

**Submission  
No 15**

## **INQUIRY INTO REGIONAL PLANNING PROCESSES IN NSW**

**Organisation:** Regional Development Australia Mid North Coast  
**Date received:** 1/02/2016

---

01/02/2016

The Hon Greg Pearce MLC  
Committee Chair  
Standing Committee on State Development  
Legislative Council of NSW

Dear Mr Pearce,

**Re: Inquiry into regional planning processes in NSW. Submission prepared by Regional Development Australia Mid North Coast, February 2016.**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the committee on how regional planning in NSW can be improved.

Regional Development Australia (RDA), Mid North Coast support sustainable growth in the region. We support economic development initiatives that drive job creation and affordable housing construction, while ensuring our valuable agricultural land is protected for future generations. RDA Mid North Coast are currently working on Agricultural pathways projects for youth at risk and Indigenous youth; and affordable farming for young people. Our agriculture and horticulture industries are of prime importance on the Mid North Coast.

In summary Regional Development Australia Mid North Coast support the following initiatives:

- Encouraging more high and medium density housing (including secondary dwellings) in existing residential areas;
- Encouraging the development of affordable housing;
- Encouraging the development of industrial and business land in the regions;
- Supporting residential development east of the Pacific Highway;
- Discouraging new residential estates on agricultural land west of the Pacific Highway;
- Ensuring all development includes integrated transport systems - including rail and bus services and walkable / cycle friendly communities.
- Protecting agricultural land from urban sprawl, mining and fragmentation;
- The clear identification of regional priorities in regional plans; and
- Strategies that foster local and regional entrepreneurs and business opportunities and link these to funding sources.

We provide the following response to the inquiry:

**(a) *Opportunities to stimulate regional development under the planning framework including through legislation, policy, strategy and governance:***

There are a number of available opportunities to stimulate regional development.

- Clearly identify regional priorities (within regional plans) to ensure development is compatible with the region;
- Provide flexible planning provisions within regional plans to allow for unanticipated / unplanned opportunities to be realised – encouraging entrepreneurs and business start-ups;
- Link Government grants with regional priorities to stimulate regional investment and provide certainty for investors;
- Promote regional priorities (eg. Medium density development in existing residential areas or the development of industrial and business land) with financial incentives such as reduced development contributions or infrastructure funding to attract industry investment.
- Promote agricultural and horticultural business opportunities (and food production generally) as a matter of priority.

**(b) *Constraints to regional development imposed by the planning framework, and opportunities for the framework to better respond to regional planning issues:***

RDA Mid North Coast identify the following constraints and opportunities for improvement:

- Lack of certainty surrounding funding. Linking regional plans to ongoing state or federal government funding would improve the situation;
- Current grant funding framework makes it difficult for government to agree on priority areas for regional development and many LGA's feel they are competing directly with their neighbouring area for key services and facilities. The nomination of regional priorities by the regions and the provision infrastructure to attract industry investment for unanticipated / unplanned opportunities would improve the current situation.
- A 'whole of region', integrated approach to infrastructure development, including rail, road and sea links. In particular improved connections East – West to inland towns such as Armidale and Tamworth.

**(c) *The suitability of a stand-alone regional planning Act:***

An additional layer of legislation would further complicate an already complex planning system. We should seek to build on and improve the structures that are currently in place, in preference to introducing additional legislation.

**(d) *The effectiveness of environmental planning instruments including State Environmental Planning Policies and Local Environmental Plans (including zoning) to stimulate regional development, and opportunities to improve their effectiveness***

Environmental Planning Instruments such as SEPPs and LEPs have been effective in providing for key regional development. These EPI's effectively nominate land suitable for key infrastructure, employment lands and medium - high density development and the identification of rural land.

Regional entrepreneurialism is however hampered by some LEP's where certain development on rural land is prohibited. An example is the Port Macquarie Hastings LEP (2011) RU1 – Primary Production zone, where any development not listed in items 2 or 3 of the LEP land use table is prohibited. This situation could be improved by specifying prohibited development, as is the case in the Bellingen LEP (2010). This ensures incompatible development is prohibited, without denying opportunities for compatible rural development to take place.

Further work is need to encourage medium density development in existing residential areas and to encourage more affordable housing. A successful program on the Mid North Coast has been encouraging the development of secondary dwellings (granny flats) through incentives such as low interest loans and an exemption on the payment of s94 developer contributions.

**(e) *Opportunities to increase delegations for regional councils in regard to the planning making processes***

Plan making delegations are generally effective as they are, however meaningful consultation with business and the community will be critical to identify regional priorities within regional plans.

**(f) *Opportunities for strategic planning to assist in responding to challenges faced by communities in regional areas including through Regional Plans,***

There are opportunities for strategic planning to respond to regional challenges. The key is identifying, communicating and reflecting community priorities and challenges in Regional Plans.

Once regional priorities are identified a commitment to fund the projects or provide incentives for the private sector to invest in development is necessary. RDA Mid North Coast have in place a regional plan which is updated every 3-5 years. The plan sets out a strategic framework for economic development in the region. There is an opportunity for this information to be integrated into strategic planning documents to ensure consistent planning takes place.

**(g) *Opportunities for government-led incentives that promote regional development,***

An opportunity exists to promote regional entrepreneurship, production, manufacturing and employment opportunities in our regions. Government at all levels has opportunities to lead such outcomes as does the private sector especially if they feel supported by the government. Strategies such as the \$1 billion Innovation Package announced by the Turnbull government may provide greater opportunity for regional entrepreneurship.

**(h) *Pathways to improve decision making processes for regional development proposals, including increasing the use of complying development, improving negotiation processes for voluntary planning agreements, and reducing costs associated with assessment, and***

Improvements to the planning approvals process are as relevant to regional development as development in capital cities. Times delays and development costs can create a prohibitive environment for some developments.

Increasing approvals under complying development codes is one means to reduce time pressures as is setting a maximum number of days for the processing of development applications. The identification of complying development codes would need to be in line with regional priorities.

**(i) *Any other related matters.***

Regional Plans should clearly identify regional priorities and not just be about urban growth strategies. They must also seek to foster local and regional entrepreneurship and business opportunities and be linked to funding to aid implementation. Plans could also identify how regions can be more proactive in attracting and delivering employment opportunities to the regions.

The regions need greater flexibility in planning controls, an outcomes focus and less not more regulation. We appreciate the opportunity to provide this submission to the committee and look forward to being involved in any detailed further planning.

Yours Sincerely

Lorraine Gordon, CEO  
Regional Development Australia Mid North Coast