

Department of Planning and Environment

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Riverina Murray Regional Plan 2041 Consultation Report

December 2022





Acknowledgement of Country

The Department of Planning and Environment acknowledges that it stands on Aboriginal land. We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land, water, sea and sky and we show our respect for Elders past, present and emerging through thoughtful and collaborative approaches to our work. We seek to demonstrate our ongoing commitment to providing places in which Aboriginal people are included and can thrive socially, culturally and economically.

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Introduction

In 2017, the Department of Planning and Environment (the department) finalised the *Riverina Murray Regional Plan 2036* (2036 plan), one of 9 regional plans in NSW to establish a vision and planning directions for the strategic use of land. The 2036 regional plan addressed the Riverina Murray region's future needs for jobs, housing, infrastructure, a healthy environment and connected communities.

The 2036 plan has now undergone its first five-yearly review. Throughout 2021-22, the department consulted widely with councils, government agencies and other stakeholders to update the priorities and vision for the region over the next 20 years and identify priority actions for the upcoming 5 years.

This report summarises the engagement, consultation process and the feedback received prior to, during and following the formal public exhibition period. It also details the types of submissions received, the themes and issues raised in this consultation and how this feedback has informed the final *Riverina Murray Regional Plan 2041* (new regional plan).

Engagement Program

The department undertook an extensive multi-phased engagement program to raise awareness and help inform the development of the draft and final plan. Due to the ongoing COVID situation, much of the engagement and consultation took place online.

The engagement consisted of five phases:



Phase 1 – Research and review (incl. early engagement)

To inform and guide the review, the department:

- analysed the 2036 regional plan, land use planning issues and challenges, and government policy changes since the release of the that plan
- conducted an audit and analysis of local strategic planning statements (LSPS) and relevant local strategies

- commissioned research and investigations on:
 - major infrastructure projects,
 - a socio-economic profile,
 - cross-border influences,
 - influence of the Special Activation Precinct on surrounding areas,
 - challenges, opportunities and trends affecting the region's economy, and
 - potential responses to temporary worker accommodation issues.
- commissioned draft *Waterfront Development Guidelines* which were exhibited with the draft regional plan.

This phase also consisted of council and key government agency engagement to inform the review, including:

- an online survey
- approximately 8 one-on-one meetings with agencies and councils
- a climate change workshop with relevant teams within and outside the department
- a pre-workshop handout summarising research and review findings
- five theme-based workshops with councils on housing, regional cities, environment, economy, infrastructure & services
- a cross-border workshop with councils and the NSW & Victorian Cross-border Commissioners.

The initial consultation identified the planning changes and challenges that had occurred across the region since the 2036 regional plan was released. It also sought to understand the current and potential future trends and opportunities for land use planning across the region.

Phase 2 – Pre-exhibition engagement

Drafting of the new regional plan occurred throughout 2021 – 2022. Prior to the exhibition, online workshops and briefings were held with:

- the Riverina Murray Delivery, Coordination & Monitoring Committee (consisting of representatives from key state agencies, the Riverina East and Riverina and Murray Joint Organisation of Councils and interested councils).
- an inter-agency Senior Officers Group, which oversaw the broader regional plan review program and included representatives from key agencies involved in the delivery of regional plan initiatives.
- councils, agencies and other stakeholders, where the proposed responses to regional planning issues were tested and refined.

An information handout for councillors in the region was provided prior to exhibition to assist with the briefing of councillors and to raise exhibition awareness.

Phase 3 – Exhibition

The *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* requires that draft regional plans are exhibited for a minimum of 45 days. The public exhibition of the *Draft Riverina Murray Regional Plan 2041* (the draft plan) occurred from **28 July 2022 - 12 September 2022** and provided an opportunity for community engagement and submissions. It was exhibited on the department's Planning Portal.

Note. A *Draft Waterfront Development Guideline* was also publicly exhibited with the draft plan.

Communications to raise awareness about the public exhibition also included:

- direct emails to interest groups, councils and individuals
- direct messaging to the department's registered subscribers
- a media strategy consisting of print, radio and digital display and placing advertisements in local newspapers allocated for wide coverage of the region, including:
 - Print media: 10 regional newspapers – 1 advertisement each across 2 different days
 - Radio media: 8 radio stations – 14 advertisements across 2 different days
 - Social media campaign: 4 advertisements on Facebook/Instagram

The NSW Planning Portal allowed people to review the draft plan and a set of Frequently Asked Questions about the review process and the plan itself, and make a submission via the Portal, email, verbal or post to the department's Western Region office.

As part of the exhibition, the following facilitated engagement workshops were undertaken:

- two in-person workshops (in Wagga Wagga and Jerilderie) for local and state government representatives
- two facilitated online workshops to obtain feedback from local councillors and members of the community.

The objectives of all four workshops were to:

- outline the approach of the draft Plan
- test the 20-year vision for the region
- explore the objectives, strategies, actions and collaboration activities and their alignment with the desired outcomes of local government (*local govt. workshop only*)
- receive feedback on the proposed governance and resourcing approach (*local govt. workshop only*)
- encourage detailed submissions on the draft plan.

