



Planning &
Environment

2036

**New
England
North
West**

**Regional
Plan**

Consultation Report 2017-2019





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Introduction

The NSW Government is committed to planning for the future housing, jobs, infrastructure and environmental needs of its regions. To deliver this commitment, the NSW Department of Planning and Environment released a draft New England North West Regional Plan in late 2016 for public comment.

The New England North West 2036 is the blueprint to deliver the region's future. The Plan proposes a number of policies and actions that have been developed in consultation with stakeholders. It outlines a 20-year vision for the region based on leveraging the region's natural resources, location and communities to be a leading 21st century regional economy.

Stakeholders and the community were invited to provide feedback on the draft New England North West Regional Plan between 19 December 2016 and 20 March 2017. During this period, the Department received 33 submissions from a range of stakeholders.

This report summarises the engagement program undertaken for the draft Plan and feedback received through the engagement program. It also details the range of submissions received in response to the draft Plan, the themes raised through submissions and the NSW Government's response and actions related to these issues. These responses have guided the development of the New England North West Regional Plan 2036.

The NSW Government has set four goals for the region:

1. A strong and dynamic regional economy
2. A healthy environment with pristine waterways.
3. Strong infrastructure and transport networks for a connected future
4. Attractive and thriving communities





Engagement program

Methodology

To raise awareness of the draft New England North West Regional Plan and to encourage feedback to help inform the preparation of the final Plan, the Department undertook a wide-reaching, engagement program from 19 December to 20 March 2017.

To ensure the final Plan responded to a range of needs and expectations, a thorough stakeholder analysis was undertaken and a range of stakeholder groups were consulted, including:

- residents, community and interest groups
- business and industry peak bodies
- local youth
- local Aboriginal Land Councils
- local government.

Tools and results

The engagement program involved a number of tools to reach these stakeholders and gather their feedback.

Events and briefing sessions

Briefings with key stakeholders were held early in the consultation period.

Local government

Following the launch of the draft Plan, the Department approached councils in the region to request their support in promoting the draft Plan to the community.

New England North West councils:

Armidale Regional Council
Inverell Shire Council
Uralla Shire Council
Glen Innes Severn Council
Liverpool Plains Shire Council
Moree Plains Shire Council
Narrabri Shire Council
Gunnedah Shire Council
Tamworth Regional Council
Tenterfield Shire Council
Walcha Shire Council
Gwydir Shire Council

Student forum

To engage a younger audience, the Department facilitated a forum on 2 March 2017 at the University of New England. Attendees included university students, honour students, PHD students, professors and students from Armidale High School.

Forum participants showed a keen interest in the draft Regional Plan and were highly engaged throughout the process. The forum included a range of activities designed to facilitate discussion on the challenges and opportunities for the region over the next 20 years.

The forum attendees initiated discussion on a range of matters, including:

- the benefits of ageing in place and ‘multigenerational living’
- responding to and minimising climate change impacts
- managing land use conflicts including mining development
- harnessing the renewable energy potential of the region
- promoting a more sustainable, innovative agricultural industry to drive the region’s economy
- improving the planning process through engagement with the Aboriginal community
- flexibility and innovation in housing choice to meet demand
- fostering strong resilient communities by optimising opportunities to improve lifestyle and housing options
- creating prosperous urban centres and job opportunities for young people.

These topics were identified as particularly important to the future prosperity and sustainability of the region. Feedback from the forum was considered in the development of the final Plan. The Department’s response to specific issues raised has been included in the submissions analysis section of this report.

Email direct marketing

An email titled ‘Have your say on the draft New England North West Regional Plan’ was sent out on 19 December 2016 to over 5,000 subscribers on the Department’s eNews list. The purpose of the email was to launch the engagement program for the draft Plan and encourage subscribers to visit the Department’s website and lodge a submission.

Survey

The Department created a survey comprising 19 questions that asked respondents about their priorities, values, views, and goals for regional planning.

The survey was available online via the Department’s website. In total, 150 survey responses were received. The sample of survey respondents differed from the broader demographic of the region, with a higher proportion of females and younger persons responding and less home owners than expected.

