GOAL 2 – Focus growth opportunities to create a great place to live and work

The North Coast is well known for its diverse rural and coastal landscapes and world-class natural environment. The draft Plan will manage growth to protect the conservation and economic value of these important assets so that the region remains a great place to live and work.

The population of the North Coast is growing, especially in the three regional cities – Tweed, Coffs Harbour and Port Macquarie – and in the coastal area. The draft Plan adopts a balanced approach to managing this growth by directing development to less environmentally constrained areas, planning for increased growth of the North Coast’s three regional cities, and introducing controls on development in the environmentally sensitive coastal area.

Over the next 20 years to 2036, it is projected that around 67 per cent of future population growth will occur in three high-growth areas: Tweed Heads, Coffs Harbour and Port Macquarie (see Figure 8). The natural qualities of these cities have made them desirable places to live and contributed to their status as the region’s largest urban centres, with the highest rates of economic and population growth.

The draft Plan promotes the development of these regional cities to drive future prosperity for the North Coast. This will be achieved by providing opportunities for greater housing choice; promoting employment growth in health, education, aviation and other services; and improving the public domain and open space to promote healthier urban environments. The growth of surrounding regional centres and towns will be integrated with that of the regional cities by reinforcing transport and other links.

Strong growth has placed pressure on the coastal area, which contains some of the most sensitive environmental areas. Sustainably managing the coastal area is vital to protecting the region’s highly valued environmental assets and cultural heritage for future generations.

The draft Plan aims to direct urban growth to the most suitable areas to preserve biodiversity. Natural constraints mean incremental outward growth of urban areas in coastal areas cannot continue indefinitely. Areas for urban growth are identified and mapped in Appendix B. These areas will accommodate a range of uses, including housing, industry, business, infrastructure, community facilities, tourism and parks. Development in these locations will take account of the mapped areas of potential high environmental value and regionally significant farmland. The draft Plan provides a framework for considering minor variations to urban growth areas when criteria are met.

Local growth management strategies, prepared by councils, will allow for new land release areas to be carefully examined and planned. The growth of inland centres and towns will be encouraged.

The NSW Government will work with councils to deliver housing, industrial and commercial activities, and supporting infrastructure, in locations that manage the potential impacts of this development on the natural environment, cultural heritage and significant farmland. Urban design will have an important role in creating inclusive, attractive and liveable places.
The draft Plan:

- consolidates Tweed Heads, Coffs Harbour and Port Macquarie as regional cities for jobs growth, supported by high-quality residential development and higher-order cultural and government services;
- directs urban and rural residential development to protect high environmental value areas and focus new housing in and around existing towns;
- includes 57,400 hectares of land in urban growth areas, with the capacity to accommodate more than the forecast 72,200 additional dwellings needed by 2036;
- permits variations to urban growth areas where councils identify insufficient available land and the proposal is minor and contiguous (if located in the coastal area), it does not significantly affect areas of high environmental value, or Aboriginal and historic heritage, and infrastructure needs present no cost to Government; and
- commits to a review of the North Coast Urban Design Guidelines to promote high-quality development that complements the region’s climate, natural features, landscape and character.

**FIGURE 8: POPULATION OF THE NORTH COAST 1991-2036**

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics and Department of Planning and Environment’s population projections
**DIRECTION 2.1 Grow the North Coast’s regional cities as a focus for economic activity and population growth**

Over the last decade, almost 60 per cent of the region’s population growth has taken place in the local government areas of Port Macquarie-Hastings, Coffs Harbour and Tweed. Together, these local government areas support more than 234,600 residents, or 43 per cent of the region’s population (see Table 2). Each of these local government areas has a large and growing regional city. Many of the people moving to the regional cities are from Sydney, Queensland and overseas.

