

Beyond the NSW Regional Strategies actions.

C Jordan

NSW Department of Planning

Regional Strategies are strategic land use plans at a regional scale, balancing the demands of future growth with the need to protect and enhance environmental values. Regional strategy outcomes and actions are designed to help balance population growth, housing and settlement issues, economic considerations, servicing and infrastructure issues with environmental concerns. Actions in regional strategies cover a wide range of matters and include:

- Specific requirements for inclusion or consideration in Local Environmental Plans
- The establishment of new systems or processes such as housing and employment lands monitoring
- Highlighting areas for future strategic work such as the review of the Dunmore hard rock resource area
- Requirements for future consultation such as the need for Councils to consult with the CMA in developing their local plans
- Guiding and supporting ongoing planning processes such as the strengthening of Wollongong as a regional centre.

In addition to the specific actions and outcomes that are explicit in the regional strategies, there are other benefits that are delivered through outcomes that may be less obvious. These include the contribution that planning actions may have in responding to climate change in the regions and providing a clear picture of likely growth outcomes for agencies to use in developing their Total Asset Management Plans when planning for future infrastructure.

While the Regional Strategies are strategic and broad scale in their nature, they have been deliberately designed so they can be readily incorporated into practical outcomes. This paper is about demonstrating, through a number of case studies, the strong link between the regional strategies and a range of practical outcomes within the coastal areas.

An update on the NSW regional strategies and the next steps for the 5 yearly review is also provided.

Introduction

Beginning in 2006, the NSW Department of Planning released a series of eight regional strategies designed to provide planning support for key growth areas across the state. Most of the strategies address regions that form part of NSW where the majority of future growth is expected to take place; Lower Hunter, Far North Coast, Illawarra, South Coast, Central Coast, Sydney Canberra Corridor, Mid North Coast and the draft Murray Regional Strategy.

The regional strategies have been designed to interact with other key policy documents such as the State Infrastructure Strategy and the State Plan, and reflect key priorities of those documents, such as delivering jobs that are close to home and appropriate supplies of housing.

For the purpose of this paper, discussion of the regional strategies will focus on the Illawarra and South Coast Regional Strategies.

Specific and explicit land use planning initiatives that came out of the Illawarra and South Coast Regional Strategies include the Illawarra Urban Development Program, planning work to deliver the West Dapto new release area, Illawarra Employment Lands Taskforce, South Coast Sensitive Urban Lands Review implementation, draft South Coast Regional Conservation Plan and the South Coast Settlement Planning Guidelines. In total, the Illawarra Regional Strategy contains 62 actions and the South Coast Regional Strategy 50 actions that play an important role in the land use process.

The following case studies illustrate different aspects and benefits of regional strategy implementation:

1. development of principal Local Environmental Plans for local government areas
2. likely assessment considerations/approaches for a development proposal for the Culburra urban expansion area
3. how the regional strategy is assisting the regions mitigate and adapt to climate change.

Case study 1: Preparation and development of principal LEPs

The regional strategies provide the framework and context to guide the development and preparation of new principal local environmental plans (LEPs). As required by s.117 Direction No. 30 - Implementation of Regional Strategies, each principal LEP must implement the vision, land use strategy, policies, outcomes and actions of a the corresponding regional strategy. The regional strategy also provides the context for the preparation of land use planning strategies that support LEPs.

The following are examples of how regional strategy actions have and will be implemented through new LEPs:

“Council based mechanisms or controls will be identified to support a hierarchy of commercial centres for the Illawarra Region” (IRS 2007:15).

This action will generally be implemented by the use of specific zones, the overall size of the area zoned as well as Floor Space Ratios and height controls of buildings in different commercial centres. This will help support the hierarchy of centres as well as defining the role of individual centres within the hierarchy.

“Councils will resist the fragmentation of agricultural and employment lands as this can threaten both economic performance and sustainability and restrict the types of uses for a site” (IRS 2007:17).

