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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 series of draft Regional Plans for public comment.

The North Coast Regional Plan 2036 is the blueprint to deliver the region’s future. The Plan builds upon the existing regional planning framework for the North Coast and 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 a thriving economy with vibrant communities in one of Australia’s most unique environments.

Stakeholders and the community were invited to provide feedback on the draft North Coast Regional Plan between 2 March and 2 June 2016. During this period, the Department received 803 submissions from a wide range of stakeholders.

This report summarises the engagement program undertaken for the draft Plan. 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 final Plan.

The NSW Government has set four goals for the region:
1. The most stunning environment in NSW
2. A thriving, interconnected economy
3. Vibrant and engaged communities
4. Great housing choice and lifestyle options
Engagement program

Methodology

To raise awareness of the draft North Coast Regional Plan and to encourage feedback to help inform the preparation of the final Plan, the Department undertook a wide-reaching engagement program from 2 March to 2 June 2016.

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; and
- local government and council joint organisations.

Tools and results

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

Events and briefing sessions

Briefings were held throughout the consultation period to engage with key stakeholders. Over 40 briefing sessions were held with more than 340 attendees.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>803 SUBMISSIONS</th>
<th>233 ONLINE SURVEYS</th>
<th>293 SOCIAL MEDIA INTERACTIONS</th>
<th>88 PRINT MEDIA ARTICLES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YOUTH FORUM WITH STUDENTS FROM 5 SCHOOLS</td>
<td>1,738 ISSUES RAISED WITHIN SUBMISSIONS RECEIVED</td>
<td>13,965 VISITS TO THE NORTH COAST WEB PAGE</td>
<td>OVER 340 ATTENDEES AT BRIEFING SESSIONS</td>
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Local government

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

In response, the councils included information about the draft Plan in their newsletters and on their websites, and distributed collateral at information centres, libraries and pools. In total, 2,500 brochures were delivered by the North Coast councils.

North Coast councils:

- Tweed Shire Council
- Kyogle Council
- Byron Shire Council
- Lismore City Council
- Ballina Shire Council
- Richmond Valley Council
- Clarence Valley Council
- Coffs Harbour City Council
- Bellingen Shire Council
- Nambucca Shire Council
- Kempsey Shire Council
- Port Macquarie-Hastings Council
- Greater Taree City Council*
- Northern Rivers Regional Organisation of Councils
- Mid North Coast Regional Organisation of Councils

*Note: The former Greater Taree City Council local government area now forms part of MidCoast Council. MidCoast Council falls within the Hunter Regional Plan area.

Youth forum

To engage a younger audience, the Department facilitated a forum on 10 May 2016 for 30 high school students in partnership with Southern Cross University. Students in attendance represented a number of schools including Nimbin Central School, Emmanuel Anglican College, Byron Bay High School, South Grafton High School and Southern Cross K-12.

The forum attendees engaged in discussions on a range of matters, including:

- protecting the region’s unique natural environment and wildlife and living more sustainably;
- local food production;
- providing places that support community interaction and reinforce community initiatives;
- reinforcing the region’s strong arts and beach culture, and Aboriginal culture and heritage;
- protecting the region’s coastal environment;
- encouraging tourism and attractions including the FIA World Rally Championships and music festivals;
- connecting communities through better transport infrastructure; and
- combatting rural youth drain by providing jobs locally.

Feedback from the forum was considered in developing 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 North Coast Regional Plan’ was sent out on 2 March 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 18 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, 233 survey responses were received.

Overall the results of the survey showed:

• There was positivity about the goals in the draft Plan, with more than half of all survey respondents indicating their support for the goals outlined in the draft Plan.

• The three most important factors to residents of the North Coast were the local environment, health services and jobs.

• Open space and recreation areas were considered important and well managed in the North Coast.

• Jobs, public transport and housing affordability were factors that residents see as important, but do not consider to be well managed in their area.

• There was broad support for the idea of health and education precincts, as long as people could access the services they required.

The five most important factors to respondents were:

1. THE LOCAL ENVIRONMENT
2. HEALTH SERVICES
3. JOBS
4. OPEN SPACES, PARKS AND RECREATION AREAS
5. FARMING AND AGRICULTURAL LAND

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.

This 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 13,965 unique visits to view content relating to the draft Plan.

Media

The Department distributed a media release on 2 March 2016 to announce the regional planning process. In total, the media releases generated 176 media stories.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>MEDIA STATISTICS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Print and online newspaper articles</td>
<td>88</td>
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<tr>
<td>Radio</td>
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<td>TV</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>176</td>
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As a result of the community engagement program, the Department received 803 submissions.