In 2011, 42 per cent of the region’s jobs were concentrated in the regional cities, and journey to work data from the same period shows net daily inflows from surrounding areas to Coffs Harbour and Port Macquarie. The Tweed experiences an outflow of workers to Queensland due to the city’s proximity to the Gold Coast (see Figure 9). The higher-order commercial services and institutions located in the regional cities provide many of the high-value and high-skill employment opportunities. These institutions will continue to drive employment growth.

The NSW Government’s vision is that the regional cities continue to be the focus for jobs growth, supported by liveable, high-quality residential development and a range of higher-order cultural and civic services. Tweed Heads, Coffs Harbour and Port Macquarie will continue to serve not only local communities, but also the residents of the broader region.

**TABLE 2: SHARE OF POPULATION, HOUSING AND JOBS IN REGIONAL CITIES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Tweed Shire</th>
<th>Coffs Harbour</th>
<th>Port Macquarie-Hastings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Share of regional population (2014)</td>
<td>16.5%</td>
<td>13.1%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projected share of regional population (2036)</td>
<td>17.8%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share of regional housing (2011)</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projected share of regional housing (2036)</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share of jobs (2013-14)</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>15.2%</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share of Gross Regional Product (2013-14)</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7,000 people come to Tweed for work
12,415 people living in Tweed work elsewhere
3,000 people come to Coffs Harbour for work
2,700 people living in Coffs Harbour work elsewhere
3,000 people come to Port Macquarie for work
24,300 people live and work in Port Macquarie
1,500 people living in Port Macquarie work elsewhere

20,800 people live and work in Tweed
27,700 people live and work in Coffs Harbour

Increasing the residential population of the regional cities

Urban renewal in the regional cities will encourage a greater mix of dwelling types, a more diverse range of activities and more vibrant precincts.

The regional cities include prime locations for greater housing choice, particularly townhouses, villas and apartments that can take advantage of the services and transport already available. Providing more housing opportunities in the regional cities will also promote the efficient use of existing and new infrastructure and provide greater access to jobs, services and lifestyle opportunities for a broader range of people.

Urban feasibility modelling undertaken by the NSW Government and councils has identified areas where multi-unit development can realistically occur and where a review of planning and development controls (such as parking requirements and height controls) will be effective in renewing regional cities.

These findings will be used to review and update local planning and development controls to make the regional cities more attractive for higher-density residential development and to meet the 40 per cent target for additional multi-unit housing outlined in Goal 3.

Support the growth and renewal of growth precincts

Each regional city has a number of growth precincts that shape how it will develop into the future (see Figure 10). The growth precincts contribute significantly to the wider regional economy and influence the region more broadly through the services and opportunities they provide. They are job generators and can drive sustainable employment growth for the North Coast.

The NSW Government aims to strengthen the interactions between precincts to support the regional cities as centres for jobs and housing and to underpin growth.

More information on the work the NSW Government will do in these growth precincts is provided in Goal 4 (Directions 4.2 and 4.3) and Goal 5 (Direction 5.2).

Regional cities, regional centres and towns support each other’s growth

Regional centres and towns are often within commuting distance of the regional cities and offer complementary housing and employment opportunities. Reinforcing the links between these places will help accommodate projected population and housing growth by providing a wide range of lifestyle choices and employment lands supply across the subregions (see Figure 11). For example, some employment activities, such as large lot industrial uses, may be best suited to certain regional centres and towns where there may be fewer constraints and cheaper land supply.
City Centres – These are core civic, employment and service hubs. They offer greater housing choice close to services. Other growth precincts have developed in locations that are accessible to or near city centres to benefit from the activities and networks they offer.

Urban Release Areas – These will support the growing population, and will in turn drive demand for the services offered in growth precincts, as well as housing some of the working population.

Employment Lands – These will support employment capacity and a growing economy by encouraging the establishment of new industries and expansion of existing operations.

Education Precincts – These will accommodate the growing demand for tertiary education on the North Coast and build on existing strong links with industry sectors to provide a skilled workforce and student housing options.

