Contents

Introduction 4
Engagement program 5
  Methodology 5
  Tools and results 5
Submissions 8
  Methodology 8
  Summary of submissions 8
Submissions: Analysis of key themes and Departmental response 9
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 Riverina Murray Regional Plan in early 2016 for public comment.

Stakeholders and the community were invited to provide submissions on the draft Plan between 21 April 2016 and 21 July 2016. The Department received 38 submissions from a wide range of stakeholders.

This report summarises the engagement program undertaken for the draft Plan and feedback received through the engagement program. It 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 Riverina Murray Regional Plan.

The NSW Government has set four goals for the Riverina Murray region:

1. a growing and diverse economy
2. a healthy environment with pristine waterways
3. efficient transport and infrastructure networks
4. strong, connected and healthy communities.
Engagement program

Methodology
To raise awareness of the draft Riverina Murray Regional Plan and to encourage feedback to help inform the preparation of the final Plan, the Department undertook a wide-reaching engagement program from 21 April until 21 July 2016.

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

- residents, community and interest groups;
- business and industry peak bodies;
- high school students;
- 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 to engage groups and people who represented a range of interests were held early in the consultation period. The Department also held a number of follow-up meetings and briefings that focused on specific issues raised by participants. In total, 33 briefings were held with 168 attendees.

Meetings with key stakeholders have continued after the consultation process in order to discuss and clarify issues raised in the submissions.
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 via their newsletters, websites and other channels.

Youth forum

To engage younger people living in the Riverina Murray region, the Department facilitated a youth forum on 27 June 2016 for high school students in partnership with Charles Sturt University at the Wagga Wagga campus.

Year 11 and 12 students attended from Temora High School and Yanco High School.

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

- the importance of agriculture and the production of food and jobs in this sector;
- the increasing need for facilities for the ageing population;
- access to health services for towns and villages;
- encouraging more renewable energy, including hydro which supports irrigated agriculture;
- the importance of transport connections between cities and the movement of freight; and
- the need for the provision of different housing types to meet the needs of the community.

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 ‘Help shape the future of the Riverina Murray community’ was sent out 21 April 2016 to over 5,000 subscribers on the Department’s eNews 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 20 questions that asked respondents about their priorities, values, views and goals for regional planning.

The survey, available online via the Department’s website, received 29 survey responses.

The results of the survey showed:

- the three most important factors to Riverina Murray residents is health services, jobs and the local environment;
- residents were most satisfied with the management of schools, open spaces, parks and recreation areas, and farming land; and
- positivity about the draft Plan goals, particularly Goal 3 relating to centres and communities.

The five most important factors to the Riverina Murray region respondents were:

1. **Health Services**
2. **Jobs**
3. **The Local Environment**
4. **Proximity to Services**
5. **Farming and Agricultural Land**

Digital (including online activity, social media and website)

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

Digital advertising helped to raise awareness of the consultation on the draft Plan and encouraged 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, and the online survey. During the campaign our website received 5,415 unique visits to view content relating to the draft Plan.

People also provided feedback by commenting on Facebook.

The three most popular themes discussed as a result of the Facebook campaign were:

1. Protecting the environment
2. The Plan as it relates to the environment
3. The economy

Media

The Department distributed a media release on 21 April 2016 to announce the regional planning process.

In total, there were nine media stories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MEDIA STATISTICS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper/online articles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Methodology

As a result of the community engagement program, the Department received 38 submissions.

Each submission was comprehensively reviewed and relevant comments were identified and catalogued to prepare a comprehensive data set by theme. These 15 themes 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 ‘Transport and infrastructure’ – we received a large volume of feedback. In these cases, sub-themes (for example freight and logistics, public transport, proposed infrastructure and local roads) have been used to sort, analyse and present information.

Summary of submissions

Type of submitters

A wide range of stakeholders sent submissions including:

- private individuals;
- business and industry;
- local government; and
- state government.

