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Draft North Coast Regional Plan
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Cover image: South West Rocks near Kempsey
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Foreword

The natural environment of the North Coast is one of the most popular features of the State. It is one of the main reasons residents choose to live in the region and 11 million tourists come to visit each year. The region will continue to be an appealing place for new residents and visitors and we need to plan for its future.

The Draft North Coast Regional Plan is our proposed blueprint for the next 20 years and it is a plan for both the Mid North Coast and the Far North Coast.

The draft Plan outlines a vision, goals and actions that focus on a sustainable future for the region as it grows that protects the environment, builds a prosperous community and offers attractive lifestyle choices for residents.

New homes, jobs and services will be directed primarily to the region’s cities – Port Macquarie, Coffs Harbour and Tweed Heads – where two-thirds of the population growth over the next 20 years will be accommodated.

New housing will be accelerated in the cities and in other centres across the region to make the most of existing services, to meet the community’s different housing needs – particularly the ageing community – and to improve affordability. New release areas, including Cumbalum, Kings Forest, Cobaki, Brimbin and Thrumster will also provide for more housing and greater housing choice.

By focusing growth in cities and centres we can protect the sensitive coastal area with its productive farmland and significant environmental and cultural values.

The draft Plan proposes diversifying the economy by providing high-skilled job opportunities in health, education and aviation services; expanding nature-based activities, events and cultural tourism; and leveraging the Pacific Highway upgrade and connections to Sydney and South East Queensland to improve transport across the region and to identify suitable locations for freight facilities along the highway.

Let us know what you think about the proposals outlined in the Draft North Coast Regional Plan so that we can make sure the North Coast of NSW remains one of the great places to live and visit.

Have your say,

Chris Gulaptis
Parliamentary Secretary for the North Coast
The Draft North Coast Regional Plan (draft Plan) applies to 13 councils - Tweed, Byron, Ballina, Lismore, Richmond Valley, Kyogle, Clarence Valley, Coffs Harbour, Bellingen, Nambucca, Kempsey, Port Macquarie–Hastings and Greater Taree.

The coastal and rural landscapes of the North Coast define the distinctive environment, character and lifestyles of this region. These areas also underpin the agriculture and tourism sectors which contribute $4.1 billion each year to the economy and attract over 11 million visitors each year. This is the most biologically diverse region in NSW and one of the most diverse in Australia. Fifteen of the region’s reserves have World Heritage status (see Figure 1).

Most people live along the coastal strip, many in centres that are separated by rural or high value environmental land.

Over the next 20 years to 2036, the population is expected to grow by over 97,000 to almost 645,000. Tweed, Coffs Harbour and Port Macquarie–Hastings are experiencing the fastest population and economic growth rates in the region. Around 67 per cent of the growth is projected to occur in these three local government areas.

Over 90 per cent of the region’s population growth to 2036 will comprise people aged over 65 years. Currently, 20 per cent of residents are aged over 65 years, but this will rise to 31 per cent by 2036. The people in this age group are likely to be healthier, more active and more productive than previous generations, which means there are opportunities to harness their skills and knowledge so they remain engaged in the workforce in varying capacities. There are also opportunities to expand the products and services on offer to this age group, including education and training, supported housing, health and leisure, tourism and recreation, and home services. The ageing population will also have land use and transport implications.

Outside Port Macquarie, Coffs Harbour and Tweed Heads, the proportion of young people (aged up to 19 years) and working-age people (20–64 years) will decline. This will have implications in terms of the number of people available for jobs, and the likely concentration of jobs growth in health care and social assistance.

Health and education are the fastest growing sectors on the North Coast – there were an extra 1,500 jobs each year in these sectors from 2006 to 2011. In the past five years, the NSW Government spent more than $268 million on health and education infrastructure in the region.

The NSW and Australian Governments have already invested around $8.6 billion on the Pacific Highway upgrade between Newcastle and Queensland. This is one of Australia’s most significant infrastructure investments, with an estimated $6.4 billion committed to complete the program. Travel times and safety have improved on the highway, which carries the second-highest level of freight of any road in Australia, with volumes expected to increase.

The draft Plan provides the strategic policy, planning and decision-making framework to guide the region to sustainable growth over the next 20 years. It integrates economic, environmental and social considerations to achieve ecologically sustainable development – a high priority for the region.