Health Services Precincts – These will underpin the strength of the health sector by addressing increasing pressure from population growth and ensuring the wellbeing of North Coast residents.

Airport Precincts – These tourism and business gateways to all growth precincts and the wider subregions will improve access to and from the North Coast.
ACTION 2.1.1 Establish governance arrangements for the delivery of investment and infrastructure in the regional cities

The NSW Government will prioritise planning for housing and infrastructure in areas where demand from population growth is the greatest – the regional cities. By investing in services and infrastructure in regional cities, the NSW Government and councils can help create a wider variety of jobs and a high-quality living environment for the entire region.

A Regional Cities Steering Committee will oversee the delivery of the Regional Cities Action Plan (see Action 2.1.2). The Department of Planning and Environment will chair the steering committee, which will include council officers and representatives from relevant State agencies, and will report to the Regional Plan Coordination and Monitoring Committee.

The NSW Government will:
- establish a Regional Cities Steering Committee with councils to coordinate delivery of investment and infrastructure in Coffs Harbour, Tweed Heads and Port Macquarie.

Regional centres and towns support the growth of regional cities and the region by:
- providing complementary lifestyle and housing choices;
- providing complementary infrastructure and services; and
- complementing employment land supply.

Support interactions by improving connectivity and promoting subregional relationships.

Regional cities are accessed by the regional population for higher-order services and employment opportunities.
Figure 12: Tweed Regional City and Growth Precincts

- Existing Urban Release Area
- Urban Renewal
- Employment Land
- Proposed Employment Land
- Business Centre
- Proposed Business Corridor
- City Centre
- Mixed Tourism/Residential
- Future Knowledge Precinct
- Education Precinct
- Future Education Precinct
- Health Services Precinct
- Civic Precinct
- Regional Sports Precinct
- Airport Precinct
- Urban Area
- National Park
- Watercourse
- Non-Urban Area
- Regional Connection
- Future Gold Coast Rapid Transit Link
- Local Connection
- Proposed Rail Alignment
- Pacific Highway
- Major Roads
Figure 13: Coffs Harbour Regional City and Growth Precincts
FIGURE 14: PORT MACQUARIE REGIONAL CITY AND GROWTH PRECINCTS
ACTION 2.1.2 Prepare a Regional Cities Action Plan

The Regional Cities Action Plan will identify opportunities to attract additional investment in the regional cities and growth precincts, such as infrastructure and public domain projects to support new development. Scope exists to increase the range of compatible land uses in each growth precinct to promote economic viability and vitality.

The plan will also consider opportunities to unlock surplus and under-used government land to deliver locations for more housing and jobs.

The infrastructure to support housing and jobs growth will be identified, and the most appropriate staging and sequencing of investments will be established.

Where necessary, transport modelling will be used to highlight the implications of growth for infrastructure.

The NSW Government will continue to partner with councils to:
- improve planning provisions to promote renewal and housing diversity;
- identify infrastructure constraints and public domain improvements that can make areas more attractive for investment;
- coordinate infrastructure delivery and establish the most appropriate staging and sequencing of development; and
- undertake transport modelling to understand the implications of growth.

DIRECTION 2.2 Align cross-border planning with South East Queensland

Growth in South East Queensland is expected to have an increasing influence on the development of the NSW Far North Coast.

In the 30 years to 2011, the population of South East Queensland doubled from 1.5 million to over 3.1 million. The Queensland Government projects the population in this area is expected to grow to around 5.5 million by 2041. By 2041, an extra 470,000 people are expected to be living on the Gold Coast, which adjoins the Tweed Shire.

The Tweed has become an integral part of the South East Queensland urban area, which provides many higher-order services and facilities to the Far North Coast. In many ways, Tweed Heads and Coolangatta function as ‘twin towns’, for example, retail and business opportunities and healthcare and education services are accessed by residents from either side of the state border.