Location of submitters

The Riverina Murray Regional Plan covers 20 Local Government Areas. Submissions were received within and outside the region.

Broad feedback

1. Stakeholders expressed positive feedback about the draft Plan goals, and suggested some additional directions.

2. Stakeholders requested strong guidance for preventing and managing conflicts between environmental areas, agricultural land, extractive industries, and rural residential or urban residential development.

3. Stakeholders would like more information relating to regional centres, towns, villages, and cross-border relationships between New South Wales and Victoria for towns along the Murray River.

4. There was strong interest around the impact of reductions in water availability for agricultural industries as a result of the Murray Darling Basin Plan. Submissions requested the Plan better address water resource management to ensure environmental, industry and community needs were balanced.
Submissions: Analysis of key themes and Departmental response

Population growth

Themes that emerged were:

- views that population growth across the Riverina Murray will not be evenly distributed, with Albury and Wagga Wagga expected to experience more growth than other centres;
- concerns that population growth estimates are too low and may not accurately reflect growth at a local level;
- some smaller local government areas in the region are also experiencing growth as a result of various local factors, and this growth needs to be considered within the final Plan; and
- concerns the Plan is based on data from the 2011 Census, which was heavily influenced by a major drought in the region, and therefore may not accurately reflect current economic and social circumstances.

In response, the Department has:

- outlined actions that encourage communities to build on their unique local qualities and competitive strengths to attract investment, and build resilience and capacity;
- based the final Plan on recently released population, household and dwelling projections prepared by the Department. 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. Projections can change due to factors such as migration levels, new technology and social attitudes to different living arrangements; and
- included directions and actions in the Plan to promote the growth of regional cities and local centres, and build resilience in towns and villages.
**Housing**

**Themes that emerged were:**

- support for a greater range of housing options to suit changing community needs. In particular, support for more seniors housing to allow people to stay in their local communities;
- concerns the cost of development is making some types of housing, including seniors housing, unaffordable;
- suggestions the final Plan should provide accurate population, economic and demographic information to make it easier for local governments and industry to identify where different types of housing may be required, and where future employment and business growth may be expected;
- request for principles to ensure rural residential development can be provided in appropriate locations and where it does not conflict with agricultural uses; and
- support for principles and data sharing that would help councils better guide the provision of both affordable housing and housing for seasonal and itinerant workers.

**In response, the Department has:**

- included actions to increase the supply and diversity of housing in the region;
- included actions that recognise the infrastructure and facilities required to enable people to remain within their communities as they age;
- included strategies that respond to the needs of the ageing population by supporting the growth of the health services sector, enhancing housing options for older people in accessible locations and developing inclusive communities for seniors;
- committed to working with Councils, industry and infrastructure providers to monitor development in the regional cities and ensure that infrastructure is responsive to investment opportunities;
- included a fundamental principle that new development should be located to provide access to services, employment opportunities and public transport, and contribute to affordable living;
- outlined additional policy and strategies to promote greater housing affordability by encouraging a more diverse mix of housing types;
- provided policy guidance regarding the location of new rural residential development; and
- committed to prepare guidelines to help councils plan and manage seasonal and itinerant worker accommodation.

**Centres and settlements**

**Themes that emerged were:**

- views that the region features three regional cities with an interconnected network of surrounding towns and villages. The region is also characterised by strong cross-border connections between New South Wales and Victoria and the twin towns along the Murray River;
- support for the recognition of the three regional cities, while acknowledging the contribution and role of smaller towns and villages to these larger centres;
- support for regionally specific urban design guidelines;
- recognition that the region is large and diverse. For example areas in the south-west and west of the region are quite different to the regional cities to the east, and growth in those cities does not necessarily result in growth for towns and villages along the Murray River; and
• the need for more recognition of border towns (such as Deniliquin, Moama and Mathoura) and the opportunities their cross-border relationships provide for the broader region.

