



Department of Planning and Environment

14 November 2014

Submission: Comments on the Discussion Paper for the Central Coast Regional Growth and Infrastructure Plan

Our Land Our Water Our Future would like to make the following comments and observations in relation to the above discussion paper:-

There is a lack of explanation as to how the “principles” that guide our planning have been formulated. As these form the basis of how the plan is developed it is important to get these principles right. We would contend that as they are currently worded they are potentially flawed and also lacking in certain respects.

We would suggest that these be reviewed taking into account the following issues:

- i. A key overriding principle should be that all developments are ecologically sustainable in order to protect and enhance the environment and the Central Coast lifestyle we all value.
- ii. The principle of delivering more housing should be reviewed in relation to point i. above to determine what level of population growth is sustainable for the Central Coast. The projected increase of 64250 should not form the basis of the plan if such an increase is not met by sustainable growth without negative impacts on the environment, infrastructure and lifestyle.
- iii. Economic growth should only be supported where again it is sustainable. Economic growth for growth sake is generally not sustainable and can be detrimental to the environment and lifestyle.
- iv. There is no justification as to why there needs to be a reduction in the number of workers commuting outside the region. Whilst some workers may be able to change their working arrangements through new technology, more flexible work arrangements, home working etc. It is likely that some workers will need to commute. As long as there are good public transport options and upgrades to infrastructure this should not be a major concern.
- v. The principle of collaborating with local councils and the community to develop a shared vision is to be applauded. However, this principle needs to be seen to be applied in practise and not be a show of words.
- vi. The principle of “cutting red tape.... for balanced growth” is all too often used by Government to remove environmental protections and appropriate checks and balances on developments. Who determines what is balanced growth? This should either be clearly defined or this principle needs to be removed or completely rewritten. Adequate checks and balances and the need to protect the environment should be a key principle.

- vii. Again the principle “Balancing development with protection of the environment.....” suggests that it is necessary to have a trade off with the need for development to the detriment of the environment. Again the overriding principle should be sustainability and protecting the environment.
- viii. There are some fundamental principles which are clearly missing and need to be included covering such issues as drinking water and food security for example. The protection of water catchment areas, including both ground water and aquifers should be paramount and override any economic or other strategic resource. Life and food production cannot exist without reliable safe drinking water. The discussion paper notes that the Central Coast has significant ground water resources and reliable rainfall. However, it fails to mention that the region is still on water restrictions and dam levels are far from capacity. We would therefore question some of the statements and assumptions made about drinking water. The Central Coast has been struggling for the last decade to adequately meet the demand for drinking water when a large proportion of the population are tourists and only here for part of the year.
- ix. With regard to food security, there needs to be a principle which protects and guarantees agricultural land will take precedence over developments, economic and other strategic resources. Sustainable food production can provide economic benefit, employment and food security for both NSW and Australia as a whole.
- x. Consideration should be given to include a principle that future energy requirements should be met by renewable resources in order to both protect and enhance the environment and lifestyle of the Central Coast as a tourism destination.
- xi. Consideration to a principle to limit and reduce the amount of mining, specifically coal and coal seam gas as these industries are detrimental to the environment, water security, agriculture, cultural heritage, tourism, and lifestyle and provide only limited employment opportunities when compared to more sustainable options. This principle would also contribute to meeting the requirements of climate change. It is most important that this be fully addressed within the strategy. Man made climate change is a reality and needs to be dealt with.

The discussion paper refers to both a new approach to strategic planning which is based around community participation, strategic focus, policies and decisions based on sound evidence and linking growth to infrastructure. However, the paper makes a number of references to the proposal for a regional airport. This is neither supported by a feasibility study, which clearly identifies a need for such a facility or outlines the true costs and benefits, including its commercial viability taking into account the regional airport which already exists at Newcastle. Such a feasibility study should also identify the impact on the local environment and local community as well as clearly identifying the financing of the project.

A strategic issue such as a regional airport should not be based upon the opinion of a few local councillors however, well intentioned, but should be based on proper strategic planning by all levels of government working together. Reference to the airport should not be included in the paper until the above criteria has been met.

The justification for the proposed theme park and the benefits to be obtained also need to be fully documented and measured against sustainable economic development.

The issue of community participation where communities have an early opportunity to set long term planning outcomes should also be made a key principle of the discussion document. All too

often such wording is rhetoric used by politicians and the planning authorities to allay community concern and in reality ignore genuine community concerns.

There are a number of processes which demonstrate this failing including local councils making major changes to the local LEP after it was adopted. Also the State Government Gateway Process is undermining public confidence in the planning system and the integrity of the process. Further, recent planning approval such as the Wallarah 2 mine in a major water catchment and the approval of the Calga sand mine expansion in a ground water aquifer would seem contrary to protecting the region's drinking water supplies and agricultural land, as well as the precautionary principle with regard to potential catastrophic risks.

The draft strategy also refers to the continued use of environmental offsets. This process is flawed and has been the subject of a Senate Committee review. Environmental offsets do not adequately redress the issues locally of land set aside in another part of the State and should not be used to justify approval of projects. The use of offsets has been found to be flawed and inadequately monitored.

On a final point we would like to see the inclusion of the Central Coast region being promoted as an area of sustainable development. Focusing on renewable energy, tourism, food production, cultural heritage, retirement living, health and education whilst maintaining a pristine as possible environment not degraded by mining and extractive industries. To make it a centre of excellence that can be used as a model for other regions of Australia. We have extensive coastline and waterways which are the envy of many States. It is an idyllic place to live and work which is why many have chosen to live here. Let's keep it this way for the benefit of our and future generations.

It's fundamental that the Central Coast Regional Growth and Infrastructure Plan include strategies to protect Our Land, Our Water and Our Future.

PR Burton
President
Our Land Our Water Our Future