

Addendum Report

REPORTS FROM THE DIRECTOR PLANNING AND REGULATION

a7 [PR-CM] Draft North Coast Regional Plan - Submission

SUBMITTED BY: Strategic Planning and Urban Design

Valid



Civic Leadership

LINKAGE TO INTEGRATED PLANNING AND REPORTING FRAMEWORK:

- 1 Civic Leadership
 - 1.5 Manage and plan for a balance between population growth, urban development and environmental protection and the retention of economical viable agriculture land
 - 1.5.2 Land use plans and development controls will be applied and regulated rigorously and consistently and consider the requirements of development proponents, the natural environment and those in the community affected by the proposed development
-

SUMMARY OF REPORT:

The NSW Department of Planning and Environment (DPE) is currently exhibiting and seeking feedback on the Draft North Coast Regional Plan (the Plan) until 2 June 2016.

The Plan supersedes the current Far North Coast Regional Strategy 2006, and has been broadened to cover 13 local government areas extending from the Queensland border as far south as Mid-Coast Council.

The Plan is seen as a pragmatic and proactive document recognising the role and significance of the regions and regional centres in the provision of housing and employment generating opportunities; environmental protection, and for establishing a framework for the NSW Government to become more involved with the implementation and monitoring of the Plan through its various Departments.

The Plan also highlights the need for an alignment of cross-border issues with South-East Queensland.

Another key feature of the Plan is that Tweed Heads has been recognised, along with Coffs Harbour and Port Macquarie, as a Regional City. This categorisation reflects the population size, projected growth scenario, and regional significance of Tweed Heads looking forward, and will bring with it potentially significant benefits for accelerating employment and housing commencements, through upfront investment in key local infrastructure, as well as the opportunity for more refined policy and economic development strategies around agricultural diversification, key market access and networking, environmental and eco-based tourism. New investment and technology industries are also likely to emerge on the back of this and

Addendum Report

as the workforce population expands and diversifies; assisted by the growth of the neighbouring Gold Coast Airport and the rollout of the NBN network across the Tweed.

A welcome addition to this new Plan also is the proposal to establish a Coordination and Monitoring Committee to oversee its overall implementation, as well as a Regional Cities Steering Committee to assist with the long-term planning and investment in Tweed Heads, as the 'regional city'. These new coordination initiatives are an essential part for ensuring Tweed meets its housing and population target upward of 16,860 new houses by 2036. Much of this will be delivered in the identified 'priority release areas' of; Cobaki, Area E, Kings Forest and Bilambil, being those current release areas where essential infrastructure has been the prevailing obstacle to their development.

The DPE has signalled its intention to finalise the Plan soon after the public exhibition process is completed, and while Council staff will be raising several technical matters with the Department separately, the adoption of this new Plan and establishment of implementation working groups / committees is welcomed.

In addition, this report identifies the need to seek clarification from the NSW Government regarding the references to Coal Seam Gas (CSG) within the draft Plan and their implication for the North Coast Region.

A letter of submission is attached to this report highlighting the Council's general support for the Plan and specifically the nomination of Tweed Heads as one of the three Cities within the north coast region, should it support this view.

It should also be noted that Council officers have also separately contributed to a NOROC submission on the draft Plan, and are preparing a technical reply covering such matters as: rectifying errors in the draft Plan, seeking further information on the 'workings' of proposed committees, and how community engagement at all levels is to be conducted and monitored, as well as other environment and planning issues.

RECOMMENDATION:

That:

- 1. The letter of submission on the public exhibition of the Draft North Coast Regional Plan, as attached to this report, be approved; and**
- 2. Council's submission to the Department of Planning and Environment be submitted prior to the deadline of 2 June 2016.**

Addendum Report

REPORT:

The Draft North Coast Regional Plan (the Plan) is now on public exhibition with a call for submissions to the Department of Planning and Environment (DPE) closing on 2 June 2016.

About the Plan

The Far North Coast Regional Strategy (FNCRS), which is the predecessor to the Plan, came into effect in 2007 and provided guidance to the then six far north coast councils on their role in meeting the region's housing, employment, environment and natural resources needs.