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

The 15 themes identified were:

1. Population growth
2. Housing
3. Centres and settlements
4. Transport and infrastructure
5. Land use conflict
6. Agriculture
7. Resources and energy
8. Environment
9. Health services
10. Education services
11. Cross-border
12. Economy
13. Implementation and monitoring
14. Local place based
15. Other matters.

For some categories, for example ‘Resources and energy’ – a large volume of feedback was received. In these cases, sub-themes (for example – mining, coal seam gas, renewable energy and community impacts) were used to sort, analyse and present information.

**Type of submitters**

Submissions were received from a wide range of stakeholders including:

- private individuals;
- business and industry groups;
- community and environmental groups;
- local government;
- state government; and
- elected representatives.

**Location of submitters**

The draft North Coast Regional Plan applied to 12 local government areas. Submissions were received from both 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. There was strong interest in the draft Plan’s discussion of energy and mineral resources. More specifically, coal seam gas exploration and extraction and mineral resource development were significantly opposed by submitters.

2. The importance of protecting the region’s unique natural environment and living more sustainably was raised in a large number of submissions. There was broad support for the emphasis the draft Plan placed on the environment and there were calls for additional measures to enhance the protection of biodiversity corridors, high environmental value areas and to promote renewable energy.

3. It is clear from the feedback received that the future prosperity of the region will be driven through the success of all its centres. There was broad support for more coordinated planning of Tweed Heads, Coffs Harbour and Port Macquarie with calls for greater recognition of other centres.

4. There was strong interest in transport and infrastructure for the region. Many respondents recognised the safety and efficiency benefits of the Pacific Highway upgrade but felt the draft Plan did not address other types of infrastructure and public transport in sufficient detail.
Submissions: Analysis and response

Population growth

Themes that emerged were:

- Requests for greater recognition of the impacts of an ageing population and proposed actions and services to address these impacts.

- Concerns regarding the population and dwelling projections from local government and the community. The major questions raised involved the differences between the previous projections and those contained in the draft Plan and the methodology used to inform the current projections.

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.

- Outlined strategies in the final Plan 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 in the final Plan that encourage all communities to build on their unique local qualities and competitive strengths to attract investment and enhance long-term capacity.

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.
Housing

Themes that emerged were:

• Broad support for housing targets with calls for clarification regarding the role of these targets in relation to future housing supply.

• Broad support for the draft Plan’s emphasis on increased housing diversity with calls for clarity regarding the mechanisms for delivery and maintaining local character.

• Concerns that affordable housing had not been adequately addressed in the draft Plan.

• Calls for the plan to place greater emphasis on sustainable housing design and community planning including social planning.

• Differing viewpoints in relation to the regulation of future rural residential development.

Response

In response, the Department has:

• Ensured sufficient residential land exists within identified urban growth areas to accommodate projected housing demand over the next 20 years.

• Identified the minimum housing supply to be delivered in each local government area over the next 20 years.

• Included strategies in the final Plan that will increase the supply and diversity of housing. To support the region’s changing population and dwelling needs, the Department has set a 40% target for new dwellings to be in the form of apartments, townhouses, villas, and homes on lots less than 400 square metres by 2036.

• Included a commitment in the final Plan to monitor land and housing supply through an annual North Coast Housing and Land Monitor.

• Reiterated in the final Plan that new development should contribute to affordable housing and be located to provide access to services, employment opportunities and public transport.

• Included additional policy and strategies in the final Plan that will promote housing affordability by encouraging a greater mix of housing and highlighting local tools and strategies to encourage the delivery of affordable housing. This includes the preparation of guidelines for local housing strategies to provide guidance on planning for local affordable housing needs.

• Included directions and actions in the final Plan to develop healthy, safe and socially engaged communities including encouraging the preparation of local precinct plans and the development of best practice guidelines for planning, designing and developing healthy built environments.

• Committed to a review of the North Coast Urban Design Guidelines to promote sustainable urban design that reinforces the distinctive character of the North Coast.

• Outlined policy and strategies within the final Plan that will ensure future rural residential development is appropriately located.
Centres and settlements

Themes that emerged were:

- Support for the retention of urban growth areas to manage the region’s future growth with calls for changes to map labelling to better qualify the function of identified areas.

- Requests from various councils, landowners and private developers to amend the urban growth areas.

- Requests for the final Plan to provide further guidance on precinct planning and include strategies that support healthier and more socially inclusive communities.

- Broad support for more coordinated planning of Tweed Heads, Coffs Harbour and Port Macquarie centres with calls for the final Plan to better recognise the importance of all centres.

- Concerns that the draft settlement hierarchy did not appropriately recognise the role that Lismore and Kempsey play in servicing the regional community.

Response

In response, the Department has:

- Identified urban growth areas to achieve a balance between urban expansion and protecting coastal and other environmental assets and maintain the region’s distinctive character.