Development on the Tweed Coast will continue to provide housing and job opportunities to support growth in South East Queensland, particularly for new residential land release areas and employment lands supply. Conversely, South East Queensland residents are increasingly using the NSW North Coast for tourism and recreational activities.

The influence of South East Queensland on the North Coast diminishes with increasing distance from the Gold Coast. In the southern portion of the Far North Coast, Lismore and Ballina operate as regional centres with greater autonomy from Tweed Heads, compared to the regional centres of other subregions. These centres have catchments that are big enough to support major facilities like the Lismore Base Hospital, Southern Cross University and Ballina Byron Gateway Airport. The influence of South East Queensland is expected to spread further south as growth pressures increase and accessibility improves.
ACTION 2.2.1 Collaborate with relevant authorities to understand the implications of growth in South East Queensland on the Far North Coast

Cross-border servicing and land use relationships will need to be considered when planning for the growth of Tweed Heads as a regional city and for the Far North Coast over the next 20 years.

The NSW Government will:

- work with Tweed Shire Council, Gold Coast City Council and the Queensland Government to better integrate cross-border land use planning; and
- work with the NSW Cross-Border Commissioner and Tweed Shire Council to investigate barriers to economic, housing and jobs growth.

DIRECTION 2.3 Focus growth to the least sensitive and constrained areas to protect natural assets

The North Coast has had a low-density settlement pattern that has exacerbated growth pressure on farmland and sensitive coastal environments. The demand for urban development remains strongest in coastal locations; however, continued development along the coast could result in the underuse of infrastructure and services in major centres outside the coastal area, and increase pressure on the fragile coastal environment.

The draft Plan manages growth to protect the region’s rural and natural landscapes, and make the most efficient use of land allocated for urban development. It provides certainty for future urban development; manages pressures on the coastal environment; creates opportunities for innovative responses to changing housing needs; provides a choice of housing; and maximises the use of existing urban areas and services.

Coastal Area

The draft Plan identifies a coastal area comprising land east of the planned Pacific Highway alignment, plus the urban areas of Tweed Heads around the Cobaki Broadwater. The coastal area covers 13 per cent of the region and is home to 49 per cent of the population, and is subject to the greatest growth pressures on the North Coast.

The coastal area is ecologically diverse, containing wetlands, lakes, estuaries, aquifers and significant farmland, and is of local, State, national and international environmental significance. Much of this land is also subject to natural hazards, including flooding, coastal inundation, erosion and recession.

As the region grows, development pressure is expected to continue in this area. A balanced approach to the use of this land is necessary to safeguard the sensitive coastal environment.

The NSW Government and councils will manage the growth of new land release in the coastal area by directing development to the mapped urban growth areas. This will distribute housing across the region and strengthen the growth of non-coastal regional centres, towns and villages. These non-coastal areas have capacity for additional rural residential and urban housing and will help to avoid pressure on the sensitive coastal environment. This will help to maintain the ‘green breaks’ between the coastal settlements and the coastal area’s distinctive character.

ACTION 2.3.1 Focus future growth into the mapped urban growth areas

Urban growth areas (see Appendix B) are identified to accommodate growth; to protect important farmland, fragile and vulnerable ecosystems, and heritage assets; and to reduce potential land use conflict.
Most of the urban settlements in the region are separated by farmland, bushland, floodplains or environmental features that give the region its distinctive character. The urban growth areas will maintain this separation to protect the important environmental values that attract people to the region.

The proposed urban and employment land in the urban growth areas represent new land release development opportunities that will require rezoning. Not all these areas will be suitable for urban use. Further assessment will be needed to determine capability, environmental and heritage impacts and potential yield. The urban growth areas will be used by councils to define the land available to investigate for release as they prepare their local growth management strategies (see Action 2.3.2).