This action will generally be implemented by the use of appropriate zones and lot size maps for agricultural or employment lands areas. For example, zoning the most valuable agricultural land as RU1 ‘Primary Production’ would assist implement this action. The objective of the RU1 Primary Production zone is:

- To encourage sustainable primary industry production by maintaining and enhancing the natural resource base.
- To encourage diversity in primary industry enterprises and systems appropriate for the area.
- To minimise the fragmentation and alienation of resource lands.

- To minimise conflict between land uses within the zone and land uses within adjoining zones.

“Local environmental plans are to recognize and protect the regional transport network through appropriate planning provisions” (IRS 2007:19).

The use of the zone SP2 Infrastructure will assist in protecting key regional transport corridors and networks that link major urban centres. The SP2 Infrastructure zone has the following objectives:

- To provide for infrastructure and related uses.
- To prevent development that is not compatible with or that may detract from the provision of infrastructure.
- To provide for key transport corridors.

“Require local environmental plans to protect regionally significant corridors shown as ‘Indicative Habitat Corridors’ on Map 2. ...” (SCRS 2007:14)

The most obvious way in which an LEP can identify and protect biodiversity values is through the zonings that are applied to reflect different values across the landscape. A mix of zones is likely to be appropriate for this purpose and may include E3 Environmental Management, E2 Environmental Conservation or E1 National Parks and Nature Reserves. The zones will dictate the land uses that are permissible and/or prohibited.

The LEP will also include provisions that assist in promoting good development outcomes by, for example, setting minimum lot sizes and including clauses that nominate issues that must be considered by a consent authority when assessing any proposed development within mapped areas. Mapping overlays provide the mechanism for identifying the areas to which these clauses would apply – such as habitat corridors or endangered ecological communities. There is a fundamental approach to these clauses of avoiding, minimizing and mitigating impacts (in that order).

The need for each council to consider how they will implement the relevant regional strategy, combined with the use of the standard LEP template, ensures a consistent context and approach to land use planning across local government areas and helps to deliver on regional outcomes and priorities.

The three regional strategies that apply to the Illawarra, South Coast and Sydney-Canberra Corridor provide the planning framework to support 12 local government areas. Of these, 4 already have new principal plans in place, 3 have had draft principal plans endorsed for exhibition and 2 have lodged draft plans that are being considered for exhibition. As a result, the regional strategy councils are on track to have 9 out of 12 principal plans in place by mid-2011.

Case Study 2: Assessment of development proposal at Culburra.

In developing the South Coast Regional Strategy, it became apparent that a review of a number of sensitive coastal sites that were zoned for development was required.

An independent review panel, South Coast Sensitive Urban Lands Panel, was commissioned to review the suitability for development of 17 sites, all having some urban, rural residential or tourist development potential because of existing controls. A summary of the assessment and recommendations for each of the sites was included in Appendix 2 of the South Coast Regional Strategy. The recommendations were to be used to guide

the finalisation of the development form and environmental management of each site. An area of land currently zoned for urban expansion in Culburra was one of those sites reviewed. The following is an extract from Appendix 2 of the South Coast Regional Strategy

Table 1: Culburra Beach- Assessment and Recommendation (SCRS 2007:38)

