

INQUIRY INTO REGIONAL PLANNING PROCESSES IN NSW

Name: Dr Ian Tiley

Date received: 5/02/2016

Dr Ian M Tiley

4th January 2016

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

Dear Sir

Submission to inquiry into regional planning processes in NSW

I appreciate the opportunity to make this submission as a private citizen, having the experience of assessing and decision making on regional planning matters under the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 since its inception, as a former member of a Regional Development Board from 2003 to 2009 and as a Chairperson of a Regional Development Australia Committee from 2009 to January 2015. I have affiliations as an Associate of the Institute for Rural Futures and as an Adjunct Research Fellow at the School of Business, both at the University of New England Armidale.

Comment and suggestions are made in relation to Inquiry Terms of Reference clauses (a), (c), (d), (e), (f) and (i).

(a) Opportunities to stimulate regional development under the planning framework

A concise set of guiding principles would be of value as an overarching statement of intent under a regional planning framework and to reflect, at a high level, the aspirations for regional development. These guiding principles would underpin the NSW State goals for investing in natural, social and economic capital and could be simply stated as:-

Economic: NSW will diversify and grow its industry base providing meaningful and sustainable employment opportunities especially in the areas of education and training, healthy living and healthy ageing, sustainable food and fibre production, creative industries and the visitor economy.

Natural: NSW will invest in maintaining and improving irreplaceable natural infrastructure, the biophysical assets, systems and processes that enable and support all forms of life, and will support healthy landscapes and seascapes to encourage a prosperous and sustainable future.

Social: NSW will celebrate and connect its heritage, lifestyle and character through a strong network of vibrant cities, communities, towns and villages.

Another suggestions under TOR part (a) is that a regional planning framework should recognise the importance of integrated regional transport plans to more effectively connect communities and identify transport infrastructure shortfalls.

(c) Suitability of a stand-alone regional planning Act

It is a given that regional planning matters often differ substantially from metropolitan planning and development concerns. A regional planning Act would need to embrace much of the existing EP & A Act and its strictures. However, I see little tangible benefit in a stand-alone Act for regional planning. Further proliferation of separate planning legislation seems unnecessary and would contradict the Government's determination to reduce the quantum of NSW legislation.

(d) Effectiveness of environmental planning instruments

In general terms, my perception is that the current suite of environmental planning instruments has served regional planning reasonably well over time. There was some concern at the time of introduction of the LEP template for local government councils to prepare new LEP's, that the template and the 'one size fits all' approach would not be in the best interests of efficient and effective planning controls and good regional developments. However, in my view, these concerns were largely unfounded and in fact the common zonings and understandings under the council LEP's across NSW have been helpful to understandings of the requirements for regional development.

(e) Increasing delegations to regional councils

There exists varying degrees of skills and capacity in regional councils regarding plan making processes. Some councils for example, lack the skilled professional staff in this area. However increased delegations in respect of the regular, more standard developments such as housing may be a worthwhile consideration. My experience is that the role and function of Joint Regional Planning Panels, for larger more complex development processes has proven to be a sound reform of regional planning processes

(f) Opportunities for strategic planning

In 2012-13, I served as part of a four member NSW Local Government Acts Taskforce. One of our core recommendations, which has been accepted by the Government, was to centralise and strengthen the Integrated Planning and Reporting (IP&R) regime in local government. Since the inception of IP&R in 2010, there has been I believe marked improvement in council performance and in community engagement and accountability. Any enhancement of strategic planning processes ought to compliment, support and strengthen the IP&R regime.

(i) Other matter – relationship of regional planning processes to the financial ‘health’ of regional and rural local governments.

The Inquiry needs to have regard to the limits of financial capacity of at least some regional and rural local government areas. To impose further burdens on the sector by way of additional regulation under new regional planning processes would amount to new and unsustainable cost shifting.

Enhancements to regional planning should be introduced with an improved capacity of local government to cost recover for its role in regional planning. If local government considers that it is being fairly treated in this regard then the prospects of a much improved partnership with the NSW Government in this area will be greatly improved.

Conclusion

I appreciate the opportunity of contributing to this important Inquiry and would be willing to appear before the Committee should that be considered appropriate.

Yours sincerely

Dr Ian Tiley

Emeritus Mayor