The results of the survey showed:

- there was strong support for the environment and economy goals of the plan.
- the three most important factors identified for the New England North West were jobs, health services and schools.
- open spaces/recreation areas and schools were considered important and well managed in the region.
- jobs and resource management were considered important but were not considered to be well managed in their area.

The five most important factors to the New England North West region respondents were:

 **#1 HEALTH SERVICES**

 **#2 JOBS**

 **#3 SCHOOLS**

 **#4 LOCAL ENVIRONMENT**

 **#5 PROXIMITY TO SERVICES**

Digital (including online activity, social media and website)

A comprehensive program of digital advertising activity was undertaken during the campaign. This program helped drive engagement over a number of channels including the Department’s website, Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn.

The digital advertising campaigns achieved 500,512 digital media impressions and 5,295 digital engagements*.

Digital advertising helped to raise awareness of the consultation on the draft Plan and encourage people to visit the Department’s website to provide feedback. The website featured the draft Plan, a summary of the Plan’s highlights, an interactive map for visitors to comment on the draft Plan, and the online survey. During the campaign period there were 4,577 unique visits to view content relating to the draft Plan.

**Digital engagements: This includes any engagement with an ad or a post, for example clicks through to our website, Facebook post likes or post shares or comments on posts or ads, interactive map comments or any other responses.*

Media

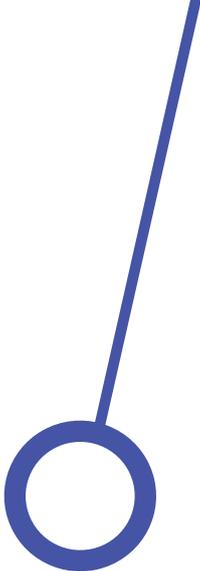
The former Minister for Planning, Hon, Rob Stokes issued a media release on 19 December 2016 to announce the regional planning process.

The Department distributed a media release on 24 February 2017 advising of the student forum.

In total, the media releases generated 20 media stories.

MEDIA STATISTICS	
Activity	Total
Print and online newspaper articles	14
Radio	4
TV	2
Total	20





Submissions

Methodology

As a result of the community engagement program, the Department received 33 submissions.

Each submission was comprehensively reviewed and relevant comments were identified and catalogued. Separate themes within each submission were identified to prepare a comprehensive data set by theme.

The 13 themes identified were:

1. Population change
2. Agriculture
3. Resources and energy
4. Transport and infrastructure
5. Housing and communities
6. Centres and settlements
7. Economy
8. Land use conflict
9. Environment
10. Cross border
11. Implementation and monitoring
12. Local placed based
13. Other matters

In some instances, sub-themes (for example – mining, coal seam gas, renewable energy and community impacts) have been used to sort, analyse and present information more clearly.

Summary of submissions

Type of submitters

Submissions were received from a wide range of stakeholders:

- private individuals
- business and industry groups
- community and environmental groups
- local government
- state government agencies.

Location of submitters

The draft New England North West Regional Plan applies to 12 local government areas. Submissions were received from within and outside the region.



Broad areas

Submissions raised a variety of different views on a range of topics. Below is a summary of the overarching areas identified in submissions.

1. Requests for improved transport connections to facilitate better movement of people and freight on road, rail and air travel to areas both within the New England North West and to external regions were well represented among the submissions received. There was significant interest in relation to the inland rail project and in securing rail and air passenger routes to Sydney.
2. It is clear from the feedback received that delivering liveable, well-serviced communities and accessible housing is an important issue for the region. There were calls for greater detail and emphasis on a range of related issues including housing affordability, itinerant worker's accommodation, urban and landscape design and healthy living options.
3. The importance of protecting the region's natural environment and promoting the sustainable growth of industries was raised in several submissions. There were calls for additional measures to enhance the protection of biodiversity, water catchments, high environmental value areas and to promote renewable energy investment.
4. There were varying perspectives on the draft plan's discussion of mineral and energy resources. Industry bodies highlighted the need to provide greater information on the location of mineral and energy resources, other submitters highlighted concerns around the impact of mining and coal seam gas. There was broad support for the promotion of renewable energy production capitalising particularly on wind and solar energy.
5. Many submitters recognised agriculture as an important foundation of the region's economy and outlined broad support for the plan's discussion of agriculture as well as suggestions to support the sector and associated value-adding opportunities.