TERMS OF REFERENCE		ASSESSMENT & RECOMMENDATION
1a.	Suitability of site	<p>Land within the catchment of Lake Wollumboola is considered unsuitable for urban development, principally on the grounds of the potential negative impacts on the Lake which is a sensitive ICOLL.</p> <p>The remaining land within the catchment of the Crookhaven River is considered suitable for limited urban development.</p>
1b.	Scale and type of land release	<p>It would be appropriate for sufficient land within the Crookhaven River catchment, north of Culburra Road and immediately west of the Culburra Village centre to progress for urban development. The amount of land should meet estimated needs for the next 10-15 years.</p> <p>The release area should achieve densities which are higher than traditionally achieved to reduce the land-take and economise on the use of land resources. Site planning should allow for suitable bushfire setbacks; protection of EECs and riparian setbacks exceeding current DNR requirements.</p> <p>The Council should monitor closely the rate of development, dwelling construction and the nature of dwelling tenure (to determine whether dwellings are permanently occupied or not) to determine land demand trends.</p> <p>Further rural land adjoining to the west (outside the Lake Wollumboola catchment) is suitable for investigation for additional urban development/release in due course, subject to environmental assessments and demand for land.</p> <p>The planning for Culburra should be revisited in 10 years to determine the need for further urban land.</p> <p>Council should instigate planning reform within the established areas of Culburra and Orient Point to increase the potential for higher density dwellings to meet changing demographic needs, and manage the demand for urban expansion land.</p>
2.	Priority and timing	No particular priority. In line with market demand.
3.	Alternate land uses	<p>The land in the Lake Wollumboola catchment should be zoned for conservation purposes (the most appropriate zone under the LEP template is Zone E1 National Parks and Nature Reserves).</p> <p>Negotiations should be commenced with the land owner to determine their interest in dedicating the land in the Lake Wollumboola catchment for conservation purposes, and including the site as a potential bio-banking site.</p>

A concept plan for the Culburra site was submitted to the Department of Planning under Part 3A of the *Environment Planning and Assessment Act 1979*, and Director General's

Requirements (DGRs) for the Environmental Assessment (EA) have been issued to the proponent. EA requirements are prepared by the Director General of the Department of Planning to outline the key issues that the proponent must address in its assessment of the project. These requirements, which are specifically tailored for the project, are known as Director General's Requirements (DGRs).

As required under the South Coast Regional Strategy, the Panel's recommendations are being used to guide the finalisation of the development form and environmental management of the site at Culburra Beach. Reference to the South Coast Regional Strategy is found under the 4th 'General requirement' of the Director General's Environmental Assessment Requirements;

'consideration of any relevant statutory and non-statutory provisions and identification of any compliances with such provisions, in particular relevant provisions arising from environmental planning instruments, the South Coast Regional Strategy and Development Controls Plans' (DoP 2010:3).

Further reference is found in DGRs 1.1, 1.2 and 2.4 for the EA for (DoP 2010:4):

'Strategic Planning 1.1: Justify the proposal with reference to relevant local, regional and State planning strategies. Provide justification for any inconsistencies with these planning strategies' and

'Strategic Planning 1.2: Demonstrate consistency of the proposed subdivision with the South Coast Regional Strategy (as well as the recommendations resulting from the South Coast Sensitive Urban Lands Review), NSW Coastal Design Guidelines and NSW Coastal Policy'.

'Subdivision Design, Layout and Desired Future Character 2.4: Demonstrate the consistency of the proposed subdivision with the NSW Coastal Design Guidelines, NSW Coastal Policy 1997, NSW South Coast Regional Strategy and SEPP 71-Coastal Protection'.

Once the proponent submits their draft environmental assessment and any statements of commitments to the Director General, it will be considered by the Director General, often in consultation with relevant agencies and local council/s to determine whether the draft EA for Culburra adequately addresses the DGRs.

In this instance, the regional strategy provides a detailed independent assessment and recommendations for this particular site that will assist in the development assessment process.

Case Study 3: Regional Strategy actions assisting mitigation and adaptation to climate change

It is widely accepted that greenhouse emissions are contributing to global warming with implications for sea-level rise and coastal inundation, more intense storms, as well as prolonged periods of drought. These changes are likely to have significant impacts on agriculture, water supply, settlements and infrastructure, natural resources, biodiversity and human health. While not always specifically badged as a climate change response, the first release of regional strategies responded to climate change through a range of initiatives and adaptation strategies, including actions to address natural hazards, settlement and housing, protecting rural lands, and water and energy use.

Initiatives addressing natural hazards such as:

- *'In order to manage risk associated with climate change, councils will undertake flood investigations over lands with the potential to be affected by sea level rise and inundation to ensure that risk to public and private assets are minimised' and*
- *'Local environmental plans will make provision for adequate setbacks in areas of coastal erosion risk and ocean-based inundation in accordance with coastal zone management plan' (IRS 2007:32; SCRS 2007:18),*

are easily identifiable as assisting in mitigating and adapting to climate change. However, it is the remainder of the actions collectively in the strategies that are just as important in mitigating and adapting to climate change. In the SCRS and IRS, just over half of the actions are assisting in mitigation and adaptation.