Councils may identify a need for variations to the urban growth areas as new information becomes available or to correct anomalies. Any proposed variations will be in accordance with the Urban Growth Area Variation Principles (see Table 3) and will need to be considered and justified through councils’ strategic planning or rezoning processes.

Only minor and contiguous variations to urban growth areas in the coastal area will be considered due to its environmental sensitivity, and the range of land uses competing for this limited area.

To provide maximum potential for urban development, active and passive open spaces may be located outside the urban growth areas. When deciding whether to locate future open space outside the urban growth areas, high value environmental, heritage or natural resource areas should be avoided.

The NSW Government will:
- require that councils only zone land for residential, commercial or industrial use if it is consistent with a local growth management strategy agreed between council and the Department of Planning and Environment, and
- prepare Statewide land release criteria to assess locations for residential, commercial, rural residential and industrial uses across regional NSW.

**ACTION 2.3.2 Identify residential, commercial and industrial uses in urban growth areas by developing local growth management strategies**

It is important that growth is sustainable and strikes a balance between competing land uses so there are positive environmental, economic and social outcomes for the community. In growing communities, planning is essential to provide infrastructure and facilities in the most effective and efficient way.

Directing future growth to locations that can sustain additional development, and are readily serviced, will facilitate efficient and sustainable growth. For instance, housing should be located close to centres and in the least constrained areas; industrial development should consider potential land use conflicts; and commercial development should be focused in existing centres.

Local growth management strategies will enable communities to assess the broader implications and consequences of identifying locations for certain land uses in proposed urban and employment land.

The NSW Government will:
- require that councils only zone land for residential, commercial or industrial use if it is consistent with a local growth management strategy agreed between council and the Department of Planning and Environment, and
- prepare Statewide land release criteria to assess locations for residential, commercial, rural residential and industrial uses across regional NSW.

**ACTION 2.3.3 Minimise the impact of rural residential development**

More than 32,600 hectares of land is currently zoned for rural residential development across the region. Rural residential development should occur in appropriate locations to manage and minimise the potential impacts on farming activities, environmental and heritage assets, and landscape values.

No new rural residential development will be permitted in the coastal area, other than development already zoned, or in an approved
### TABLE 3: URBAN GROWTH AREA VARIATION PRINCIPLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Urban Growth Area Variation Principles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>POLICY</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The variation needs to be consistent with the objectives and outcomes in the <em>Draft North Coast Regional Plan</em> and any relevant Section 117 Directions and State Environmental Planning Policies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>INFRASTRUCTURE</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The variation needs to consider the use of committed and planned major transport, water and sewerage infrastructure and have no cost to government.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The variation should only be permitted if adequate and cost-effective infrastructure can be provided to match the expected population.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ENVIRONMENTAL AND FARMLAND PROTECTION</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The variation should avoid areas of high environmental or heritage value.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The variation should avoid areas mapped as significant farmland, unless consistent with the interim variation criteria prior to finalising the farmland mapping review.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LAND USE CONFLICT</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The variation must be appropriately separated from incompatible land uses, including agricultural activities, sewage treatment plants, waste facilities and productive resource lands.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AVOIDING RISK</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The variation must avoid physically constrained land identified as:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- flood prone;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- bushfire prone;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- highly erodible;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- having a severe slope; and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- having acid sulfate soils.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>HERITAGE</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The variation must protect and manage Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal heritage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>COASTAL AREA</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only minor and contiguous variations to urban growth areas in the coastal area will be considered due to its environmental sensitivity, and the range of land uses competing for this limited area.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
current or future local growth management strategy (or rural residential land release strategy).

The NSW Government’s Settlement Planning Guidelines (2007) guide councils on the North Coast about planning for rural residential development and the issues they need to consider, such as:

- avoiding areas prone to natural hazards, including bushfire and flood;
- avoiding areas of high environmental value and Aboriginal and historic heritage significance;
- potential impacts on, and land use conflict risks to agricultural activities and productive natural resources;
- the proximity and access to employment and higher-order services in the region;
- the location of declared water catchments and potential impacts on water quality or supply; and
- the existing supply and demand for rural residential lots in the area, including in neighbouring local government areas.

