

Parks and Playgrounds Movement Inc

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Department of Planning
PO Box 2213
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Dear Sir or Madam,

Submission to Draft Lower Hunter Regional Strategy 2006

The Parks and Playgrounds Movement is a community organisation established in the early 1930s. Its secretary was the C E W Bean, the historian, lawyer and journalist. It was brought to Newcastle in 1952 by R.E. Farrell, and continues the work to safeguard our Natural and Cultural Heritage. The Movement's work included the protection of the openspace provisions of the 1952 Northumberland County District Town and Country Planning Scheme.

This Submission is a brief critique of the Draft Hunter Regional Strategy as published and is meant to supplement the Movement's previous submissions to the Minister's draft paper of May 2004 and the Submission to the Metropolitan Strategy and other correspondence concerning the LH Strategy.

Preliminary

In May 2004 as part of the Greater Sydney Metropolitan Strategy the Planning Minister the Hon Craig Knowles MP issued Ministerial directions for the Lower Hunter Region which included: Prepare a Regional Strategy to manage growth and change. Identify conservation priorities, Locations for housing growth, employment and future infrastructure. Improve public transport outcomes through LHTWG. Manage low-density rural residential living. Preserve future development opportunities in the broad Maitland to Newcastle corridor. Plan for development of the F3 corridor to Branxton.

The need for a general strategic planning framework for the future of the Greater Metropolitan Region including the Lower Hunter Region is generally regarded as essential and the Department of Planning is to be congratulated on this initiative. Unfortunately the directives for the Hunter are Sydney centred and lack an understanding of the planning history in the Hunter Region from 1948 onward.

Sydney Regional Outline Plan was a strategic concept plan to provide for growth and change and was launched in 1967 and together with additional strategies has provided a guiding overview for Sydney.

It was the Lower Hunter Region however, that has had the benefit detailed statutory planning since the exhibition of the first scheme in 1952 and of Regional Environmental Planning since March 1982. The REP 82 was revised to create REP 1989 and now needs to be again reviewed and improved to especially include clear provisions for protecting and conserving the natural and cultural qualities of the Hunter Region. Planning should be a naturally evolving process and it is destructive to sweep away the advances that are achieved by one planning cycle and disregard the wisdom and memory carefully built up since the commencement of the earlier schemes.

The currently proposed Lower Hunter Strategy is welcomed but should address the need to modify the Statutory Regional Instrument so that there is logical continuity in planning ensuring that past successes and future potentials are identified and advances clearly made. It is important that the planning process is not just seen as a facilitation scheme at the mercy of short-term political expediency or arbitrary development pressure.

The LH Strategy will need to be much more determined in triggering efforts from the whole of government to protect and conserve our natural and cultural environmental heritage in the emerging urban pattern in the years ahead.

Dedicated National Parks control urban sprawl

In terms of the overall strategy the dedication of National Parks is the most sustainable spatial determinant in the control of urban sprawl and in sustaining a quality regional environment.

This is obvious when you realise how Sydney Region has benefited from the dedication of the 14000ha Royal and Ku-ring-gai Chase National Parks, which were set-aside when Sydney's population (Cumberland County) was similar to that of the current Lower Hunter Region population. The Cumberland Green belt proposals failed only because the conservation lands were not clearly identified and purposefully dedicated within the Public Reserve System and the Cumberland Fund used for parkland acquisition.

The Lower Hunter Strategy

The LH Strategy is the poorer for not being based on an exhibited Regional Environmental Study under the EP&A Act that carefully reviews the growth of the region and understands the natural and cultural history and the planning initiatives of the past and their strengths and weaknesses and the opportunities for the future.

We believe that the LH Strategy cannot achieve its stated Aim to be the pre-eminent planning instrument informing State and Local EPI's without that firm statutory base.

We would like the Strategy to include and reflect the following objectives.

- I. To make the conservation of the Region's natural and cultural heritage an integral and essential feature of the Strategy.**
- II. To make Ecologically Sustainable Development the criteria for future healthy growth and change.**
- III. To clearly identify the elements and attributes of the Region's "unique natural beauty and enviable lifestyle" (*Directions statement*) and include policies that will ensure their protection and survival into the future.**
- IV. To provide Public Domain policy for the Region that protects the right of every citizen to clean air and water and the enjoyment of public foreshores, parks and open spaces and beaches and the provision of public transport.**

Parks and Playgrounds Movement want to see the future planning instruments based on a realistic understanding of the environment. The complete and detailed mapping of the Region's native vegetation and the full assessment of the publicly owned lands for the protection of Flora and fauna in parks and reserves and the creation of a firm foundation as an integral part of the planning strategy for a sustainable future.