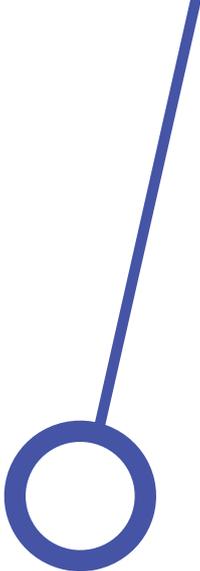


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Submissions: Analysis and response

Population change

Themes that emerged were:

- Requests for finer scale demographic projections to inform the Plan.
- Requests for the final plan to include greater detail on how to attract and retain young people in the region.
- Concerns that the plan does not sufficiently address an ageing workforce, particularly in the mining and agricultural sectors.

The final Plan is based on the Department's latest Population, Household and Dwelling Projections (2016). These projections will be used by the NSW Government to help plan for service and infrastructure delivery for the community. These are identified in the Plan as projections, not targets, and are based on assumptions that take into account recent and current trends for births, deaths and migration.

Response

In response, the Department has:

- Reiterated the expected demographic and workforce changes associated with population ageing and highlighted the expected social infrastructure and housing needs associated with these changes.
- Recognised the challenges associated with an ageing workforce and highlighted the importance of the region's education and training sector, particularly tertiary education institutions like the University of New England which will continue to retain and attract younger residents to deliver the jobs needed to serve the growing and ageing population.
- Outlined strategies that respond to the needs of a rapidly ageing population by supporting the growth of the health services sector, enhancing housing options in accessible locations and developing socially engaged and inclusive communities for seniors.
- Outlined strategies and policies that encourage all communities to build on their unique local qualities and competitive strengths to attract investment and enhance long-term capacity.

Agriculture

Themes that emerged were:

- Concern that water security will be a limiting factor in the development of agribusiness.
- Concern that the biophysical strategic agricultural land mapping contains inaccuracies and does not consider the predicted impacts of climate change, water availability and freight connectivity.
- Requests for greater use of agricultural research data to develop more specific actions around intensive agriculture.

Response

In response, the Department has:

Included actions to:

- Prepare a Regional Intensive Agribusiness Strategy to foster ongoing investment, specify guidelines for intensive agriculture and food processing and map suitable future precincts for these uses.
- Identify and protect intensive agriculture clusters in local plans to avoid land use conflicts, particularly with residential and rural residential expansion.
- Identified further work to deliver important farmland mapping for the region that will complement the Biophysical Strategic Agricultural Land mapping.
- Recognised existing government frameworks and programs that balance competition for water resources and encourage water efficiency including: water sharing plans; licensing requirements; water sensitive urban design principles; the Cap and Pipe Bores Program.
- Considered the NSW Climate Impact Profile (2010) in developing the final Plan which highlights the projected land, settlement and ecosystem impacts of climate change.

Resources and Energy

Themes that emerged were:

- Concern regarding the long-term sustainability of mining and coal seam gas activities and perceived conflict with other goals of the plan, particularly the potential environmental impacts of these activities.
- Industry bodies highlighted the need to provide greater information on the location of mineral and energy resources and general concern that the draft plan lacked sufficient support for mining and extraction activities and presented these activities as a source of conflict with other sectors.
- Concern that the draft Plan placed disproportionate emphasis on traditional energy resources, with requests for greater consideration of ways to promote self-sufficient energy production and community scale renewable energy projects.
- Broad support for the draft Plan's position on renewable energy with differing perspectives on how the plan should promote renewable energy development. Some submitters requested that the whole region be recognised for renewable energy production potential while others requested specific mapping of renewable energy precincts.

