



# DRAFT HUNTER REGIONAL PLAN SUBMISSION

MARCH 2022



4 March 2021

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on the draft Hunter Regional Plan 2041 (draft Plan).

## ABOUT THE COMMITTEE FOR THE HUNTER

The Committee is an independent and inclusive champion for the people of the Greater Hunter and their enterprises. Representing over 60 organisations including some of the largest employers, institutions and peak bodies in the region, we provide a unified voice for the Hunter. Our members are drawn from the private and community sectors and all three levels of government. We come together with a shared interest in building a sustainable, prosperous and equitable future for our region. The Committee delivers on that promise through advocacy, thought leadership and providing a platform for collaborative action between governments and the region.

The diversification of the Hunter economy is a [strategic priority](#) of the Committee.

For more information on the Committee and regional priorities and projects visit [www.hunter.org.au](http://www.hunter.org.au).

Alice Thompson | [ceo@hunter.org.au](mailto:ceo@hunter.org.au) | 0490 688 125

## KEY POINTS

### More emphasis on strategic planning

The draft Plan is being prepared in accordance with the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*. The Act emphasises regional plans as strategic plans setting out a vision, objectives and the strategies and actions for achieving these objectives.

The draft Plan is positioned in the document and functions more as a land use and development plan, amalgamated from council (ten LGAs) Local Strategic Planning Statements and strategies.

This could be balanced with a top-down approach to regional priorities and more focus on the projects, strategies and actions that will achieve these. This will complement and provide direction and certainty to councils and developers to deliver at the district scale.

### Establish a more ambitious vision for the Hunter to inform priorities and actions

The vision described in the draft Plan is sound, reflecting triple bottom line principles. However, with the broad focus, it does not distinguish the Hunter and our competitive advantage from any other place.

The biggest disrupter to the region over the next twenty years is Net Zero and the structural decline of coal industries including mining and electricity generation. It also presents the region's biggest opportunity with leadership and a plan.

The diversification of the Hunter economy has to be the question to which everything we do in the region – including the Regional Plan – is a response to.

NSW goals for Net Zero depend on what happens in the Hunter. The region's communities are affected more than most as the world moves to low carbon energy and Net Zero. We also have the most to gain.

Home to the world's largest coal export port, the State must look beyond royalties to productivity for economic growth. It is in NSW's long-term interest to pursue a more diversified economy than services sectors concentrated in the Sydney metro.

We encourage a more ambitious vision and targeted set of objectives to provide more direction to the Plan and accountability for delivery.

The Vision is to *strengthen* and not just maintain the Hunter as the leading regional economy in Australia:

1. **Triple the number of local jobs occupied by coal mining and electricity generation** in a diverse range of industries over the next decade. With over 15,000 workers in these industries, a target of tripling these jobs in ten years (45,000) still only goes part way to delivering the number of jobs required to meet straight line projections in the Hunter Regional Plan 2036. We can aim higher still with a good strategy.
2. Position the Hunter as a **global centre and investment destination for Net Zero and clean energy**. Low emissions must be built into the region's development trajectory to remain competitive. There is significant capital to be harnessed, and the region has growing production and services to supply this demand.
3. Growth and development to **improve living standards across the Hunter**. This includes housing, jobs, infrastructure and services to support a growing population. The Hunter has the scale and capacity to drive these benefits at the State and national level. The disparity between the socio-economic outcomes of Hunter communities and our Sydney neighbours is not explained by being remote or a lack of resources. With people being the most important resource in the new economy, we need to do better to share the benefits of growth.

### **Plan for a population of 1 million**

The draft Plan has a 20 year time horizon to 2041, while focusing on actions over the next five years until the next review.

While the Vision projects population will be 860,000 by 2041, the draft Plan should explicitly focus on and set up the structures to support a population of 1 million. This will provide more certainty around a plan and investment to manage the challenges of growth and capture the benefits.

### **Embed quantitative targets for housing**

Targets for housing supply will inform priorities, actions and measure progress. The Hunter has entered a housing affordability crisis. It is more important than ever that the Regional Plan identifies housing supply – not just diversity – as a clear priority and provides transparent reporting on delivery.

### **Identify future major infrastructure needs for further study and gateway processes**

A top down approach to regional planning will reveal key corridor and public infrastructure requirements that Government has not yet committed to. As a future-focused strategy, it will be important that the Regional Plan identify these needs to trigger further studies and business cases to move these priorities forward given the long lead times for project planning and delivery.

Identifying these future needs in the Hunter Regional Plan should be understood as a commitment to good process rather than a project.