The draft Plan integrates land use planning across State and Local Governments to strengthen partnerships and regional identity.
FIGURE 1: HIGH ENVIRONMENTAL VALUES
Underpinning the planning framework for this draft Plan are key principles. Regional plans will:

- facilitate economic growth, environmental management and social wellbeing;
- respond to the region’s landscape, environmental assets, and natural and cultural resources;
- respond to long term structural, economic and demographic changes, with a focus on ageing, migration patterns and productivity;
- address the implications of a changing climate and build resilience to natural hazards;
- guide the locations for new housing and provide a diversity of housing choice;
- facilitate economic activities consistent with changing market demands and industry needs;
- inform infrastructure and services investment, coordinated with land use; and
- integrate cross-border drivers of change and coordinate responses Statewide and nationally.

**FIGURE 2: BUILDING THE DRAFT PLAN**

- Base design on previous plans and strategies (biodiversity, conservation and regional schemes)
- Use Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) environmental mapping
- Map significant farmland
- Understand and respond to hazards
- Define coastal area
- Use accurate population projections to understand growth
- Ensure new development avoids high environmental values
- Use urban growth areas to limit uncontrolled outward spread of development
- Build resilience in the environment and reinvest development outcomes (biodiversity certification)
- Use resources responsibly so that they are available for future generations
- Invest in infrastructure that generates economic opportunities
- Push for development of health and education precincts, as well as aviation
- Leverage improved connectivity from Pacific Highway upgrade
- Design urban release areas that integrate the environment, liveability and transport accessibility
- Emphasise urban design that creates active and socially responsible spaces

**Community and industry engagement**

- Use economic assets to build prosperity and create resilience to environmental, social and economic change
- Locate new growth to build the environmental performance of our urban areas
- Understand our environmental and social baseline
- Apply a precautionary approach
Developing the draft Plan

The Draft North Coast Regional Plan is underpinned by a strong evidence base. Data and evidence on population growth and change, the regional economy, the housing and employment markets, and the location of important environmental and resource areas, and natural hazards was gathered and analysed.

Background research that has informed the draft Plan includes:

- Department of Planning and Environment (2014), Population, Household and Dwelling Projections – identifies the population and housing numbers for the North Coast to 2036;
- MacroPlan Dimasi (2015), Mid North Coast and Far North Coast Housing Submarkets – identifies the housing submarkets, the demographic profile of each, and the relationship to housing choice and the type of housing needed to meet future needs;
- MacroPlan Dimasi (2015), North Coast Employment Land Review – analysis of trends, drivers, and the supply and demand for employment lands;
- Department of Planning and Environment (2016), Mid North Coast and Far North Coast Housing and Land Monitors – monitors land and housing supply and is developed with input from all councils;
- Department of Planning and Environment (2006 and 2008 respectively), Northern Rivers Farmland Protection Project and Mid North Coast Farmland Mapping Project – identifies State or regionally significant land that is to be retained for existing or future agricultural production; and
- Department of Planning and Environment (2016), North Coast Subregions Background Paper – summarises strengths and opportunities for the three subregions, including journey to work, migration, land supply and economic sectors.

Additional evidence was also considered:

- Transport for NSW (2013), Mid North Coast Regional Transport Plan and Northern Rivers NSW Regional Transport Plan – provides a strategic direction for delivering transport infrastructure and services in the State's regions over the next 20 years;
- Bureau of Transport Statistics (2011), journey to work data – analyses and forecasts changes in employment and commuting patterns;
- Office of Environment and Heritage (2015), Potential High Environmental Value land Mapping – identifies areas for conservation; native vegetation of high conservation value; threatened species and populations; significant wetlands, rivers, estuaries and coastal features; and sites of geological significance. The mapping provides guidance on regionally important conservation priority areas, along with potential regional priority offset areas that may have the same or similar biodiversity to that predicted in areas identified for future development; and
- Department of Industry (2015), Economic Development Strategy for Regional NSW – sets out clear goals, comprehensive actions, and an economic profile of the North Coast.

North Coast subregions

The North Coast has three discrete landscapes that are focused on specific centres and reflect shared interests, geographical proximity, social links and existing services. These areas operate as subregions. The draft Plan highlights areas where the NSW Government will work with councils across these different landscapes to provide an adequate supply of housing and job opportunities.

These landscapes are:

- **Far North Coast** – comprising Tweed, Byron, Ballina, Lismore, Richmond Valley and Kyogle Councils;
- **Mid North Coast** – comprising Clarence Valley, Coffs Harbour, Bellingen and Nambucca Councils; and
- **Lower North Coast** – comprising Kempsey, Port Macquarie–Hastings and Greater Taree Councils.
The vision for the North Coast is for a sustainable future, centred on a prosperous community, healthy environment and attractive lifestyle choices.

Residents and visitors will continue to enjoy the region’s natural environment, World Heritage-listed rainforests, rivers and waterways, landscapes and heritage. New housing will be located in identified regional cities and urban growth areas, to protect environmentally sensitive coastal and rural landscapes.