The Plan has since been broadened to cover 13 councils, including: Mid-Coast, Port Macquarie-Hastings, Kempsey, Nambucca, Bellingen, Coffs Harbour, and Clarence Valley.

The Plan is divided into five Goals, namely:

1. A natural environment, and Aboriginal and historic heritage that is protected, and landscapes that are productive;
2. Focus growth opportunities to create a great place to live and work;
3. Housing choice, with homes that meet the needs of changing communities;
4. A prosperous economy with services and infrastructure, and
5. Improved transport connectivity and freight networks.

Each Goal is broken down into 'Directions' and 'Actions' creating a hierarchy which is clear and detailed as to the outcomes and responsibilities.

Recognition of the role and significance of the regions and regional centres in the provision of housing and employment generating opportunities and more direct involvement of the DPE in the implementation and monitoring of the Plan are seen as positive initiatives and commitments of Government through the Plan.

The role and responsibility of government is clearly defined in the Plan and seen as crucial to achieving accelerated release of residential land and efficient delivery of the housing commencements needed to meet the targets proposed.

Recognition of Tweed Heads as a Regional City, along with Coffs Harbour and Port Macquarie, will facilitate economic growth and the prosperity of these centres and surrounding areas through greater resourcing opportunities and should lead to more targeted strategic allocation of funding for key regional and local infrastructure.

One of the more beneficial initiatives of the Plan will be the commitment of Government in partnership with local councils and the industry to provide upfront investment in key local infrastructure which will assist in addressing one of the major barriers to the development of identified urban release areas. Many of these areas have been in a prolonged state of inactivity brought about by infrastructure shortage and lacking the certainty and impetus this new Plan will provide.

Addendum Report

Overall, the Plan represents a more pragmatic and positive approach backed up with a commitment to stronger collaboration and investment from the government focused on implementation.

These positive attributes, which are absent from much of the earlier policies, should not be understated; they represent a clear shift toward a more collaborative planning response to the Regions' growth pressures, and one that embraces cross collaboration with industry and community.

The far greater commitment the Government is making through this Plan to be more 'hands-on', especially with the monitoring of its aims and actions, is to be commended. It is the absence of this level of reporting that has historically made it more difficult for Government to properly understand the problems or barriers councils confront when striving for action on the ground under the former regional plans. The proposed monitoring initiatives will feedback directly on the critical issues and blockages, and enable Government to proactively tailor its policy responses to match the circumstances of individual cases. This is the Government's commitment; and it is one worthy of Council's support.

From an overarching policy perspective the draft Plan will provide greater certainty on many current issues however, Council resolved at its Meeting of 12 December 2013, among others:

"that

- 1. The Tweed Shire Council reaffirms its commitment to a moratorium with respect to Coal Seam Gas (CSG) activity and restates the position that the Tweed Shire does not welcome CSG and other Unconventional Gas Mining operations."*

While it is noted the Minister for Planning has been quoted to the effect that the NSW Government has no intention to revive coal seam gas on the north coast, it is considered that Council should seek clarification on the references to CSG within the draft Plan and their implications for the North Coast Region.

Delivering the Plan

The Plan proposes a Coordination and Monitoring Committee which is mandated to "coordinate and drive" delivery of actions. It will comprise representatives from five Government agencies, and two local government representatives.

In addition, a Regional Cities Steering Committee is proposed and is to be serviced by a range of issue-specific supporting groups. This emphasis on a framework which delivers outcomes represents another welcome initiative through which the Plan can be implemented, and performance monitored.

While the formation of the Coordination and Monitoring Committee and Regional Cities Steering Committee are seen as strong and positive initiatives worthy of Council's support, it is noted that further information regarding the roles and accountabilities of Government agencies; key stakeholders, and how the various plans will be prepared, linked, and how they will be prioritised and funded, remains to be provided and debated.

Addendum Report

Environmental Protection

The key directions under Goal 1 – ‘A natural environment, and Aboriginal and historic heritage that is protected, and landscapes that are productive’ include:

1. Protect the environment, and Aboriginal and historic heritage;
2. Protect and enhance productive farmland;
3. Safeguard aquatic habitats and water catchments;
4. Adapt for natural hazards and climate change, and
5. Deliver economic growth through sustainable use of, and access to, minerals and energy resources.