The outcomes of these workshops were incorporated into the new regional plan.

Phase 4 – Consideration and final drafting

The submissions received during the exhibition period were reviewed and considered by the department between September 2022 and October 2022, appropriate changes were made, and the new regional plan was prepared. A total of **27 submissions** were received on the draft plan from:

- 10 Local governments
- 10 State government agencies
- 1 Commonwealth agency
- 2 non-government bodies
- 4 Individuals

After detailed consideration of all submissions and comments, the department made amendments to both the structure and content of the exhibited draft plan. These changes included minor edits such as images, spelling, clarification, definitions or adjustments to narrative and/or maps. A summary of the changes made to the draft Plan have been provided in **Appendix 1**. A summary of the submissions received, and the department’s response is provided in Appendix 2.

As a result of the submissions analysis, changes to the new regional plan include:



The department granted several councils minor extensions to the submissions period, to ensure all councils had an opportunity to provide feedback on the draft plan. Where councils did not make a formal submission during or immediately after the exhibition period,

the department followed up directly to seek their input. Comments received from councils in these follow-up meetings and in any subsequent/late submissions were considered in preparation of the new regional plan.

Several submissions included feedback that was out of scope of the review or function of the regional plan or the department's role. The department has forwarded these submissions to the relevant agency for its consideration.

Phase 5 – New regional plan

The new regional plan and this Consultation Report were approved by the Minister for Planning and Homes, prior to their release in December 2022.

Bi-annual forums are proposed to be held with councils and relevant agencies to monitor implementation and discuss emerging regional planning issues that may arise prior to the next review of the regional plan.

Regular monitoring and reporting will be provided on the department's website to identify the status of the implementation of the new regional plan.

Appendix 1

Detailed changes made to the plan following exhibition

Section	Changes made
General	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inserted and changed images throughout the plan• Removed questions posed for exhibition• Removed 'Council Activities' and 'Resources' included for exhibition – these will be incorporated on the regional plan implementation webpage
Foreword	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Edited
Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Minor edits
Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Removed the implementation timeframes – these will be incorporated on the regional plan implementation webpage
Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Minor edits
Resourcing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Minor edits to clarify outcomes• Inserted new 'Action 1' to support strategic and statutory planning resourcing
Vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Minor edits to respond to submissions
Part 1 - Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Minor edits to respond to submissions
Objective 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Minor edits• Removed 'Collaboration Activity 3' to identify biodiversity corridors and climate refugia at the request of DPE Biodiversity Conservation Division.
Objective 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Minor edits• Inserted new 'Action 3' to review waterfront planning controls in planning instruments
Objective 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Minor edits to respond to submissions• Included acknowledgement of current flooding events• Inserted break out boxes for 2022 NSW Flood Inquiry (including the NSW Reconstruction Authority) and 2019-20 NSW Bushfire Inquiry• Inserted new 'Collaboration Activity 3' to investigate priority areas for floodplain risk management planning
Part 2 – Communities and places	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Minor edits
Objective 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Minor edits
Objective 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Minor edits and responded to submissions.

Section	Changes made
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inserted break out boxes for Regional Housing Taskforce (RHT) and Regional Housing Delivery Plans (RHDP) • Inserted new 'Collaboration Activity 6' to implement the RHT and RHDP recommendations
Objective 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minor edits and responded to submissions • Added new point for regional cities to coordinate growth through structure and master planning • Inserted new 'Collaboration Activity 7' to work with councils to coordinate growth through strategic planning • Inserted new 'Collaboration Activity 8' to consider the relocation of the Griffith CBD freight terminal
Objective 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minor edits and responded to submissions • Clarification of housing strategy requirements, including noting that the RU4 zone is not suitable for rural residential development
Objective 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minor edits • Combined 'Strategy 8.1' and 'Strategy 8.2' into one • Inserted new 'Strategy 8.2' to require DAs for large-scale projects to include a workforce accommodation strategy
Objective 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minor edits and responded to submissions
Objective 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minor edits and responded to submissions • Data updated to reflect recent 2021 Census release • Inserted new 'Collaboration Activity 11' to understand cross border servicing & infrastructure catchments
Objective 11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minor edits and responded to submissions • New section about electricity matters
Part 3 - Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minor edits and responded to submissions
Objective 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minor edits and responded to submissions • Inserted new requirement for changes to rural lot sizes to be supported by a defensible methodology • Clarified rural land strategy requirements
Objective 13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minor edits and responded to submissions • Deletion of renewable electricity dot points on page 61 • Inserting dot point to consider opportunities to minimise land use conflict with and outside the South-West REZ • Inserted Circular Economy section
Objective 14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minor edits and responded to submissions

Section	Changes made
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inserted new ‘Collaboration Activity 20’ to apply learnings from the Wagga Special Activation Precinct and Albury Regional Jobs Precinct to other industrial precincts
Objective 15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minor edits and clarification of ‘Strategy 15.1’
Objective 16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minor edits and clarification of the recognition of the importance of the region to tourism in Victoria
Objective 17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minor edits and responded to submissions
Objective 18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minor edits and responded to submissions
Glossary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New definition of “Climate refugia” • Removal of “Urban land” zones that will be superseded by the end of 2022 and insertion of other zones that were mistakenly left out

