Plans unveiled to protect biodiversity in Western Sydney’s growth centres

The NSW Government is seeking comments on a plan to protect nationally significant environmental lands while ensuring new homes can be built in Sydney’s North West and South West Growth Centres.

Planning Minister Tony Kelly said the Growth Centres -- which will accommodate around 500,000 people over the next 30 years -- contain areas of high environmental value and need to be secured.

“At the same time, landholders and developers need a consistent process that provides certainty if sustainable development is to proceed in regions earmarked to accommodate much of Sydney’s greenfield growth,” Mr Kelly said.

“The NSW Government simplified its environmental assessment process in 2007 by introducing biodiversity certification -- a tool that identified and protected areas of significant environmental value before any development commenced – to remove the need for costly, site by site assessment of each development.

“However, site by site assessments are still required under Commonwealth law as there may be nationally significant matters in need of protection.

“That is why the Australian and NSW Governments have agreed to undertake a Strategic Assessment of proposed Growth Centres development -- to remove the need for multiple assessments.

“It will ensure matters of national environmental significance are managed through a single process that evaluates areas suitable for future development and secures those areas needing protection for their environmental value.

“This is a modern, sensible approach to planning. It is a forward thinking, logical way of aligning the development needs of growing cities with environmental protection.”

As part of the Strategic Assessment process, Mr Kelly said from today on exhibition will be

- the draft Sydney Growth Centres Program Report, which outlines the NSW Government’s approach to housing, employment and conservation in the Growth Centres (and related infrastructure); and

- the draft Strategic Assessment Report, which analyses the potential impacts and outcomes of the Sydney Growth Centres Program as they relate to the requirements of the Commonwealth’s Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999;

Mr Kelly said the Growth Centres already achieve a good environmental outcome by focussing most of Sydney’s greenfield expansion within two areas totalling 270 square kilometres.

“The Growth Centres help us to reduce Sydney’s urban sprawl by up to 500 square kilometres, based on past development practice,” he said.
“This proposed approach goes further, allowing both governments to map out long-term development, conservation and heritage priorities in the Growth Centres, while providing certainty to the community for sustainable urban expansion.

“We want to build on the State’s Biodiversity Certification to ensure the Commonwealth’s requirements are met and that comprehensive and consistent environmental outcomes are achieved.”

Mr Kelly said Biodiversity Certification helps protect endangered areas by delivering a levy on Growth Centres development into a fund for conservation offsets.

“Through this fund, the NSW Government is able to purchase conservation land or enter into Biobanking agreements that help private landowners secure valuable conservation areas forever.

The public are encouraged to view the draft reports and are invited to provide comments. The information can be viewed at the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water offices at Level 14, 59 Goulburn Street, Sydney and the Department of Planning offices at Level 5, 10 Valentine Avenue, Parramatta and 23-33 Bridge St, Sydney.

The draft reports and exhibition material are also available from the following local councils:

- Blacktown City Council 62 Flushcombe Road
  Blacktown NSW 2148
- Camden Council 37 John Street
  Camden NSW 2570
- Campbelltown City Council Cnr Queen and Broughton Streets
  Campbelltown NSW 2560
- Hawkesbury City Council 366 George Street
  Windsor NSW 2756
- Hills Shire Council 129 Showground Road
  Castle Hill NSW 2154
- Liverpool City Council 1 Hoxton Park Road
  Liverpool NSW 2170

The exhibition period closes at 5pm on 25 June 2010.

Further Information is available by contacting the Community Information Line on 1300 730 550 or by emailing community@planning.nsw.gov.au.