



# *Pastoralists' Association*

*of West Darling Inc.*

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## Submission to the Draft Far West Regional Plan.

The Pastoralists' Association of West Darling (PAWD) is an agri-political body that has represented the interests of landholders in western NSW since 1907. PAWD members are principally involved in the production of wool, sheep cattle and goats, and the management of semi-arid rangelands in the far west of the State. Bearing this background in mind, we make the following submission to the Draft Far West Regional Plan (DFWRP).

PAWD is concerned by the proposal to deliver the final plan alongside the Far West Initiative (DFWRP pg6). PAWD flagged significant issues with the preferred model outlined in the Far West Initiative Consultation and Background Papers in its submission, to which the Office of Local Government is yet to respond. Indeed, PAWD is not aware of progress of any consequence on the Far West Initiative this year, and the proposal appears to be dead in the water. Any attempt to force the Far West Initiative on to stakeholders in its current form will be met by strong opposition. PAWD's submission to the Far West Initiative is attached to this submission for your consideration.

The DFWRP correctly identifies kangaroos in the far west as being both a challenge and an opportunity (pg16). By some estimates, kangaroos contribute approximately half of the grazing pressure in the semi arid rangelands of far west NSW, which poses problems for landholders trying to manage pasture levels when seasonal conditions deteriorate. The Tibooburra – Broken Hill – Wentworth area contributes approximately one third of the annual NSW commercial kangaroo harvest, with the majority of production trucked out of the region for processing and value adding. Industry participants have identified potential new export opportunities for kangaroo products, but the ability to explore these opportunities is constrained by regulatory restrictions imposed by the Office of Environment and Heritage. The number of kangaroo procession licences in NSW is capped at eleven, with some existing processors controlling multiple licences. Meanwhile, the Office of Environment and Heritage has in excess of fourteen expressions of interest from potential processors on file, and PAWD calls on the regulatory roadblock that caps the number of processor licences at eleven to be lifted immediately.

The DFWRP fails to recognise the opportunity to establish a game meats processing facility in Broken Hill, targeting kangaroos but with a capability to handle other species. An injection of seed capital funding would be required to achieve this outcome, but developing a facility of this kind would be a

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win – win situation, generating jobs and economic activity in the district, whilst providing a commercial solution to problems created by high kangaroo numbers on grazing properties.

The DFWRP proposes to unlock economic potential in the region by identifying and resolving issues in the local freight network (*pg25*). PAWD's priorities in regard to the transport of agricultural products are the sealing of the Silver City Highway between Broken Hill and Tibooburra, and Cobb Highway between Ivanhoe and Wilcannia. Rain on unsealed sections of these highways brings the movement of all traffic on these roads to a halt, which affects not only pastoral businesses, but also the tourism and mining sectors. There exists an opportunity to unlock the potential of Broken Hill as a freight hub servicing the oil and gas fields of the Cooper Basin, with the cross loading of gas pipe from rail to road transport in the Broken Hill rail yards an example. The Silver City Highway has also been flagged as an alternative route for freight between Queensland and South/Western Australia once remaining sections of gravel road between Tibooburra and Noccundra (SW QLD) are sealed. Consideration should eventually be given to sealing the Cut Line between Bourke and Tibooburra, once work on the Silver City and Cobb highways is complete.

Reliable telephone and data connections are essential for families living in remote locations to run their businesses, educate their children, access government services and maintain social relationships. (*pg32*). Legislators must not lose sight of the importance of a basic telephone service in the rush to deliver data services to the bush. PAWD seeks assurances that proposed reform of the Telecommunications Universal Service Obligation by the Productivity Commission and roll out of the NBN does not ultimately deliver basic telephone and data services that are inferior to services currently in place, intentionally or otherwise.

PAWD supports the adoption of policy which mandates the delivery of fast, reliable and value-for-money data services for users in rural and remote locations. People working remotely in agriculture, mining and tourism, three important pillars of the Australian economy, should be able to access data on the same terms as those living in urban areas. Telecommunications services must have the capacity to support innovations such as video conferencing for health providers and EFTPOS services for small businesses.

