there is reform occurring in the area of extractive industry assessment and regulation, in particular the Resources Advisory Forum and some upcoming amendments to the PAC process creating more independence and more efficient processes. However, we submit that these reforms will not deliver what has been committed to by Government, nor will these reforms work strategically as an overall package to deliver better land use in NSW. The case of the currently negotiated buyback of the Shenhua Watermark Coal mining licence is an example of why up-front strategic planning is so important for all parties and community members.

In the lead up to the development of the SRLUP in 2011, the Association developed a proposal for a 'traffic light approach' for the assessment of mining and gas approvals. To this day it remains a relevant and much needed policy solution for truly up-front assessment of mining and gas approvals. A copy of that draft proposal in the form of a flowchart at Appendix 1.

Opal Mining

The Association has been involved in extensive advocacy and lobbying campaigns during the last decade where we have sought to improve the opal mining regulatory and enforcement system in the Lightning Ridge opal mining areas. As is evident upon even the most cursory inspections of the opal fields, management and rehabilitation of opal prospecting sites has historically been sub-standard, resulting in major and permanent changes to the landscape which render large areas unusable for productive agriculture.

Opal prospecting claims and licences are granted without first requiring rehabilitation plans, nor cumulative impacts (e.g., requirements under an Environmental Impact Statement) be considered. For this reason the current bond system has been ineffective and there are a range of worsening environmental impacts across the claim areas.

Last year we welcomed the voluntary surrender scheme for Western Lands Leases within the Narran Warrambool Reserve near Lightning Ridge. However, a buy-back scheme was only ever a 'quick-fix' and did not address the root cause of the problem. Furthermore, the scheme was not available for all landholders and so significant land use issues continue for the landholders in these areas.

Direction 4 – Diversify energy supply through renewable energy generation

The Association supports moves to more widespread use of renewable energy. We note however that the current debate over how renewables can be adequately linked to the grid is muddying the waters. In agriculture, there are particular challenges for large energy users, often irrigators, who do not yet have the confidence in large scale renewables because the storage options are not yet robust.

As a necessary first step in a strategic approach to energy innovation in regional NSW, we are calling for a sprint study of innovation opportunities in regional electricity supply and distribution. Today, digital network control and solar

technology make it possible to rethink electricity distribution in regional areas. We are calling for a collaborative effort across government to achieve workable solutions.

In general, the ends of the distribution networks are not cost-efficient to operate. There are likely to be opportunities for off grid, island grid and hybrid solutions that repurpose existing distribution assets (poles and wires) around local renewable generation, load shifting and demand management.

Such opportunities cannot be assessed in the absence of detailed analysis of the local demand patterns and projection of future demand. Such a study could be delivered by the Institute of Sustainable Futures.

The need for this work is supported by the Alliance to Save Energy and is closely aligned with the objectives of the NSW Climate Policy. Further, we believe it could make a significant contribution to the value of the asset sale by providing an economically and socially acceptable framework for addressing underperforming parts of the asset. This work could be funded from the NSW Government's \$500m Climate Change Fund.

Direction 5 – Promote tourism opportunities

The Association values the allocation of \$1.3 million from the Regional Tourism Infrastructure Fund, for upgrades to Lightning Ridge and Bourke airports to help boost their capacity and safety, and increase their ability to attract visitors to regional NSW. We also acknowledge the Government's recent announcement of a new \$300 million Regional Growth – Environment and Tourism Fund.

We note that Figure 4 (p. 26-27) indicates tourism from Broken Hill to Sydney and Adelaide as a key issue. We agree that passenger rail connections would support the community and the commercial sector, but we wonder what funding the Government is proposing to put behind such a vision.

It is important to note that the Menindee Lakes and the Darling River have been great draw cards for the villages along the river. It is therefore critical for the local communities that they are able to benefit from the visitors who come to the region.