Response

In response, the Department has:

- Outlined strategies and actions that will help establish the region as NSW's renewable energy hub, including specific actions to identify and map potential renewable energy opportunities and identify renewable energy resource precincts and infrastructure corridors
- Outlined strategies within the final plan to promote appropriate smaller and community scale renewable energy projects that make use of biowaste, solar, wind, small scale hydro, geothermal other innovative technologies

- Highlighted the importance of addressing land use conflict through local plans to accommodate the wide spectrum of land uses that exist in the region.
- Described the importance of mining to the regional and state economy and advocated for the development of the sector in balance with other land uses. The plan reflects current state and federal policy.
- Highlighted that mining and extraction activities should be undertaken in a way that minimises adverse impacts on the environment, significant agricultural land, neighboring businesses and the community.
- Acknowledged opportunities to improve service delivery across the region by identifying and protecting key infrastructure, describing existing government funding for infrastructure development and highlighting priorities for investment.
- Acknowledged the region-shaping potential of the proposed Inland Rail Project.
- Recognised the potential for the National Broadband Network to grow knowledge-intensive industries and small business and provide people with greater options to work/study at home.
- Included actions to support the development of education clusters and ongoing investment in health.
- Reiterated the NSW Government's position to protect existing regional flights to Sydney airport.

Transport and infrastructure

Themes that emerged were:

- Calls for improved rail, road freight and passenger connections across the region, to facilitate better movement of people and freight both within the region and to external regions.
- Requests for greater support for local and enabling infrastructure to be delivered including the National Broadband Network, health services and education.
- Calls for the final Plan to include more detail on key future regional infrastructure including the inland rail corridor and High Pressure Gas Transmission Pipelines.

Response

In response, the Department has:

- Introduced a new goal in the final Plan that highlights the critical role for transport and infrastructure networks in the region's future growth.
- Recognised the importance of the region's existing transport networks and outlined actions and strategies to protect and enhance the network.

Housing and Communities

Themes that emerged were:

- Concern that development and predicted population growth cannot be serviced by current water supply and services.
- Calls for greater emphasis on urban and landscape design and greater emphasis on sporting infrastructure.
- Concern in relation to the community impacts of purpose-built facilities for temporary workers to live in the community.
- Requests for greater emphasis on affordable housing.

Response

In response, the Department has:

- Committed to continued monitoring of development activity which will be used to provide an understanding of infrastructure capacity and needs.
- Outlined strategies and actions including Interim Settlement Planning Principles and other policies that will require that new land release areas are located close to existing urban settlements and services to maximise efficient use of infrastructure and services and are supported by adequate infrastructure.
- Included strategies and actions in the final Plan to develop healthy, safe and socially engaged communities such as encouraging the preparation of local precinct plans and the development of best practice guidelines for planning, designing and developing healthy built environments.
- Included an action to prepare planning guidelines for seasonal and itinerant workers accommodation and to work with councils to consider opportunities to permit such facilities through local plans. These guidelines will consider issues of community integration.

- Included an action in the final Plan to prepare guidelines for local housing strategies that will provide guidance on achieving greater housing diversity and planning for local affordable housing needs.
- Included an action to incorporate policies and tools into local growth management strategies and local plans that will enable a greater variety of housing types and incentivise private investment in affordable housing.

Centres and settlements

Themes that emerged were:

- Requests for Glen Innes to be identified as a strategic centre.
- Request for flexible planning controls in commercial centres.
- Calls for more balanced discussion of cities and centres including those outside of Tamworth and Armidale.

Response

In response, the Department has:

- Identified Glen Innes as a strategic centre in the final Plan.
- Outlined actions and strategies which will encourage the vitality of commercial centres and focus growth to existing urban centres.
- Reiterated that the prosperity of the region will be driven through the success of all its centres by focusing on the roles and functions of centres, and outlining a range of objectives within the final Plan that will build stronger interrelationships across communities, maximise economic and housing potential, ensure environmentally sustainable outcomes and retain the region's unique lifestyle and character.

Land use conflict

Themes that emerged were:

- Limited support for growth precinct residential development areas east and south of Tamworth due to expected conflict with adjacent agriculture.
- Requests for greater detail on the relationship between mining, agricultural land uses and renewable energy developments with respect to land use compatibility.
- Calls for greater detail regarding buffers for biosecurity.

Response

In response, the Department has:

- Recognised potential growth precincts that have been identified by Councils, these areas will be subject to further investigation including potential land use conflicts and impacts to the environment.
- Identified strategies and actions to manage land use conflict through local plans including agricultural clusters and identifying renewable energy precincts.
- Reiterated support for the NSW government's Strategic Release Framework for Coal and Petroleum to achieve a balance between these industries and other uses.
- Developed strategies and actions to minimise biosecurity risks including biosecurity plans and applying appropriate buffer areas.