The availability of water and security of its supply (*pg32*) is of critical importance to the sustainability of agriculture in the far west. Away from the major river systems the supply of water for stock and domestic use on properties is the responsibility of landholders, who incur significant costs in terms of constructing on-farm infrastructure. The current provisions for licencing and resource sharing must not be subject to change without extensive consultation. However, DPI Water should work to reduce the time taken to assess licence applications, and a requirement that DPI Water must consult DPI Fisheries regarding fish passage around structures on ephemeral streams away from major rivers - given that these streams are usually dry and do not contain fish – is pointless and contributes unnecessarily to delays in determining the outcome of licence applications.

The plight of the Darling River between Bourke and Wentworth is of particular concern to PAWD. Landholders along the river rely on it to supply water for stock and domestic supplies, as well as acting as a boundary fence between properties. It appears that recent changes to regulations that govern water extraction upstream of Bourke has had a catastrophic affect on the reliability of the river downstream of Bourke, particularly in regard to the number and frequency of low and medium flows making their way through the system. Consequently, there is a pressing need to take action to address the condition of the Darling River below Bourke. The preferred response would be to unwind the regulatory changes that have contributed to the current situation. Alternatively, it may be worthwhile investigating the option of building new weirs in the river. These weirs should be “smart weirs”, as distinct from the existing “dumb weirs”, insofar as they should be higher than

existing weirs to retain more water for a longer period of time, are fitted with regulators to facilitate the release of water if the need arises, and fish ladders to allow the passage of fish along the river system. Not only would “smart weirs” be good for pastoralists, but would also contribute to the wellbeing of communities along the river, encourage tourists to visit the area and have a positive environmental benefit.

PAWD is obviously aware of the process and progress of developing the Crown Lands Management Act 2016 (*pg36*). We are awaiting further details in terms of how the new Act will affect pastoralists in the far west, and expect that opportunity to comment on this process will be afforded to all stakeholders as the need arises. Of particular concern is the future management of the wild dog fence along the SA and QLD border, as implementation of the Crown Lands Management Act has implications in regard to how the fence is maintained. It is important to understand that raising small stock (sheep, goats) would not be possible in NSW without an effective wild dog fence.

The DFWRP proposes the preparation of a local plan for the Unincorporated Area (*pg37*), on the basis of a number of assumptions outlined in the DFWRP. PAWD has significant concerns that the DFWRP is recommending an action that is not needed or wanted by residents of the Unincorporated Area, and without any prior consultation with stakeholders whatsoever. Proponents of a local plan for the Unincorporated Area are strongly encouraged to engage with and listen to the locals before making any plans to proceed accordingly. At first glance, it would appear that adoption of a local plan would result in unnecessary imposition of red tape and costs on residents in the area. Furthermore, PAWD is concerned that proposed mapping and protection of high environmental value areas through local plans (*pg41*) may result in the imposition of conditions on landholders that are incompatible with existing land uses. There are better ways to manage areas of high environmental value than by imposing restrictive regulations on land managers. In short, the simplest and best advice PAWD can offer is to leave the Unincorporated Area alone.

The proposal to install weather radar in the Orana region would not have any benefit for residents in the far west (*pg44*), given that weather events usually track west – east. Consideration should be given to installing weather radar in two locations in the far west – one to the north of Broken Hill and another between Bourke and Cobar.

The DFWRP addresses the potential impact of, and adaptation to climate change in the far west (*pgs44-45*). Naturally, climate change and natural climate variability is a major concern to people engaged in agriculture in the far west. The best way for government to help landholders manage climate change and variability is to adopt policies which assist in building resilience into agricultural businesses, such as incentives to conserve water and manage total grazing pressure.

PAWD is concerned that many of actions proposed in the DFWRP are somewhat vague in their intent, potentially unnecessary and probably costly to implement. Accordingly, PAWD encourages further consultation on issues raised in the DFWRP that may involve our members.

I thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Plan.

Yours faithfully,

Lachlan Gall.  
President.