Direction 6 – Unlock economic potential through improved freight transport and other enabling infrastructure

It is important to acknowledge the investments that the Coalition Government has made in the Far West. In our MOU signed with the NSW Government in early 2015, the Association secured a commitment to allocating \$6 billion from the proceeds of the long-term lease of 49 per cent of Sydney's electricity networks to infrastructure which enhances the productive capacity of regional and rural NSW.

For example, recently in the 2016/17 budget there was \$11.5 million allocated to continue the upgrade and sealing of the Cobb and Silver City Highways.¹⁷ However, much more needs to be done. A commitment to complete both the Cobb Highway (Ivanhoe to the Barrier Highway) and the Silver City Highway this would form the basis of a good start.

¹⁷ The total allocated is \$40.4 million for upgrade works on the Silver City and Cobb highways, and \$4.25 million for the widening of Kidman Way south of Cobar, funded by the Restart NSW Western Freight Productivity Program.

East-West corridors also need to be factored in, e.g. Main Road 80 - Mossgiel to Hillston, the Wool track Balranald through Ivanhoe to Cobar, and Ivanhoe to Menindee (which would also benefit tourists).

In addition, the local council road programs, Fixing Country Roads, Fixing Country Rail and Bridges for the Bush, make up a total pool of \$1.1 billion. There have been two rounds of Fixing Country Roads funding, totalling \$92.85 million however of the first two rounds of these programs only \$6 million has been awarded in the Far West.¹⁸ The Association's focus on these programs reflects our interest in growing agricultural productivity and ensuring that our members can continue to grow the state's domestic product. We would therefore like to see more allocated to connectivity in the Far West given the following statement in the draft Plan:

Distance is a constant challenge. Businesses and communities have relatively higher transport and input costs, poorer communication links and less choice in health, education and community services. By contrast, the Far West is connected to national highways and rail networks linking Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Adelaide, and is deeply integrated with global markets and trade flows.¹⁹

We welcome the commitment to work with stakeholders to identify key strategic priorities, we note Figure 5 which identifies rail lines which we presume the NSW Government is proposing funding. This underlines the fact that the vision must be underpinned with funding for specific initiatives.

Direction 7 – Improve regional airport connections

We note that the NSW Government is currently considering deregulation of the Broken Hill to Sydney air route following deregulation of a number of Sydney-linked routes in NSW country towns in recent years with some seeing new airlines commence operations as a result.

However, as has been noted by Moree residents, Narrabri has had limited connectivity since its route to Sydney was deregulated and, because of the difficulty obtaining slots at Sydney Airport, even if a route was deregulated there's nothing to say the carrier who comes on to compete would be able to get slots at convenient times.

Growing such connectivity will rely on all of the other actions working together to build economic productivity.

Direction 8 – Enhance access to telecommunications

The advent of Machine to Machine (M2M) and Internet of Things (IoT) devices in agriculture, and the digitisation of the economy more broadly, make connectivity the number one issue in regional NSW.

NSW Government funding for Rounds 1 and 2 of the Commonwealth's Mobile Black Spot Programme (MBSP) has ensured that NSW has been the greatest beneficiary from this popular Australian Government program, delivering improved connectivity

¹⁸ Projects funded included: the Euston Prungle Access Upgrade (\$626,600 Balranald Council); Acres Billabong Tilpa (\$419,000 Cobar Shire); Whitbarrow Way (\$800,000, Cobar Shire); Sealing of Bugilbone Road between Burren Junction and Pilliga (\$1,316,000 Orana / Walgett); Upgrade of Gundabloui Road north of Collarenebri (\$989,000, Orana / Walgett); Eyre/Comstock and Comstock//Patton Street Intersection Concrete Upgrade (Broken Hill) (\$700,000 Broken Hill Council); Seal extension Wilga Downs Road (SR26) (\$700,000 Cobar Shire Council) Reconstruction and Sealing of Gundabloui Road between Collarenebri and Mungindi- 6 km segment (\$1,200,000 Walgett Shire Council)

¹⁹ NSW Planning and Environment *op. cit.*, p. 4

across the state. However, there are substantial areas of regional NSW that still have inadequate mobile service, or which have no service at all. Given the Australian Government's commitment to fund Round 3 of the MBSP (announced ahead of the 2016 General Election), we seek a commitment from the NSW Government to continue to provide matching funding for the scheme into the future.