Environment

Themes that emerged were:

- Concern that climate change was not given sufficient emphasis and that the Department's position on climate change conflicts with its position on mining and coal seam gas development.
- Request for greater protection of Travelling Stock Routes and the biodiversity they support.
- Concern in relation to promotion of biodiversity offset mechanisms.
- Calls for greater detail on High Environmental Value mapping, its criteria and application.
- Calls for updated bushfire prone land and flood risk land mapping.
- Requests for greater focus on increasing resilience to climate change.
- Concerns around inadequate water supply storage.

Response

In response, the Department has:

- Identified strategies and actions that will build community resilience to the impacts of climate change, identify risks and plan for collaborative responses to natural hazards.
- Outlined actions to avoid land use conflict including mapping of important agricultural land and potential High Environmental Value land.
- Promoted a strategic, balanced approach to mining and energy development and highlighted the importance of renewable energy for the long-term sustainability of the region.
- Recognised the importance of Travelling Stock Routes and included an action to provide continued management and protection of Travelling Stock Routes.
- Reiterated the importance of High Environmental Value land mapping to identify environmental values at the strategic planning stage.

- Outlined actions which will focus development to areas of least biodiversity sensitivity and encourage the identification of vegetated areas adjacent to aquatic habitats and riparian corridors in local plans.
- Reiterated the NSW government's position on biodiversity offsetting.
- Recognised the risk posed by climate change and identified additional hazard mitigation considerations for planning and natural resource management authorities.
- Included the criteria used to identify High Environmental Value land and reiterated its application as a strategic mapping product.
- Encouraged the review and update of floodplain and bushfire mapping to manage risks and incorporate this new knowledge into local plans for new development.
- Included actions to support water security and supply projects.

Implementation and monitoring

Themes that emerged were:

- Support for an implementation committee with suggestions regarding membership of the committee including other government agencies, all councils and private entities required better representation.
- Requests for clearer guidance on agency responsibility and the mechanisms that will be used to implement the Plan.

Response

In response, the Department has:

- Included a section in the final Plan titled 'Delivering this Plan' that better explains the Plan's implementation mechanisms and governance structure. Governance for the Coordination and Monitoring Committee was developed as a state-wide policy.

- Prepared a stand-alone Implementation Plan for the New England North West Regional Plan which includes responsibility and timing for actions.
- Noted suggestions for representation on the implementation committee, recognising that further engagement with additional stakeholders will be achieved throughout implementation of the final Plan.

Local place based

Themes that emerged were:

- Request for detail on local heritage, tourism and horticulture for each council area.
- Request for minor amendments to the Tamworth Growth Precinct map to reflect approval status.

Response

In response, the Department has:

- Included local government narratives in the final plan that summarise the strategic aspirations and opportunities for centres, local heritage, tourism, horticulture, employment and housing.
- Amended the growth precinct plan for Tamworth in the final Plan.

Other matters

There were other themes that emerged outside of the above categories, including:

- Requests for funding of actions detailed in the Plan.
- Requests that the final Plan's vision recognise what council's are doing to leverage foreign markets.
- Concern that mapping specific precincts and assets within the Plan could limit innovation.
- Criticism that consultation did not occur from first principles.
- Criticism that the draft Plan relies too heavily on existing government policy and direction.

Response

In response, the Department has:

- Developed the vision as an overarching goal for the whole of the region but highlighted the growing need to leverage foreign markets.
- Increased a focus on strategic level mapping in the final plan, this mapping will be used as a resource to guide strategic planning and is not intended to hinder the establishment of innovation.
- Undertaken extensive stakeholder engagement as part of the Plan's development which involved both state and local government stakeholders. This process included a partnership approach to working with councils and other agencies, an extensive digital communications campaign, a new approach to online communication, including a spatial viewer as part of a new online plan, briefings with councils and a student forum.
- Created a vision and actions to achieve that vision for a prosperous New England North West region to 2036.

Matters out of scope

A number of submissions related to topics outside the scope of the regional plan.

Response

Where issues not related specifically to the region plan were raised, these matters have been referred to other sections of the NSW Government.



*For more information about the New England North West Regional Plan 2036
visit planning.nsw.gov.au*