The coastal landscape and fertile floodplains that provide attractive lifestyles and support farming and fisheries will be managed so that future generations continue to benefit from the productive and environmental values that define this significant area of the North Coast.

The regional cities of Tweed Heads, Coffs Harbour and Port Macquarie will continue to grow and provide greater housing choice and jobs, supported by key services and educational opportunities.

The North Coast will have a diverse economy. Opportunities will be provided to cluster complementary health and education activities into growth precincts, more high-skilled jobs and provide better access to services. Nature-based and cultural heritage tourism will be expanded through complementary land uses, infrastructure and services.

The region’s diverse agricultural sector will remain a major contributor to the economy and landscape values. Regionally significant farmland will be preserved to support a wide variety of farming practices.

The completion of the Pacific Highway upgrade will make it easier for residents to get to jobs, for visitors to access the wide range of tourist activities, and for industries to expand through better access from the region to Sydney and Brisbane.

The growth of South East Queensland will provide job opportunities and services for adjoining communities. The North Coast will capitalise on these economic opportunities as investors and business seek development opportunities to provide greater housing choice and affordability, and land with good access to local, national and international markets.

The Gold Coast Airport will continue to allow business and industry in the region to access international export and tourism markets, and major regional airports will continue to attract tourists and provide access to metropolitan centres.

The competing demands of environmental protection, Aboriginal and historic heritage protection and conservation, population growth, and economic development will be sustainably managed so that sensitive environmental and coastal areas are protected for future generations. Future development will be directed to the least constrained areas.

To achieve this vision, five goals have been set:

- **GOAL 1 – A natural environment, and Aboriginal and historic heritage that is protected, and landscapes that are productive**;
- **GOAL 2 – Focus growth opportunities to create a great place to live and work**;
- **GOAL 3 – Housing choice, with homes that meet the needs of changing communities**;
- **GOAL 4 – A prosperous economy with services and infrastructure**;
- **GOAL 5 – Improved transport connectivity and freight networks**.

The vision will be achieved through this draft Plan and is reflected in the Draft North Coast Regional Plan Map (Figure 3).
Delivering the Plan

Achieving the vision and the goals of the final North Coast Regional Plan (final Plan) will be a shared responsibility that will require the ongoing commitment of all stakeholders, including councils, State agencies and the development and services sectors.

Governance

A Coordination and Monitoring Committee will be established to oversee the implementation of the final Plan. It will be chaired by the Department of Planning and Environment and comprise two Local Government representatives determined by the Regional Organisations of Councils (or Joint Organisations once established), and representatives from the Department of Premier and Cabinet, Office of Environment and Heritage, Transport for NSW and the Department of Industry.

The committee will:
- coordinate and drive the delivery of actions, supported by an Implementation Plan;
- identify potential policy interventions or resourcing issues;
- establish a framework to monitor issues such as:
  - population;
  - housing;

FIGURE 4: COORDINATION AND MONITORING COMMITTEE

SUPPORTING GROUPS

Notes – Other Agencies and relevant executive to be informed and provide input via –
- Committee reporting to their respective Executive and the North Coast Regional Leadership Group on progress of the North Coast Regional Plan.
- Where a North Coast Regional Plan action is given priority status, the respective agency involved in its delivery to be in attendance at Committee meetings.
The NSW Government will use the final Plan and the annual monitoring of development activity to advise infrastructure agencies about the timing of new developments to inform ongoing planning and delivery of infrastructure, asset management and services. Opportunities for private sector delivery of infrastructure will also be explored to support growth.

The NSW Government will continue to work with State infrastructure providers to plan and deliver infrastructure that responds to place and community needs across regional NSW. This includes:
- aligning future infrastructure priorities to support planned growth and change;
- coordinating infrastructure delivery to support strategic employment and housing land; and
- exploring innovative design and delivery approaches across infrastructure sectors.

**Local Planning Initiatives**

A Ministerial Direction will require all councils to implement the objectives and actions of the final Plan, appropriate to their local area, in their council planning strategies and local environmental plans.

Reviews of and amendments to planning strategies and local environmental plans will need to be consistent with the policies and actions in the final Plan.

In addition to implementing statutory mechanisms, councils will lead and participate in relevant strategic projects such as urban design and public domain improvement projects to deliver the outcomes of the final Plan.

Once finalised, the Plan will replace the following strategic plans in the region:
- **Far North Coast Regional Strategy 2006–31**, released by the NSW Government in 2006 for Tweed, Byron, Ballina, Lismore, Richmond Valley and Kyogle Local Government Areas; and