### **Focus on delivery**

The draft Plan is to be commended for listening to stakeholders and focusing on delivery through the 'Infrastructure first and place-based framework' (Part 1). This aligns with Committee advocacy for Place-based Infrastructure Compact approaches to be adopted in the region. It will be important for further consultation on the model to ensure it facilitates and does not slow down the right

development in the right place at the right time through additional governance, process and gateways.

There is a current backlog of development stuck in the planning pipeline. Addressing this requires focus and funding now while we work collaboratively towards a more normative process of integrated planning, delivery and resourcing.

### **Synchronise the objectives, priorities, content and release of the Hunter Regional Plan and Hunter Regional Transport Plan**

Best practice integrated land use, transport and infrastructure planning is a priority in the Committee's [strategic plan](#).

Land use and transport planning has not been sufficiently joined up in the Hunter. Over \$20 billion in housing and commercial developments are held up by transport infrastructure delays across the Hunter. Those developments could deliver more than 40,000 homes and \$37 billion in economic benefits to the region.

There is an opportunity for better integration with the concurrent drafting of the regional and transport plans. The draft Plan sets out outcomes for housing, accessibility and equity that rely on actions and investments in the transport portfolio.

The draft Plan therefore will need to inform priorities and projects in the Hunter Transport Plan, and vice versa. We are looking for more markers of this feedback and optimisation across the plans in the drafting process and output.

The exhibition period for the draft Plan will close before the draft Hunter Transport Plan is released for public comment. The final plans should be released at the same time and demonstrate clear evidence of integration of land use and transport planning and priorities.

### **15-minute region**

The draft Plan sets out as aspiration for a 15-minute region where people can access most of the things they need without a personal vehicle.

The challenge for the Hunter is not travel time – indeed most residents would state they already live in a 10 or 15-minute region. The priority is to provide more transit options, in particular public transport, to reduce car dependency.

This need is recognised in the draft Plan, however the Strategies in Chapter 3 focus on development solutions. These will not be effective in addressing the problem. The draft Plan raises the issue without acknowledging that the NSW Government holds powerful levers to achieve this objective.

We are seeking a significant commitment to improve and increase public transport services in the region through this Plan, as a direct responsibility of the NSW government. This provides an example of how the draft Plan and the Hunter Transport Plan should be heavily interfacing.

An immediate priority is also an assessment and strategy to address the gaps in existing centres impeding the improvement of a 15-minute regional experience, for example education, social services and open space.

### **A more strategic approach to the adaptive reuse of coal lands, transport corridors, water licences and supply chain functions across the region**

The long-term decline of coal industries releases strategically located and serviced land, transport corridors, water licences and supply chain functions across the region. These are incredibly powerful assets to be harnessed for regional development and to achieve the objectives of the draft Plan.

Plans are advancing on sites in the Upper Hunter including Muswellbrook Coal, Liddell and now Eraring in Lake Macquarie.

With a sequence of closures scheduled over the coming years and decades, this is something the region will need to get good at – something the draft Plan recognises.

The scope in the draft Plan should extend to coal-fired power plant sites and assets in addition to mining. It should also include the transport corridors outside of the gates of these sites that link into domestic supply chains and international gateways.

The regional plan should dedicate significant focus to outlining a strategy for the adaptive re-use of coal assets and corridors in addition to land use principles and development approvals.

### **Greater Cities Commission**

In December 2021 the NSW Premier announced the creation of the Greater Cities Commission (GCC), expanding the remit of the Greater Sydney Commission to Newcastle, Central Coast and Wollongong.

Further details on the role, scope and governance of the GCC have not yet been publicly announced.

Upon establishment, the Greater Sydney Commission produced the Greater Sydney Regional Plan: A Metropolis of Three Cities.

We are looking for more guidance on the role and relationship of the GCC in regional planning and important outputs like the draft Plan before it is finalised, along with the Greater Newcastle Metropolitan Plan (five-year review scheduled in 2023).

Fundamentally the objective is alignment of regional, metropolitan and council plans and cadence.

## **OTHER COMMENTS**

- Meet current commitments for timely reporting on land supply, housing and commercial development, and demand (Part 1: Making it happen).
- Strongly support the objective and strategy for economic self-determination for Aboriginal communities and a stronger role in regional planning (Objective 2).
- Include a strategy to increase and improve and the stock of social housing (Objective 4).
- Include a strategy for complimentary land use around international gateways to protect and enhance their function and expansion into the future (Objective 8).
- Include strategies to enhance inter-regional linkages including commitments to reducing travel times and improving services rail on the Newcastle to Sydney corridor in the immediate future (Objective 8).
- Clarify the relationship, hierarchy, governance and delivery of the draft Plan with the Greater Newcastle Metropolitan Strategy (Part 3).
- Include Eraring Power Station as key precinct for economic development (Part 3: Central Lakes).