

The Council of The Shire of Bourke

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Please address all
communications to
the General Manager

Our Reference: GM:KHO-17-E6.20

28th March 2017

Department of Planning
PO Box 58
DUBBO NSW 2830

Dear Sir,

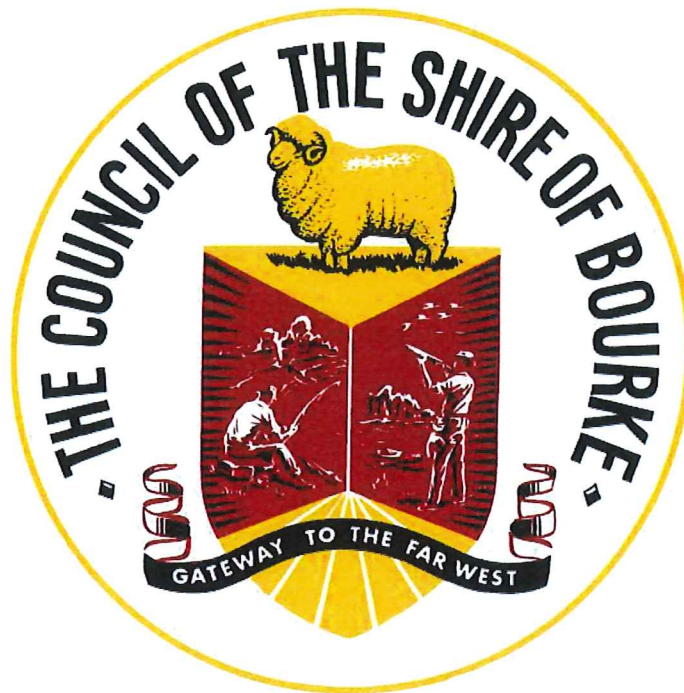
Re: Submission in relation to the Draft Far West Regional Plan

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission into the Far West Regional Plan

I have attached a brief submission detailing some of the issues that Council wishes to highlight

Yours faithfully

Ross Earl
General Manager



SUBMISSION TO NSW DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING
IN RELATION TO DRAFT FAR WEST REGIONAL PLAN

General Comments and an Overview

The footprint of the Far West Regional Plan is the same that is covered by the proposed Far West Initiative (FWI) and many of the questions that have been related to issues of community of interest that impact of the FWI are similar to that which would also impact on the Far West Regional Plan.

The large area of the state which comprises the Far West Area stretches from the Queensland border down to the Victorian border and out to the South Australian border and none of the other areas which are subject to similar plans go close to this expanse.

As detailed in the Plan there is four (4) quite distinct areas with the Shires of Cobar, Brewarrina, Bourke and Walgett in the east forming a strong linkage to the Dubbo and Orana Region, Balranald and Wentworth in the south with an orientation towards Victoria whilst Broken Hill has a linkage to South Australia and use South Australian time and Central Darling is also aligned to this western sector

What binds the Region?

The Darling River threads its way basically along the length of the Far West and is effectively the life blood of much of the area. Additionally with the tenure of the land over much of the area being Western Lands Leases this also provides a linkage and commonality.

Some sections of the regions draw their water from alternative river systems but the Darling would have the greatest impact.

There should be more emphasis on the importance of the Darling River and the management of water in the Plan.

Service Provision

Given the structure of the region the services for each of the three (3) sub regions are derived from different areas making linkages across the entire Far West difficult to accurately identify. Bourke has to either provide services locally or travel long distances to access them in Dubbo.

Economic Diversity

The region is extremely diverse with range of industries providing a contribution to the overall economic input of the area which it must be said on per capita basis is greater than any other regional part of the state.

From the opal fields of Lightning Ridge to the fruit growing areas along the Murray and the mining in Broken Hill the economy is diverse and one would say extremely resilient.

The area had developed a strong tourism industry which continues to grow and adds another dimension to this already diverse economy.

Economic Input

The Far west provides an economic contribution far greater than any other regional section of the state and 32% greater than the average.

The Problems

Clearly the tyranny of distance is a significant problem with the low population density being an impediment to the cost effective delivery of a number of services and the inability for the region in many instance to enjoy the amenity that is enjoyed in other parts of the state. The large road network although providing an important link is in many instance unsealed and this proves to a significant problem in wet weather. There needs to be more investment into the transport network, especially when it supports economic activity such as tourism and the agricultural supply chain.

The inability to attract staff to the remote areas is also a problem and professional staff in particular, being both hard to attract and retain, despite the opportunity the area afford in terms of career advancement and levels of remuneration available.

The shrinking population has place pressure on the ability to maintain basic amenities such as schools and shops in some areas and this in turn impacts on the ability to attract staff. The loss of population is attributed to increased mechanisation, the development of things like round up resistant cotton, periods of extended drought and in the case of Broken Hill the down turn in the mining industry.