Long term, together with the National Farmers' Federation (NFF) and other partner organisations, the Association seeks recurring, sustainable funding by the Commonwealth for the MBSP. This will ensure that it can systematically and comprehensively eliminate black spots and expand the boundaries of existing coverage.

In addition to providing further funding, the Association also believes that the NSW Government should carefully consider the conditions that it attaches to any funding. The MBSP has two key goals – expanding coverage and fostering competition in regional telecommunications. Noting the reluctance of mobile network operators to co-locate tower infrastructure funded under the MBSP, the Association believes that amendments should be made to the MBSP guidelines so that any mobile network operator that receives public funding for network infrastructure is required at a minimum to wholesale the resulting service. These amendments could be tailored so that they do not diminish the incentive for telecommunications companies to invest. For example, contracts could include provision for a limited period of exclusive use to recover any capital committed by a Mobile Network Operator (MNO).

Direction 9 – Sustainably manage water resources for economic opportunities

Water is a valuable resource that must be planned for and managed efficiently. The Association continues to monitor the reviews of the water resource plans across the state, assisting members to improve plans in an effort to streamline delivery and improve water efficiency. We are also fighting for better outcomes for members and rural communities involved in the implementation of the Murray Darling Basin Plan (MDBP).

In terms of the MDBP, we cannot support further removal of water out of productive use. Any remaining targets to be met under the Basin Plan must not be found by simply adding to the pool of environmental water, but rather by maximising the complementary measures programs for invasive species control and other types of environmental management like cold water pollution control measures.

We are calling for:

- Water planning regimes based on balanced and equally considered social, environmental and economic outcomes;
- Environmental watering plans that minimise impacts at peak water times;
- Fair and reasonable pricing arrangements that are reviewed independently;
- Management of existing water storages to maximise productivity and environmental outcomes;
- The construction of new dams, in a strategic manner to streamline electricity production, irrigator, primary production and community needs for mutually beneficial outcomes, flood mitigation; and
- The security of our members' water entitlements.

In our MOU signed with the NSW Government in early 2015, the Association secured a commitment to allocating \$6 billion from the proceeds of the long-term

lease of 49 per cent of Sydney's electricity networks to infrastructure which enhances the productive capacity of regional and rural NSW. Of this, around \$500 million has been allocated to build a 270 km pipeline from the Murray River to secure Broken Hill's water supply. The Association also welcomes the \$110 million allocated under the Regional Water and Wastewater Backlog Program, for projects in Bourke, Central Darling, Cobar and Walgett.

Direction 12 – Support new planning and land management arrangements

The Association supports the concept of a plan for the unincorporated area.

Although the draft Plan states:

No formal governance and planning arrangements apply to the Unincorporated Area and, from a planning perspective, this is evident in the lack of a community-led strategic land use strategy, local plan and related decision-making.²⁰

we note that road infrastructure in this area can often be superior to that provided elsewhere in the Far West on more limited council budgets.

We further support the new Crown Lands Act which consolidates several Acts into one and treats the Western Division and the Eastern and Central Divisions consistently for the first time. It will also allow conversion of Western Lands Leases under certain circumstances. We particularly welcome the Government's intention to provide greater flexibility for Western Lands leaseholders and remove onerous restrictions on covenants. For most large pastoral holdings, easing these restrictions will mean farmers will be able to do more with their land, whether that be farm tourism or small to medium scale renewable energy projects.

²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 37

Goal 2: An exceptional and distinctive natural environment

Direction 13 – Protect the region’s environmental assets

The Association supports the protection of environmental assets like Traveling Stock Reserves when they are still used for their original purpose and well maintained. However, any mapping of ‘potential high environmental value areas’ should be done in close consultation with land owners so that it does not lock up the potential for graziers and farmers to expand the value of agriculture in NSW.