Acknowledgement of the status of existing high environmental value and heritage areas and opportunity to consider potential new areas is likewise welcomed.

In support of development of farms that can adapt to changing agricultural trends and practices, the Plan proposes that councils investigate complementary activities in rural zones where diversification and value-adding might be possible, including a range of commercial and tourism related land-uses. This is both a welcomed recognition of the need for diversification on rural land and consistent with the Rural Lands Strategy currently being prepared.

Protection of land-based and marine aquatic environments, sustainable use of mineral resources, and adaption to natural hazards and climate change are also addressed and welcomed.

Population and housing targets

The Plan states that over the next 20 years to 2036, it is projected that around 67% of future population growth will occur in the three Regional Cities and establishes the following Directions:

1. Provide sufficient housing supply to meet the demands of the North Coast;
2. Deliver housing choice to suit changing needs, and
3. Deliver more opportunities for affordable housing.

Housing targets for the Tweed will see an additional 14,000 - 16,860 dwellings constructed, an average of 843 per year, which is significantly above the current rate of supply.

The Plan has listed preliminary priority land release areas where the DPE will work with Council to identify where upfront investment in local infrastructure would accelerate housing commencements. The following four sites have been identified yielding a potential 12,786 lots:

- Cobaki;
- Bilambil;

Addendum Report

- Area E – Terranora, and
- Kings Forest.

The Plan points to a substantial increase in the number of one person households by 2036; which will impact the ability of housing targets alone to meet growth projections for the Tweed.

For the Plan to deliver the housing targets proposed, direct and pro-active whole-of-industry engagement with landowners, developers, and government agencies will be required to ensure that upfront investment in critical local infrastructure is undertaken as a priority.

The Plan requires councils to have a Local Growth Management Strategy (LGMS) before they can zone land for residential, commercial or industrial use. This is a significant policy shift under the current FNCRS. This requirement could impede rezoning of land identified for release but not yet zoned, where there is no current LGMS. While this is a sensible policy response to managing growth pressures, in their technical reply Council officers' will be recommending that the upfront need for an LGMS should be excluded from land currently identified within a council adopted urban release strategy; provided these areas are to be master-planned.

Economic development

Goal 4 – 'A prosperous economy with services and infrastructure' list the following Directions:

1. Expand the tourism sector on the North Coast;
2. Develop health service precincts;
3. Enhance education precincts;
4. Provide well located and serviced supplies of employment land to expand industry investment opportunities, and
5. Grow the region's commercial and business centres.

Creation of activity centres including health services and employment precincts is supported and is seen as a logical approach to planning future employment generating opportunities, and for guiding related infrastructure investment; however, there are numerous other potential employment clusters that could be established in the Tweed, including a cultural and creative precinct, knowledge-intensive industries, business and research park, food processing cluster, transport hub, and events hub for rural, coastal and urban events that could also be noted within the Plan.

The Plan shows that for the Tweed, approximately 19,415 people, nearly half (48%) of the employment population, either leave the Tweed to work elsewhere or come to the Tweed for work; highlighting the need for development of local employment opportunities; this compares with 17% for Coffs Harbour and 6.2% for Port Macquarie.

While it might be expected that the attraction of South East Queensland as an employment hub and large residential area would contribute to the significant numbers for the Tweed an

Addendum Report

emphasis on understanding the travel motivations of this sector, particularly those leaving the Tweed for work would assist Council in developing a strategy to reduce these numbers.

This will be exacerbated by the substantial increase in the residential population proposed; however, while the Plan provides housing and population targets and proposes upfront investment in local infrastructure to facilitate housing commencements, it has not provided targets for employment generation or directly canvassed potential incentives for employment generating initiatives. These matters will also be addressed in the officers' submission.

Protection of agricultural land

The Plan advises of a review of State and Regionally Significant Farmland and proposes 'Interim Variation Criteria' for minor variations to the mapped farmland boundary.

Agricultural production still represents one of the major contributors to the Tweed economy, and while the review is seen as an opportunity to standardise mapping across the State, the ability of this highly productive land to complement adjoining agricultural land that may not itself be rated so highly should not be overlooked. The composite productive potential of all agricultural land in the location should be given more consideration, and this will be raised in the officers' submission.