Appendix 2

Summary of exhibition submissions and responses

General comments	Response
Some submissions felt the plan was not ambitious enough with longer term actions.	The NSW government has committed to implementing actions and collaboration activities over a five-year period. During the plan's implementation and at the next regional plan review phase, further actions and activities will be identified. The new Bi-annual Forum with councils and agencies will provide opportunities for changes, trends and government priorities to be discussed and regional plan implementation priorities to be reprioritised, if required.
Many submissions raised concerns about the need for funding to enable strategic planning to be undertaken in resource-poor councils across the region.	The new regional plan will assist the department and other government agencies to identify funding priorities and important government outcomes that may assist councils and agencies when seeking funding from various sources. A new action was also included to work with, and advocate for, resources for strategic and statutory planning.
Some councils requested better representation of their communities in the plan's images.	The department worked with councils to improve representative images throughout the new regional plan.
Many councils requested changes to the Council Activity time frames, and some felt the timeframes proposed for the outcomes were too onerous on local government.	The 'Council Activities' in the draft plan were derived from council LSPSs. The new regional plan does not include these council activities. The department will work with councils to identify broad timeframes for LSPS activities that implement the regional plan to be included on the implementation website. All the actions and collaboration activities in the new regional plan will be implemented or led by the department, many in collaboration with a range of stakeholders, including project working groups. The department recognises council resources are limited.
The vision should include better representation of the irrigated nature of much of the region's agriculture contribution.	The vision was reviewed to refer to irrigated agriculture contributions.
Some comments raised were outside the scope of the regional plan.	Where these issues were identified as the responsibility of other government agencies, the submissions have been referred for their attention.

Governance comments	Response
It was suggested that all regions should adopt the same governance arrangements.	Based on the experience of the implementation of the 2036 regional plan, the government arrangements were designed to reflect the resources and issues relevant to each region.

Environment comments	Response
It was recommended that waterfront land should be identified and should be limited to within an urban boundary.	The waterfront provisions relate to all development outcomes. Adverse impacts on non-urban land uses are unlikely to occur from the application of these provisions.
Some submissions made suggestions to include changes or additions to protect waterways and water resources.	The suggested changes were not made to the new regional plan as many were unable to be verified or they were able to be accommodated in other land use planning processes or policies (such as re-examining clearing laws).

Housing comments	Response
Some submissions suggested the Regional Housing Taskforce (RHT) findings and recommendations should be better represented.	The new regional plan has been updated to include specific reference to the RHT findings and recommendations. It will work to implement those recommendations, including a new collaboration activity.
Many submissions supported increasing densities in centres, however there was a common concern that funding should be provided to assist councils to meet regional plan requirements for strategic planning work.	The RHT recommendations will assist with housing delivery and additional funding. The Regional Housing Strategic Planning Fund is a new funding initiative to assist with council strategic planning. Action 1 was added to the plan to support strategic and statutory planning resourcing.
Some submissions raised concerns about the capacity of local government to effectively support the outcomes of addressing social and affordable housing and temporary accommodation issues.	There are a range of actions and collaboration activities, including an affordable housing working group, adoption of the RHT recommendations, and projects to understand and quantify major project housing implications that will allow the department to collaborate with councils and other stakeholders to work towards addressing some of these housing issues across the region.
Some submissions recommended the regional plan include housing targets to assist councils with their planning responsibilities.	While some regional plans have identified housing targets, these are generally in high growth, coastal locations. Processes and mechanisms other than housing targets will be employed to work with councils in the region to improve housing outcomes.

First Nations' issues comments	Response
Limited capacity of Local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALCs) to engage with and implement planning outcomes. Biggest Aboriginal challenges are housing, health and education.	The new regional plan identifies the importance of consulting with and working with LALCs and Aboriginal communities to achieve strategic planning outcomes. Implementation of the plan may provide opportunities for additional support.

Economy comments	Response
It was identified that the regional plan should address circular economy outcomes.	The new regional plan has been updated to include circular economy discussions under Objective 13 (Support the transition to net zero by 2050).

Economy comments	Response
<p>The regional plan needs to recognise the importance of economic issues and assets that affect smaller towns, not just the regional cities.</p>	<p>The new regional plan now reflects these comments. Changes include adding other assets to the Economic Assets Map, such as Leeton/Narrandera Airport and improving narratives to include smaller towns.</p>
<p>A range of economic issues were raised and suggestions made to change the regional plan.</p>	<p>Many of the suggestions and comments related to issues outside the scope of the regional plan or beyond the ability of the regional plan to address, for example, comments relating to public transport provision or issues relating to water use and reuse. These comments have been noted where possible and provided to other relevant agencies.</p>
<p>The provision of infrastructure for urban growth was raised as an issue, including the importance of funding.</p>	<p>Alignment of urban growth and infrastructure provision are important issues highlighted in the RHT and the relevant infrastructure providers. There are a range of outcomes in the new regional plan to work collaboratively to improve infrastructure provision across the region and to support future funding applications.</p>