

**Submission
No 41**

INQUIRY INTO REGIONAL PLANNING PROCESSES IN NSW

Organisation: Orana Regional Organisation of Councils
Date received: 8/02/2016

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4th February 2016

The Director
Standing Committee on State Development
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Committee Chair

Regional Planning processes in NSW (Inquiry)

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to comment on the NSW Inquiry into Regional Planning processes in NSW.

Background - about the OROC region.

- The Orana Region is currently supported by a Regional Organisation of Councils namely OROC. Member LGA's include the 12 Councils of Bogan, Bourke, Brewarrina, Cobar, Coonamble, Dubbo, Gilgandra, Narromine, Wellington, Warren, Walgett and Warrumbungle.
- The twelve local government areas of OROC have been working together delivering regional level functions for over 20 years which has provided significant savings and other benefits to member councils that have directly benefited local communities.
- OROC has delivered meaningful benefits to the Orana region and has been able to respond to the needs of the region due to its close relationship with each of its communities.
- The OROC region has well developed links, networks and relationships and this is considered that these links should be maintained and continued under the existing regional geographic footprint.
- This area is based on a natural fit of well-established communities of interest that link to the regional centre of Dubbo and relies on the existing and emerging economies, agricultural and mining industries, catchment boundaries, demographics, cultural and heritage connections.
- The strong contribution of agriculture and mining is a major characteristic of the region.
- The OROC region covers approximately 24% of the geographical area of New South Wales and comprises a diverse environmental landscape with an extensive and complex range of natural resources that covers approximately 190,000 square kilometres.
- ABS Population statistics show that there are just over 98,039 people residing in the OROC region.

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

- The planning framework can be improved by removing the layers of complexity from the NSW Planning system to make it more efficient and allow it to stimulate regional development.

- A planning framework should have clarity and transparency for the community, development proponents and practitioners.
- The introduction of a balanced development assessment system that allows consistency for development proposals whilst respecting the community's values and expectations and ensuring development can proceed in the most effective manner.

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

- Currently, regional development in NSW is restricted by the multiple layers of conflicting legislation - this can be confusing for developers, industry and the community.
- There is a noticeable lack of commitment and coordination of a 'Whole of Government' approach towards regional development.
- The obvious postponement, lack of detail, co-ordination and commitment to the Regional Growth Plans by NSW Government which are now re-named Regional Plans.

c) The suitability of a stand-alone Regional Planning Act.

- A stand alone Regional Planning Act is not supported by OROC member councils. A Regional Planning Act will only serve to complicate reforms and the planning systems for practitioners and the community.
- OROC Members support the retention of the principle of one stand-alone planning act that will set the principles and direction for a new planning system.

d) The effectiveness of EPI's including SEPPs and LEPs (including zoning) to stimulate regional development, and opportunities to improve their effectiveness.

- State Environmental Planning Policies (SEPPs) are not considered to be effective in the delivery of regional or local development outcomes.
- Overtime, the State Government has gazetted numerous new SEPPs which have added significant layers of confusion and uncertainty to the planning process.
- An integrated local planning scheme that will include state, regional and local provisions will reduce the complexity and provide a more transparent approach for developers and the community.

e) Opportunities to increase delegations for regional councils in regard to the plan making processes

- The use of delegations by regional councils is seen as a positive step in the plan making process. Regional Councils have sufficient expertise and experience in the interpretation and plan making requirements.
- The process for rezoning can be simplified through the use of delegations and removal of the bureaucratic processes.

f) Opportunities for strategic planning to assist in responding to challenges faced by communities in regional areas

- Regional Growth Plans founded on extensive community consultation and 'Whole of Government' commitment can deliver positive opportunities for regional growth and provide greater confidence and certainty for investors, industry, business and the community.

- Strategic planning via regional plans needs to be responsive to government policy changes and easily amended where change can bring about ongoing positive economic and growth benefits to rural and regional communities.

g) Opportunities for government-led incentives that promote regional development.

- Government led incentives could further include investment in community infrastructure, rural and regional employment, investment and reinvigoration of agricultural research and development, reducing payroll tax for regional manufacturers, facilitating opportunities for small business to relocate out of metropolitan areas to rural and regional areas – ensuring that local government has allocated land in appropriate areas for small and medium sized business.
- It is well recognised that changes to planning policy/process alone cannot stimulate regional development.
- This should be a ‘Whole of Government’ approach as local government cannot fill the void and carry the cost burden of significant infrastructure on its own.

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.

- Voluntary Planning Agreements have been a positive development for many communities and have the ability to facilitate and promote outcomes for growth and regional development. The flexible nature of such agreements can provide positive growth benefits.
- Investment and planning towards vital infrastructure is essential to facilitate future growth.
- Appropriate funding measures (both Federal and State) will be crucial to the long term viability and sustainability of rural and regional NSW.

The OROC Board warmly welcomes the opportunity for any further discussions on matters raised in this document. Please contact the OROC Executive Officer directly via email oroc@oroc.com.au.

Yours faithfully,

Clr Bill McAnally
Chair
Orana Regional Organisation of Councils (OROC)