Despite the reduced population there is an expectation of the need to maintain service levels and the basic community amenities with the small population base struggling to meet the cost burden that results and even the ability to attract volunteers to keep some organisations functioning in the rural areas is causing difficulties. There needs to be a coordinated approach to planning and servicing areas of decline and helping communities to understand these trends and put measures in place to address this issue.

Areas to be addressed in the Draft Plan

- **Regional Hub**

There would not be a single sub- regional hub amongst the four (4) councils in the eastern section with each of them developing a strong affinity to Dubbo.

Whilst Cobar is the largest centre it does not assume a regional role as detailed in part in the Draft.

The centralisation of services has been to the detriment of the area generally with an erosion of things like banking services and regional branches of many government departments.

The erosion of these services has taken out a number of skilled people who contributed to the community in a number of ways to increase and improve the social amenity.

- **Health Services**

The gradual reduction in health services as evidenced by the closure of the birthing unit at Bourke Hospital has seen people having to travel to Dubbo for many services which should be able to be provided locally or even on a sub –regional basis.

The distance to Dubbo and the resultant travel costs has put increased pressure on a severely socio –economic communities in the eastern sector

- **Air Services**

Queensland is able to provide air services to its remote communities which in return provide access to the larger centres. If a commuter services were available to connect Bourke for example to Dubbo it would also give the residents access to Sydney, Melbourne Brisbane and Newcastle.

Bourke Shire Council has an excellent airport with modern facilities and it would be good to be able to capitalise on this facility and provide a quick linkage to the area for residents, visiting medical specialists and other professionals to name but a few.

An effective air service would also see a boost for tourist numbers and in particular those international visitors on restricted timeframes and the tyranny of distance and the time taken often providing an impediment to travel to our parts of the state

- **The River Systems**

The importance of the Darling River to the economic diversity of the area cannot be stressed enough and the resultant impact on many of the communities along the Darling as a result of water buy backs is well documented.

As mentioned earlier the River Systems are the lifeblood of the area and continuity of flow and quality of water is critical for agricultural, economic, social, environment, cultural and recreational purposes.

- **Development of the Goat Industry**

The establishment of a state of the art goat processing facility in Bourke will add another dimension to the economic diversity of the region and potentially see a shift in the way in which the breeding and harvesting of goats takes place. With more certainty in the market place landowners have the opportunity to establish and improve goat breeding programmes.

- **Valuing Adding Industries**

It is noted that value adding industries are mentioned for Brewarrina and Walgett; however this should the case across the whole region with opportunities available to be considered in conjunction with the goat abattoir for example.

- **Transport Linkages**

Depending on the destination of products consideration needs to be given to ensuring that adequate and reliable linkages are in place.

With the construction of the Goat Abattoir critical to its viability will be the supply of goats for processing and with many roads leading into Bourke from areas of established goat supply still being unsealed consideration will need to be given to making these all- weather. The improvement of the road network will also be of great assistance to the promotion of tourism.

- **Telecommunications**

While the Draft covers the area of telecommunication the importance of this cannot be emphasised with the numerous applications to business now seen as essential rather than a luxury.

The NBN in Bourke will see greatly improved services as will the improved wireless connection and satellite connections but these must remain both reliable and cost effective. The service as I mentioned whilst much improved falls short of the service available in the more densely populated

areas. There are still significant areas of the Far West with NO mobile service and this is an impediment for a number of applications in business.

If the Far west is to capitalise on its potential, telecommunications has to be comparable to elsewhere within the state.

- **Changing Demographics**

The Draft report shows a dramatic increase in the population who will be over the current accepted retirement age and while the impact has been covered in the Draft, consideration needs to be made of the anticipated shortage of people in the aged care industry and given the already identified skills shortage over much of the region and the availability of younger people to fulfil these roles.

Adequate provision needs to be made for the ageing population and the facilities that are required and will be required to support this demographic change

- **Education and access to training**

An impediment to skills developments is access to training facilities. TAFE NSW has adopted a number of flexible training models which has to a degree alleviated the problem, However, the need for young apprentices to travel to Regional TAFE campuses to receive tuition puts an additional cost on both them individually and a no doubt their employers. Whilst the centres of Wentworth and Broken Hill have access to training facilities relatively locally all the other centres are hampered again by the tyranny of distance.

- **Tourism**

There is an emphasis on tourism and its importance to the economies covered by the plan and the current and future importance is not to be underestimated.

The Draft details a number of attractions and in the case of Bourke we have worked to establish the area as a destination as opposed to a stopover bringing with it increased bed nights and stimulus to the local economy

Tourism impacts right across the area and indeed across the borders and it rightfully needs an emphasis on both regional and individual areas.

Summary of the Solutions

- More investment in the regional freight network, including sealing of important regional roads
- Better transport options for our communities to connect both within and outside of the Region (including public transport and air links)
- Access to telecommunications for business and the community
- Provision of services that are matched to the needs of the community especially health and aged care
- Provision of education services to help retain youth in the community
- Better management of the Darling River system
- Recognition of the importance of the goat industry