Direction 15: Increase resilience to natural hazards and climate change

The Association supports the NSW Government employing a “more robust, strategic approach to identifying and mapping regional hazards” and working to reduce carbon emissions and adapt and mitigate impacts of climate change. We further support the installation of a weather radar service to significantly improve the accuracy of weather data in the Far West and Central West and Orana regions. We agree that not having real-time weather data impacts on the preparedness of the community to deal with natural hazards. We have included such a proposal in our pre-budget submission.

We support the Government’s work, in conjunction with the University of Technology Sydney, to identify and better understand regional vulnerabilities and emerging risks from a changing climate.²¹

Through our submission to the Climate Change Fund Draft Strategic Plan 2017 to 2022, we have urged the Government to walk-the-walk as far as agricultural strategy is concerned.

Further, as per our pre-budget submission, the Association is seeking \$10 million in NSW Government funding for a Doppler radar in the western NSW. The radar station will cover a gap in existing coverage that extends over large sections of highly productive cropping land in the Central and North West of NSW. Strategic investment into Doppler radar infrastructure enables more informed decisions ensuring farm inputs are applied more efficiently and effectively.

Doppler radars offer short-term weather forecasting and accurate climatic information at a localised level that enable farm businesses to make more informed decisions. This means farm businesses can make timely, tactical decisions around time of sowing, chemical and fertiliser applications and movement of stock, potentially resulting in significant savings.

²¹ This work is known as the Far West Enabling Regional Adaptation project. The project identifies adaptation pathways and opportunities to minimise climate change impacts on local communities. It will help to identify responses to vulnerabilities, identify the region’s ability to cope (known as its ‘adaptive capacity’) and inform government service delivery at a regional and subregional scale.

Goal 3: Strong and connected communities

Direction 17 – Improve access to local health and aged care

The Association is concerned that despite producing a very large percentage of food produced in NSW, and yet the region itself is somewhat of a fresh food desert.

Direction 18 – Enhance access to skills and training

Skills and training can only be supported by an adequately resourced training sector and good telecommunications.

The advent of Machine to Machine (M2M) and Internet of Things (IoT) devices in agriculture, and the digitisation of the economy more broadly, make connectivity the number one issue in regional NSW.

NSW Government funding for Rounds 1 and 2 of the Commonwealth's Mobile Black Spot Programme (MBSP) has ensured that NSW has been the greatest beneficiary from this exceptionally popular Australian Government program, delivering improved connectivity across the state. However, there are substantial areas of regional NSW that still have inadequate mobile service, or which have no service at all. Given the Australian Government's commitment to fund Round 3 of the MBSP (announced ahead of the 2016 General Election), we seek a commitment from the NSW Government to continue to provide matching funding for the scheme into the future.

Long term, together with the National Farmers' Federation (NFF) and other partner organisations, the Association seeks recurring, sustainable funding by the Commonwealth for the MBSP. This will ensure that it can systematically and comprehensively eliminate black spots and expand the boundaries of existing coverage.

Direction 19 – Improve public and community transport services

Some small communities have a community bus which takes residents able to travel to medical appointments and to do shopping in their regional centres. This is valuable and should be extended to ensure regular connectivity across the region.

Direction 20 – Manage and conserve water resources for communities

Many areas in the Western Division rely on ground water. It is vital that there is secure access to water, uncontaminated by extractive industries. As noted above, the Communities reliant on the Menindee Lakes and Darling River should be guaranteed water for sustainability and tourism.

Direction 26 – Enhance planning between crossborder communities

The Association supports the ongoing work of the cross boarder commissioner, James McTavish. It is critical that cross-jurisdictional issues do not tie landholders in red tape and we regularly engage with the commissioner on issues of interest.

Appendix 1

Appendix 1 – Conceptual Model of Assessment Pathways for Mining Projects – NSWFA Proposal