Focusing development in existing well serviced centres and away from isolated and sensitive locations creates a more sustainable settlement structure and a more efficient use of infrastructure and services. The requirement for the design of new development to be based Neighbourhood Planning Principles will also ensure that new suburbs are compact, walkable and have access to jobs, centres and transport choice – all contributing to a reduced impact on greenhouse gas emissions than would be expected from conventional suburbs. Initiatives and adaptation strategies relating to settlement and housing include:

- *'priority to infill housing and new residential subdivisions located to existing well serviced centres and towns' (SCRS 2007:23)*
- *'Strengthen Wollongong as a regional city by increasing opportunities for medium and high density residential and commercial development, which will in turn, support vitality and economic growth of the centre' (IRS 2007:24).*

One of the implications of climate change is prolonged periods of drought. Protecting food producing land with reliable rainfall is critical in mitigating against climate change impacts. Initiatives and adaptation strategies relating to protecting rural lands include:

- *Location of non-compatible uses in core productive agricultural areas will be limited to allow agricultural land to be used for farming (SCRS 2007:29)*
- *'Local environmental plans will include minimum subdivision standards for rural and environmental protection zones' (SCRS 2007:29).*

The security of water supply and energy is an important issue for all regions due to the potential impacts of climate change and drought. Initiatives and adaptation strategies relating to water and energy use include:

- *'Locally generated and/or renewable energy projects, including wind, solar, bio-waste and wave power will be supported in suitable locations (IRS 2007:25, SCRS 2007:31)*
- *Councils will consider including provisions in development control plans to achieve water and energy conservation measures in new commercial and industrial development (IRS 2007:35).*

By establishing a framework to manage growth sustainably and through a suite of actions, the regional strategies provide a response to climate change and its impacts. The review of the regional strategies provides an exciting opportunity to further focus on a regional approach to climate change issues.

Regional Strategy Review Process

Context

Regional Strategies have been released for the Far North Coast, Mid North Coast, Lower Hunter, Central Coast, Illawarra, South Coast and Sydney Canberra Corridor regions. All regional strategies contain a requirement that they be reviewed every five years so they can adjust to any demographic, economic changes or other policy changes. The reviews will also assist local councils with their five-yearly review of local environmental plans, required under recent reforms to the NSW planning system.

The Lower Hunter Regional Strategy will be the first strategy to be reviewed with an updated Lower Hunter Regional Strategy due end of 2011. Other strategies will be updated between 2012 and 2014.

Illawarra and South Coast

The Illawarra and South Coast Regional Strategies were released in 2007. The Illawarra Regional Strategy covering the council areas of Wollongong, Shellharbour and Kiama, currently plans for an additional 47,600 people, 38,800 new homes, and 30,000 new jobs over a 25 year period to 2031. The South Coast Regional Strategy covering the council areas of Shoalhaven, Eurobodalla and Bega Valley, currently plans for an additional 60,000 people, 45,600 new homes, and 25,800 new jobs by 2031.

The Illawarra and South Coast Regional Strategies are due for their first five yearly reviews by February 2012.

As a first stage in the review process a discussion paper on emerging issues and key policy shifts will be prepared for each region to seek comments from stakeholders and the public. Consultation with stakeholders including local councils, other state government agencies will take place during the first half of 2011. Discussion papers for the Illawarra and South Coast regional strategies are expected to be released mid 2011 prior to updated regional strategies being released February 2012.

Conclusion

The case studies discussed illustrate the different ways that the regional strategies are being used in the Illawarra and South Coast regions to help balance the demands of future growth and economic development. Perhaps the best mark of the success of the strategies is that fact that they are already being used on a regular basis to make decisions about local environmental plans.

References

DoP 2007 *Illawarra Regional Strategy 2006-31*

