Response given to the Newcastle Herald regarding the progress of a number of Hunter LEPs

Response given on 28 June in response to questions about the status of a number of council-wide local environmental plans (LEPs) in the Hunter region:

The Department is working constructively with all councils in the State to deliver new council-wide local environmental plans (LEPs) in a timely manner. This is also the case in the Hunter region where new LEPs have already been delivered in the Taree, Muswellbrook and Gloucester council areas.

LEPs in a number of other council areas in the Hunter have also been identified as ‘priority LEPs’ including Cessnock, Lake Macquarie, Maitland, Newcastle and Wyong. LEPs have generally been prioritised due to being either already well-advanced, economically important or in a high growth area.

Most of these LEPs are well advanced and expected to be completed this year. However, the Lake Macquarie and Wyong LEPs are expected to be finalised in 2012.

The Department also administers the LEP Acceleration Fund which provides assistance to local councils in delivering new council-wide LEPs, with a particular focus on streamlining the delivery of new LEPs in Metropolitan Sydney, the Illawarra and the Lower Hunter.

Broadly speaking, the number of priority LEPs in the Hunter is consistent with other regions of the State, and local councils in the region have generally been keen to review and update their planning controls.

Whilst it is not specifically identified as a priority LEP, the Dungog LEP is also well advanced and may be completed this year.

With regard to Port Stephens, work is underway by the council and the LEP should be completed next year. Both Upper Hunter and Great Lakes councils are also progressing their LEPs and the Department is working with both councils to determine appropriate timeframes for completion.

Overall, the Department is satisfied with the progress of new comprehensive LEPs in the Hunter and will continue to work collaboratively with councils on the delivery of these LEPs that will guide strategic planning in the Hunter for years to come.

It should also be noted, the Government has announced that a number of Strategic Regional Land Use Plans will be developed across the State to guide the interaction of competing land uses, for example mining and agriculture. The Upper Hunter region has been identified as one of the first areas to have a Strategic Regional Land Use Plan completed.