- Advocated a clear, strategic approach for the assessment of future urban growth areas within the final Plan. It should be noted in this regard that requests for new areas to be identified have generally not been endorsed. It is not appropriate to consider individual areas for inclusion in the urban growth areas outside a local growth management plan process, in isolation from the regional context.

- Reiterated that the prosperity of the region as a whole 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.

- Included additional policy directions and strategies within the final Plan that will enhance livability through local precinct planning and create healthy built environments through design that encourages walking and cycling and enhances access to recreation, and open space.

- Included a revised settlement hierarchy within the final Plan that identifies regional cities, strategic centres and centres for the region. Lismore has been identified as a regional city. Kempsey is also recognised as an important centre. Significant industry anchors located in the Kempsey Shire, like Nestle at Smithtown will continue to encourage growth in the manufacturing sector.
Transport and infrastructure

Themes that emerged were:

• Concerns that public transport had not been addressed adequately in the draft Plan and requests for more detail around proposed public transport improvements.

• Calls to protect the safety and efficiency benefits of the Pacific Highway upgrade with calls for the final Plan to address the significance of other regional connections.

• Requests for greater support for local and enabling infrastructure to be delivered.

• Calls for the final Plan to include more detail on key future regional infrastructure.

• Calls for greater protection of the ‘high speed rail’ corridor.

Response

In response, the Department has:

• Outlined strategies within the final Plan that will enhance access to public transport routes and encourage walkable communities to reduce car dependency.

• Introduced a new direction in the final Plan to encourage a coordinated and efficient local infrastructure delivery. The final Plan encourages detailed infrastructure service planning be undertaken for new major release areas to establish that the land can be feasibly and cost effectively serviced.

• Committed to monitoring and regularly reporting on development activity and growth across the region to support infrastructure planning.

• Safeguarded the safety, efficiency and economic opportunities provided by the upgraded Pacific Highway.

Land use conflict

Themes that emerged were:

• Requests that the final Plan include further detail on management of land use conflict issues, particularly at the interface of rural and mineral extraction sites with urban land uses.

Response

In response, the Department has:

• Outlined additional policy directions and strategies within the final Plan to address the potential for rural land use conflict in relation to future land release proposals through the use of buffers and land use risk assessments.

• Identified strategies that will manage the region’s mineral resources to ensure that urban encroachment and potential land use conflicts are avoided.
Agriculture

Themes that emerged were:

• Broad support for the mapping of the region’s important farmland to safeguard agricultural production and increase food security.

• Concerns that the draft Plan did not sufficiently identify the importance of agriculture to the region and required a stronger focus on promoting the growth of agribusiness and other agriculture related industries.

• Requests to modify the regionally and state significant farmland mapping and the ancillary variation criteria.

• Concerns regarding the inclusion of biophysical strategic agricultural land mapping in the draft Plan.

Response

In response, the Department has:

• Committed to delivering a consistent management approach to important farmland across the region.

• Included a new direction in the final Plan to grow the economic potential of the agribusiness sector.

• Outlined strategies in the final Plan that will facilitate diversification and attract investment in agribusiness and agriculture related industries.

Resources and energy

Themes that emerged were:

• Objections to any form of coal seam gas development being carried out within the region, with concerns that the draft Plan advocated development of these resources.

• Concerns that the draft Plan identified mineral resource areas. This issue was of particular concern to residents of Valla in the Nambucca Shire.

• Concerns that the draft Plan placed disproportionate emphasis on traditional energy resources, with requests for greater consideration of renewable energy alternatives.

Response

In response, the Department has:

• Reiterated through the final Plan that the NSW Government has no intention to revive coal seam gas on the North Coast. The final Plan makes it clear that coal seam gas resources on the North Coast will remain in the ground.

• Clarified the intent of mineral resource locations within the final Plan.

• Highlighted that extractive industries should be undertaken in a way that minimises adverse impacts on the environment, significant agricultural land, neighbouring businesses and the community.

• Identified strategies that will manage the region’s mineral resources to ensure that urban encroachment and potential land use conflicts are avoided.

• Outlined strategies within the final Plan to promote appropriate smaller and community scale renewable energy projects that make use of bioenergy, solar, hydrogen, small scale and run of river hydro, geothermal, storage or other innovative technologies.

• Identifies a strategic, integrated approach to renewable energy projects to leverage the opportunities presented by renewable energy and enhance the long-term sustainability of the region.

