

INQUIRY INTO REGIONAL PLANNING PROCESSES IN NSW

Organisation: Nature Conservation Council of NSW

Date received: 5/02/2016



Nature Conservation Council

The voice for nature in NSW

The Director
Standing Committee on State Development
Parliament House
Macquarie St
Sydney NSW 2000

5 February 2016

Submission to the Inquiry into regional planning processes in NSW

Dear Sir/Madam,

The Nature Conservation Council of NSW (**NCC**) is the peak environment group for New South Wales, representing more than 150 member societies from across the state.

We welcome the opportunity to make a submission to the Inquiry into regional planning processes in NSW. Many of our members are located in regional NSW, and have a strong interest in strategic planning processes that deliver positive environmental, social and economic outcomes for regional communities.

Nature is in crisis in NSW. Over the last 200 years Australia's natural heritage has been in dramatic decline, with currently over 989 species of plants and animals threatened with extinction in NSW. Water resources have been contaminated, rivers are drying up and fertile agricultural is becoming sterile. The State's planning and environment laws have failed to provide adequate protection for our natural assets and guidance for managing growth within the constraints of our natural landscapes.

We are disappointed that recent planning reform processes have failed to improve strategic regional planning in NSW. For example:

- The Government's *Planning Bill 2013* failed to adequately deliver on its promise to improve strategic planning processes in NSW, including improved community engagement in strategic planning;
- The Government's recent introduction of Part 3B of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* (via the *Greater Sydney Commission Act 2015*) was a missed opportunity to establish a robust framework for strategic planning with clear requirements for achieving environmental, social and economic outcomes; and
- The first iteration of regional plans have failed to adequately resolve land use conflicts in regional areas of NSW.

We are also concerned that the terms of reference for this inquiry are heavily focused on regional development (i.e. economic growth). While we recognise the importance of looking at opportunities and challenges for regional development, regional planning processes must deliver triple bottom line outcomes in line with the principles of ecologically sustainable development. Effective regional planning processes can recognise regional development opportunities, but must also deliver important environment and social outcomes, including the conservation of biodiversity and ecosystems, and the sustainable management of agricultural land and mineral resources.

Further, healthy and resilient environments support strong regional economies. Natural landscapes, such as beaches, rainforests, rivers and bushland are highly valued by regional communities and are integral to maintaining productive farmland and providing new opportunities for increased tourism.

Finally, it is critical that regional planning recognises and addresses impacts of climate change on the environment, natural and cultural resources, local economies, infrastructure and social well-being.

We believe there are opportunities for improving the regional planning process in NSW to deliver positive outcomes for the environment and communities, as well as regional development.

While we have not had the capacity to respond to each of the terms of reference in detail, we enclose a number of our previous reports and submissions that examine opportunities for improving strategic regional planning in NSW:

- **Our Environment, Our Communities – Integrating environmental outcomes and community engagement in the NSW Planning System** (Nature Conservation Council of NSW, Total Environment Centre and EDO NSW)

In 2012 NCC, TEC and EDO NSW released *Our Environment, Our Communities - Integrating Environmental Outcomes and Community Engagement in the NSW Planning System*¹ (enclosed).

The report identifies a number of key elements for effective strategic planning, including:

- a whole-of-Government approach to strategic and land use planning,
- baseline studies of environmental and natural resource values to underpin strategic and land use planning,
- strategic environment assessment that includes mandatory consideration of prescribed environmental criteria, and assessment of cumulative impacts
- sharing of data across sectors,
- consistency with other government strategies, including , for example, in the areas of natural resource management, transport, infrastructure and health,

¹ Available to download at www.nature.org.au/media/1170/our_environment_our_communities_0.pdf

- identification of competing land uses and values and mechanisms for achieving environmental outcomes,
- early, sustained and genuine community engagement in strategic and land use planning processes, and
- appropriate statutory weight for, and hierarchy, between planning instruments.

Appendix 1 of *Our Environment, Our Communities* outlines recommendations for legislative changes to give effect to these key elements.

- **Submissions to the draft Illawarra and Central Coast Regional Plans** (Nature Conservation Council and Total Environment Centre)

In late 2014 NCC and TEC made submissions to the first iteration of regional plans prepared by the Department of Planning and Environment (**enclosed**)². The submissions highlight our concerns that the current roll out of regional plans is happening outside of a clear legislative framework with mandated requirements, including environmental assessment or public participation. This does not provide a suitable basis for long term strategic planning, including the proper consideration of issues such as biodiversity and connectivity, access to green space and infrastructure, climate change and population planning. We are also concerned that regional plans have failed to resolve serious land use conflicts.

Our submissions highlight a number of ways that regional plans can be improved in order to deliver positive environmental, social and economic outcomes.

We understand the Parliament's desire to support regional communities and promote regional development, however we emphasise the need to ensure that regional planning processes deliver triple bottom line outcomes in line with the principles of ecologically sustainable development.

We strongly urge the committee to make recommendations for improving regional planning processes in NSW that will deliver positive outcomes for regional economies, environments and communities.

Yours sincerely,

✓

Kate Smolski
Chief Executive Officer

² Available to download at www.nature.org.au/resources/submissions/