Similar to the identification of land of high and potentially high environmental value, identification of productive and potentially productive agricultural land and inclusion of planning provisions for the protection of agricultural land would assist councils in managing expectations for further development.

The Plan encourages investigation of mechanisms to support small lot agriculture which prevents "widespread" fragmentation of rural zones; however, demand for small rural allotments in the Tweed has predominantly occurred to supply a growing lifestyle focus of the retired or near retirement section of the community who are more capable of meeting the escalating costs associated with small rural residential lots.

The Department of Primary Industries (DPI) has raised their 'precautionary' concern about further subdivision of rural land based on escalated costs, inefficient allocation of infrastructure, and services, sustainability issues and importantly access to that resource to take advantage of changes in technology, markets, new plant varieties and the like.

While current trends might support rural lifestyle development and small lot sizes, Tweed's history of subdivision in the RU2 Rural Landscape zone has seen nearly 90% of allotments already below the prevailing 40 hectare standard, 71% less than 10 hectares and more than 61% less than 5 hectares.

While establishment of niche agricultural enterprises and horticulture is not opposed, this should not result in further reductions in lot sizes that may restrict access agricultural opportunities that are yet to be discovered or revealed.

It is proposed the Plan give more emphasis to the significance of all agricultural land, not focus on State and Regional Significant Farmland and BSAL, through the inclusion of guidelines for the identification of productive and potentially productive agricultural land and that planning provisions are established that ensure that small lots are utilised for

Addendum Report

agricultural purposes or allied rural industries. This issue will be raised in the officers submission.

Community engagement

While it is acknowledged that the Plan establishes a State Government policy position, engagement with the community in determining the desired future for their communities is essential to the implementation of policy at all levels.

The former Green Paper and White Paper 'A New Planning System for New South Wales' emphasised the desirability of consultation with the community in plan making, especially in the early conceptual stages of planning and development.

Community engagement and role of the community in determining the future use of land in or affecting their locality is crucial if conflict is to be reduced and consensus achieved in streamlining development.

How the community will be represented and consulted during this Plan's implementation is not particularly clear at this stage, and may become more apparent as the various committees and groups are formed. It may be detailed in a new consultation guideline similar to the "guidelines for community consultative committees", which the DPE exhibited in February 2016, or through some other new policy initiative or committee charter. This issue will also be addressed in the officers submission.

OPTIONS:

1. Approve the Council's letter of submission and delegate its lodgement by the 2 June to the General Manager, or
2. Resolve not to make a submission from Council, or
3. Advise the General Manager of the content of an alternate letter of submission to be prepared and submitted by 2 June.

CONCLUSION:

The Draft North Coast Regional Plan is a welcome update of the Far North Coast Regional Strategy 2016 and provides a range of environmental, social and economic benefits including significant opportunities through upfront investment by the government in key local infrastructure targeting an increase in housing commencements.

The greater role and responsibility of government is clearly defined as is their commitment to implementation, which is a welcomed addition to the regional planning for the north coast.

In response, a submission has been prepared for Council with the aim of advancing its support for the new Plan, as well as seeking clarification from the NSW Government regarding the references to Coal Seam Gas (CSG) within the draft Plan and their implication for the North Coast Region.

Addendum Report

This submission will be further supported with a Council officers' technical reply that likewise and consistently acknowledges the positive commitments, principles and initiatives of the Plan.

COUNCIL IMPLICATIONS:

a. Policy:

Corporate Policy Not Applicable

b. Budget/Long Term Financial Plan:

Implementation of the North Coast Regional Strategy has the potential to adjust Council's Delivery Program and Operational Plan but will also provide potential investment from the Government in critical local infrastructure. At this stage there is no foreseeable direct impact on the Council's forward budget estimates.

c. Legal:

Not Applicable.

d. Communication/Engagement:

Inform - We will keep you informed.

UNDER SEPARATE COVER/FURTHER INFORMATION:

Attachment 1.

Council's Submission to the Department of Planning and Environment on the Draft North Coast Regional Plan (ECM4061134).

Addendum Report

THIS PAGE IS BLANK