• Recognised the importance of renewable energy for the long-term sustainability of the region by supporting the NSW Renewable Energy Action Plan.
Environment

Themes that emerged were:

- The importance of protecting the region’s unique natural environment.
- Broad support for the emphasis the draft Plan placed on the environment however there were also calls for additional measures to enhance the protection of biodiversity corridors and high environmental value areas.
- Concerns regarding existing or proposed legislative frameworks for biodiversity and coastal protection.
- Concerns that the high environmental value mapping is not at an appropriate scale to inform local planning.
- Concerns that the draft Plan did not adequately recognise climate change with calls for more detail regarding mitigation responses.

Response

In response, the Department has:

- Promoted environmentally sustainable growth by identifying urban growth boundaries and a coastal area to direct growth away from the region’s most sensitive environmental assets.
- Provided greater emphasis on identifying and protecting for biodiversity through the strategic planning process by mapping locations that contain potential high environmental values.
- Recognised the risk posed by climate change and identified additional hazard mitigation considerations for planning and natural resource management authorities.
- Highlighted the importance of renewable energy for the long-term sustainability of the region.

Health and education services

Themes that emerged were:

- Broad support for health precincts, as long as people can access the services they require in their local communities.
- Requests for identification of district hospitals.
- Support for the establishment of education precincts as a way to enhance skills and knowledge in the region.

Response

In response, the Department has:

- Identified district hospitals on relevant maps within the final Plan.
- Identified strategies in the final Plan that will encourage clusters of activity around health and education facilities to support co-location and efficient service delivery.
- Identified health services precincts at Tweed, Lismore, Coffs Harbour and Port Macquarie to coincide with the region’s largest hospitals.
- Identified education precincts at Tweed, Lismore, Coffs Harbour and Port Macquarie to coincide with the region’s tertiary education facilities.

The Department has reiterated the Draft Plan’s commitment to undertake initiatives that support health services and education precincts.
Cross-border

Themes that emerged were:

• Broad support for achieving greater integration of cross-border land use planning and investigation of cross-border barriers to economic, housing and jobs growth.

• Requests for greater recognition of the relationship of inland centres on the Far North Coast with centres in South Queensland, particularly Beaudesert and Toowoomba.

Response

In response, the Department has:

• Reiterated the Plan’s commitment to undertake initiatives that will integrate cross-border land use planning and investigate barriers to economic, housing and jobs growth.

• Enhanced the narrative and emphasis on cross-border issues with Queensland to better characterise the opportunities for inland centres on the Far North Coast.

Economy

Themes that emerged were:

• Support for the draft Plan’s recognition of the importance of tourism to the regional economy with requests for greater support for the tourism sector.

• Calls for greater clarity on holiday letting regulation.

• Calls for a stronger focus on promoting the growth of agribusiness.

• Requests from Aboriginal stakeholders for the final Plan to place more emphasis on cultural tourism opportunities.

• Support for growing the health, education and knowledge sectors in the region.

• Requests for employment targets to be established to guide the allocation of future employment land.

Response

In response, the Department has:

• Secured sufficient employment land within urban growth areas to accommodate projected demand over the next 20 years, enhance confidence in the regional economy and increase job opportunities.

• Expanded the tourism direction in the final Plan to identify additional strategies that will support the strength of the local tourism industry.

• Advocated for cultural tourism opportunities to be explored where culturally appropriate to celebrate and recognise the region’s Aboriginal cultural heritage.

• Included a new direction in the final Plan to grow the economic potential of the agribusiness sector.

• Reiterated the draft Plan’s commitment to growing the region’s health, education and knowledge sectors.
Implementation and monitoring

Themes that emerged were:

- Support for an implementation committee with suggestions for membership of the committee including views that Aboriginal stakeholders, other government agencies, all councils and private entities required better representation.
- Requests for clearer guidance on the mechanisms that will be used to implement the Plan.
- Requests that the direction and actions outlined in the draft Plan are more measurable and targeted.

Response

In response, the Department has:

- Incorporated a new section in the final Plan titled ‘Delivering this Plan’ that better explains implementation mechanisms and governance structure.
- Prepared a stand-alone Implementation Plan for the North Coast Regional Plan that 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:

- Requests for additional narrative in relation to each local government area to summarise local housing, economic and employment opportunities.
- Feedback regarding a range of local development proposals that were not in the scope of the Regional Plan.

Response

In response, the Department has:

- Included local government narratives within the final Plan that summarise the strategic aspirations and opportunities for centres, employment and housing.
Other matters

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

- Requests for greater sensitivity and more recognition of Aboriginal communities and heritage.

Response

In response, the Department has:

- Incorporated additional directions and actions in the final Plan that will build collaboration and partnerships with Aboriginal communities, increase economic self-determination and protect Aboriginal heritage.

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 regional plan were raised, these matters have been referred to other sections of the NSW Government.
For more information about the North Coast Regional Plan 2036
visit planning.nsw.gov.au