In response, the Department has:

• emphasised the importance of all regional cities and recognised the role of local service centres;

• identified the need to strengthen connections across communities, and provide strategies to improve public transport connections between regional cities and regional communities;

• clarified the interdependent networks in the region to better reflect the movement of goods, services and people;

• emphasised the importance of cross-border connections with actions to improve access to services such as health facilities for cross-border communities; and

• retained the Department’s commitment to develop regionally-specific urban design guidelines to respond to the region’s unique climate and water security challenges, and provide guidance for preparation of local environmental plans resulting in healthy and livable centres.

Transport and infrastructure

Themes that emerged were:

• submissions supported the importance of the regional freight network to the economy;

• pinch points in the freight network are a concern, with the risk that businesses are being lost to other areas that have better access to transport;

• submissions outlined the need for alternate routes to provide a more efficient freight network;

• residents want a more collaborative approach to providing an efficient freight network, as there is a high volume of freight in the region, which makes a significant contribution to the state’s economy;

• the Plan should seek to encourage public transport improvements, particularly for older people and seasonal and itinerant workers;

• support for transport corridors to be identified and protected in council local environment plans; and

• requests to include more strategic and aspirational future infrastructure improvements.

In response, the Department has:

• outlined the major freight corridors between Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Adelaide, which cross the region. These corridors are essential to the success of the region’s business and manufacturing, forestry and freight and logistics sectors;

• identified the need to investigate alternate routes to protect future freight and transport corridors;

• committed to work with stakeholders to identify the regional freight network and prioritise projects to address network problems;

• outlined strategies for better public transport connections between regional cities and local service centres; and

• identified strategies to provide more seniors housing in locations that maximise infrastructure investments, allowing for better access to existing services and facilities.
Land use conflict

Themes that emerged were:

• support for directions and actions to protect agricultural land to reduce loss and fragmentation of the important land resource; and
• requests for policies to reduce conflicts and protect agricultural land from unsuitable uses such as mining and rural residential development.

In response, the Department has:

• included specific directions and actions to minimise the potential for land use conflict arising, for example, between agricultural land and rural residential development;
• identified strategies to manage the region’s mineral resources to ensure urban encroachment and potential land use conflicts are avoided; and
• retained the commitment to prepare a Regional Agricultural Development Strategy to identify important agricultural land in the region.

Resources and energy

Themes that emerged were:

• support for directions and actions in the Plan that encourage renewable energy opportunities;
• suggestions the Plan should place a greater emphasis on mining and mineral resources and exploration occurring within the region; and
• consideration that site-specific energy supply shortages and energy costs are impeding business development, affecting potential investment and industry diversification.

In response, the Department has:

• added a direction to capitalise on renewable energy opportunities, including identifying areas with renewable energy potential and ready access to electricity networks;
• included a direction to sustainably manage mineral resources, including an action to protect areas of mineral and energy resources potential;

Agriculture

Themes that emerged were:

• support for identification and protection of important agricultural land, and of growing agribusiness;
• the Plan could support opportunities to facilitate advances in agricultural technology and productivity; and
• the current format of local environmental plans does not allow for agribusiness/agri-tourism development. A new land use definition should be included to promote growth of agribusiness and value-adding opportunities.

In response, the Department has:

• included a direction in the Plan to protect productive agricultural land, including an action to prepare a Regional Agricultural Development strategy to identify important agricultural land in the region;
• included a direction in the Plan on growing the agribusiness sector, including support for agribusiness diversification by removing planning barriers in local environmental plans; and
• included an action point to investigate opportunities to better support agriculture through land use planning.
included an action to protect and support the provision of infrastructure that facilitates business and industry development, including mineral and energy resources; and

included an action to promote appropriate smaller and community-scale renewable energy projects that make use of bioenergy, solar, hydrogen, river hydro, geothermal, storage or other innovative technologies.