The NSW Government will require that:

- land is only zoned for future rural residential development if it is consistent with a strategy that is:
  - agreed between council and the Department of Planning and Environment; and
  - consistent with the Settlement Planning Guidelines.

**DIRECTION 2.4 Provide great places to live through good design**

The North Coast has a range of settlements that offer a variety of lifestyles. Well-designed settlements help residents develop a sense of community and wellbeing. High-quality urban design can increase the economic viability of development and deliver social and environmental benefits, for example, by providing more walking and cycling opportunities that have flow-on benefits in terms of healthy lifestyles.

Urban areas should have access to natural features, such as coastal foreshore and riparian land, to maintain their ecological values. There should also be sufficient open space for community recreation and social interaction, and nature conservation.

**ACTION 2.4.1 Support council-led precinct planning**

Councils should consider precinct planning as a way of promoting new developments that enrich the quality of life and wellbeing of residents. Precinct planning can guide the expansion of specific places and establish a framework for achieving goals, such as attracting new housing development or investment in renewal. Precinct planning should be considered for areas that may undergo change as a result of bypasses from the Pacific Highway upgrade.

The NSW Government will:

- improve coordination between State agencies, councils and the private sector to support council-led precinct planning.
Case study: Kingscliff Locality Planning, Tweed Heads

The urban coastal areas of the Tweed Shire have experienced some of the strongest growth on the North Coast. The area offers a high-quality lifestyle and more affordable housing than is found in South East Queensland. The popularity of the Tweed Coast is expected to continue, particularly as opportunities for greenfield development on the Gold Coast become limited.

Tweed Shire Council has planned for the population of the Kingscliff local centre to grow to 20,000 people. This will make it the service centre for the Tweed Coast’s network of villages.

Council has begun planning for Kingscliff as it transitions into this new role, to plan for growth that meets community expectations while still retaining the area’s local character and identity.

The Council’s early findings suggest that Kingscliff can play a stronger role beyond simply providing local services. Large areas of relatively unconstrained land exist close to Kingscliff that may be used for significant residential, tourism and employment development, which could contribute to the growth of Tweed Heads as a regional city.

Council’s land use planning will focus on consolidating and expanding the town centre, identifying infill and greenfield residential development opportunities, establishing a knowledge precinct that will offer jobs and commercial investment opportunities, and growing the aquaculture industry.

ACTION 2.4.2 Encourage healthy living by increasing options for public transport, walking and cycling

Transport for NSW, in partnership with councils, has created a number of programs in regional cities, centres and towns to increase opportunities for people to be more active and therefore healthier. They include the Community Transport Program, Cycling Towns Program, Walking Communities Program, the Connecting Centres Cycling Program and NSW Bike Week.

These programs focus on:
- prioritising infrastructure improvements for two-kilometre footpaths and five-kilometre cycling tracks that lead to town centres, as well as improving access to transport interchanges; and
- using information and events to promote walking and cycling as a form of transport.

The NSW Government will:
- work with councils to develop and implement programs that improve opportunities for walking and cycling, focusing first on regional cities.

ACTION 2.4.3 Review the North Coast Urban Design Guidelines

The distinctive character of the region’s settlements sets it apart from other parts of NSW and brings tourists back to the region year after year. New development needs to be sympathetic to the character of certain areas. The North Coast Urban Design Guidelines (2008) help planners and designers recognise the distinctive character of the region’s centres and encourage high-quality development that is sensitive to the area’s climate, natural features, landscape and character.

Urban design continues to evolve over time. The review will be made to support further improvements in housing design, help improve sustainable living and respond to the North Coast’s changing climate.

The NSW Government will:
- review the North Coast Urban Design Guidelines.