

INQUIRY INTO REGIONAL PLANNING PROCESSES IN NSW

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NSW Senate Inquiry into Regional Planning Processes
Supplementary Submission
Governance and Implementation

This supplementary submission responds to some questions raised during the course of the Planning Institute of Australia's (PIA) presentation to the Inquiry on 11 March 2016. PIA NSW appreciates the opportunity to elaborate on some of the points made particularly in relation to the Hunter and Illawarra-Shoalhaven regional planning processes.

Introduction

1. Any Plan is only as good as its implementation. A competent plan contains directions, actions and proposed structures that connect logically and have the capacity to be readily implemented. Good governance is vital to effective implementation.
2. This submission is directed mainly at the draft Hunter Regional Plan which recently came off public exhibition and the Illawarra-Shoalhaven Regional Plan which was adopted in late 2015.
3. While PIA acknowledges that there is emphasis given to delivery in each of these regional plans, the sub-sections on "delivering the plan" are vague and lacking in detail and should in our view be much more integrated with implementation.

Context

4. PIA NSW understands that there is a progressive process involved in achieving the cohesion and leadership of State Government agencies to deliver regional plans. This is acknowledged as an evolving process and PIA NSW strongly supports the Minister for Planning and the Department of Planning & Environment as the lead government agencies who are liaising with the various State agencies to enable effective implementation of the regional plans.
5. Monitoring, review and particularly adaptation are crucial given the dynamics and unpredictability of the social, economic, environmental and technological context in which the 20-year plans will be implemented. Beneficial impacts of the NBN and the decline of coal mining are two examples of change that crucially need to be monitored.

6. There are lessons to be learned from the operation of the Urban Development Committees and the Urban Development Programs in the Illawarra in order to ensure that the proposed Regional Co-ordination and Monitoring Committees (RCMC) will be effective in the future.

What makes for good governance and implementation of Regional Plans?

7. There are a number of crucial ingredients to achieving effective implementation and governance of regional plans:
 - a) Clarity of directions and actions to facilitate implementation, that is, more precision as to what should be done, by whom and by when;
 - b) Strong leadership to ensure governance structures and clear lines of accountability to Ministers, NSW Treasury and to the NSW Cabinet;
 - c) Prioritisation of actions and key performance indicators to instil accountability and measure progressive implementation;
 - d) Upfront and strong commitment to monitoring and adaptation of the Plan over time, including a culture of responding to the “unpredictables” and contingencies;
 - e) Enabling and fostering positive working relationships with civic leaders: in the case of the Hunter this would include Members of Parliament, Mayors, Vice-Chancellors of Universities, CEO of Newcastle Airport, CEO of the Newcastle Ports Corporation, leaders of professional associations, etc. to utilise intellectual capital and knowledge, develop cohesive local momentum and involve those responsible for implementation; and
 - f) Annual independent auditing of implementation relative to Plan and KPIs.
8. The Draft Hunter Regional Plan should follow the example of the Illawarra - Shoalhaven Regional Plan which, in Appendix 2, summarises the actions and is more precise around integrating directions, actions, lead agencies, key stakeholders and timing. It is understood that each Action will have an “Implementation Plan” drafted by the Department of Planning and Environment, which we would submit, should be transparent.
9. The role of the Hunter Regional and Hunter City Plans Co-ordination and Monitoring Committee should be defined within the Plan when adopted in terms of responsibilities for implementation, monitoring review and adaptation;
10. The effectiveness of such a Committee depends on strong leadership, an annual business plan with objectives and key performance indicators that at the end of each year can relate performance back to demonstrable achievement of the vision, the four goals and the directions contained in the Regional Plan;
11. Establishing an ‘oversighting’ model for regional planning based on the Greater Sydney Commission model would provide a mechanism for ensuring consistency and delivery to set timeframes; and

12. Currently the proposed structure and composition of a Hunter Co-ordination and Monitoring Committee involves 11 Councils (possibly reducing to nine), six State agencies and supporting groups with the Chair being the NSW Department of Planning & Environment. This will be a large Committee which may prove unwieldy. PIA NSW recommends that a broader sub-regional perspective needs to be adopted and the number of members on the Committee should be reduced to no more than a dozen to ensure that it has the greatest chance of succeeding. To effectively undertake its role it needs to be streamlined so that it can operate efficiently and in a truly representative fashion.

Recommendations

13. PIA NSW recommends that:
 - a) The governance models for the delivery of regional plans should be clearly set out in the various Regional Plans and adequately resourced to undertake the task of ensuring effective implementation of the those Plans;
 - b) The RCMCs should include senior representatives from the Department of Planning and Environment, NSW Treasury, NSW Transport/Roads and Maritime Services and the Department of Premier and Cabinet;
 - c) Local Government needs to be represented on the RCMCs at a district or sub regional level rather than every Council having its own representative;
 - d) Regional Plans, when adopted, should explicitly acknowledge that integration with infrastructure planning, budgeting, funding and delivery is critical to the effective implementation of the Plan and clearly integrate and prioritise the key infrastructure required;
 - e) That an Annual Implementation Report be prepared by each RCMC and that it be made publicly available.