Environment

Themes that emerged were:

• overall support for the recognition of climate change and the social and environmental impacts this will have on the region;

• the Murray Darling Basin Plan and other water sharing plans are regularly mentioned in council and public submissions particularly in regard to the impact environmental flows has on farmers and agricultural outputs;

• suggestions the Plan should recognise the importance of the Murray River as well as the Murrumbidgee, Lachlan and Tumut rivers;

• support for the Waterfront Management Strategy and suggestions this be replicated along the Murrumbidgee River;

• requests for further engagement with councils during the preparation of the Waterfront Management Strategy and any review of the Murray Regional Planning Policy; and

• support for flood mapping to guide development and increase regional resilience to natural hazards.

In response, the Department has:

• included a direction to increase resilience to natural hazards and climate change, including using the most up-to-date information for land use planning;

• included a direction to sustainably manage water resources for economic opportunities, including actions to provide clarity for producers regarding water allocations; and

• included directions for managing land uses along key river corridors which apply to both the Murray and Murrumbidgee River systems. The Waterfront Management Strategy will apply to the Murray River only. The outcomes of this strategy will likely inform future planning of other rivers, such as the Murrumbidgee.

Health services

Themes that emerged were:

• requests for more discussion around the ageing population and the opportunities it presents to the region.

In response, the Department has:

• included a direction on growing healthcare and aged care opportunities, including establishing health precincts around hospitals and leveraging opportunities for private sector investment in health services.
**Education services**

Themes that emerged were:

- requests for more emphasis on how education facilities will be managed across the region;
- requests to include more detail about proposed education infrastructure improvements, changes in student numbers, and how the consolidation of infrastructure between schools will be managed; and
- suggestions the Plan should encourage tertiary institutions to provide agribusiness training to support the retention of skilled workers in the region.

In response, the Department has:

- included a direction to expand education and training opportunities;
- included actions to encourage greater sharing of community and school facilities and potential joint venture opportunities; and
- committed to work with council, industry, research institutes, and education and training providers to identify opportunities to align skill shortages with regional training programs.

**Economy**

*See also the agriculture, transport and infrastructure and resources and energy themes.*

Themes that emerged were:

- support for Draft Principles for Industrial Land Identification; and
- suggestions to focus on economic diversification, strengthening the region’s economy through industries other than agriculture.

In response, the Department has:

- better recognised the diversity of economic opportunities and identified actions to support a diverse economy; and
- retained the principles for the identification of industrial land.

**Cross-border**

*See also the centres and settlements theme.*

Themes that emerged were:

- the Plan should demonstrate more understanding and recognition of the unique economic and social relationships between cross-border towns and villages; and
- requests to promote the competitiveness and livability of NSW cross-border towns along the Murray River.
Implementation and monitoring

Themes that emerged were:

• suggestions the governance and monitoring committee could be expanded to include representatives from the community, local councils, local health district, various NSW Government departments, irrigation companies and the local housing industry;

• support for an implementation committee with a broader and more diverse representation through a more transparent appointment process;

• requests for more measurable directions and actions, including targets and timeframes as well as key deliverables for the committee, which should be responsible for identifying timelines of key performance indicators for each action;

• the Plan should be a whole-of-government document, not only focused on land use; and

• requests for more meaningful community engagement.

In response, the Department has:

• incorporated a new section titled ‘Delivering this Plan’ to explain implementation mechanisms and governance structures;

• prepared a stand-alone Implementation Plan which includes responsibility and timing for actions; and

• noted suggestions for representation on the implementation committee, recognising that further engagement with additional stakeholders will be undertaken throughout implementation of the Plan.

Other matters

A number of submissions related to topics outside the scope of the Plan.

Response

Where issues not related specifically to the Plan were raised, these matters have been referred to relevant agencies within the NSW Government.
For more information about the Riverina Murray Regional Plan 2036 visit planning.nsw.gov.au