We acknowledge that the Government claims to be committed to ensuring continued growth and prosperity, increased choices for housing, transport and employment, protecting of environmental assets and allowing the *Region to grow in a sustainable way.*

However there is no machinery embedded in the strategy that can realise the achievement of these desirable commitments within an environment worth living in.

Honeysuckle

The Honeysuckle Development Corporation with its \$100 million Building Better Cities head start failed to integrate at Central Honeysuckle with the foreshore work that had been so laboriously achieved by the citizens of Newcastle. It clandestinely worked for the removal of rail services to Newcastle and growth without consideration of previous planning schemes or the morphology of the City. Honeysuckle Development Corporation is not a transparent public body and the current Growth Centre boundary should be reduced to Honeysuckle's original 45ha around the Basin of Newcastle Harbour and its Approved Scheme revised to comply with the exhibited Newcastle LEP.

The Development Corporations legislation provides for the creation of Growth Centre boundaries that can be altered without exhibition and for *Approved Schemes* that are required to be implemented but can be disregarded as has happened with the closing off the Newcastle Harbour front contrary to the Honeysuckle Approved Scheme and REP Central Honeysuckle. The Corporation has no annual meetings where directors can be questioned and the minutes of regular meetings are not available to the public.

Planning requires a true partnership with the citizens and their representatives and must be publicly transparent and accountable to the electorate.

Biodiversity Corridors

Parks and Playgrounds Movement has identified the need for the provision in the planning strategy for the establishment of biodiversity corridors from Stockton Bight through the Hunter River estuary to the Sugarloaf Range and connecting to the conservation corridor in the Wyong/Lake Macquarie buffer zone which includes the Wallarah Peninsular to the Wattagans in the south. These regional corridors are essential natural elements giving form and character to the urban developments and these corridors must now be given inviolate reserve status as National Park, Conservation Areas, Nature Reserves or Regional Parks.

These corridors, absolutely essential as they are, must be part of the overall protection of Biodiversity within the Lower Hunter Region and beyond.

The Strategy at a glance (9 dot points)

The Strategy plans to provide a broad scale land use framework for a 25% population increase.

A critique is provided within brackets by the Parks and Playgrounds Movement.

- **Promote Newcastle as regional City with hierarchy of mixed & special centres.**
(Clear guidelines and regional help are needed to make these centres attractive and improve their amenity for future citizens and businesses. Charlestown is an important District Centre that is about to squander its natural advantages as a Hilltown and cohesive centre by sprawling across priceless openspace to the south with one dominant business rather than create a many faceted renewed centre with an attractive aspect. Intervention is urgently needed).
- **Provide 95 000 new dwellings by 2031- 50% (45,000) in existing zoned areas to accommodate 125,000 increased population.**
(The real planning crises are not the raw figures but the lack of base environmental information to guide their siting in an ecologically satisfactory way and provide new and interesting urban areas in a staged pattern)
- **Identify new release areas and contain urban development. Ensure supply of employment lands within new centres for 50,000 new jobs.**

- (The Sustainability Criteria Appendix 1 is more likely to allow ad-hoc settlements to form and add to sprawl rather than containment. Employment lands do not need to be wastelands they require much more thoughtful development and ecological responsibility)
- **Focus new housing in centres to maintain urban character and reduce pressure on established suburbs.**

(The importance of history and heritage in the maintenance of urban character must be given sufficient emphasis for the Strategy to be successful)

- **Provide housing choice and maximise use of existing and new public transport.**
(This concept is essential and the LHWG Reports must be rejected as wrong in their direction because they were biased in the favour of removing Newcastle from CityRail services rather than improving public transport. The Newcastle urban strategy based on New Urbanism should be a necessary part of the Lower Hunter Strategy)

- **Release 5,300 ha of rural land for new communities and extension to existing areas.**
(This objective must be based on the Biodiversity and Conservation Plan that should be an integral part of this Strategy but is still to be formulated)

- **Release Greenfield land in coordinated way, improved design and efficient use of infrastructure.**

(This objective is vital to the success of the Strategy but as pointed out earlier can only be considered if the Conservation Plan is an integral part of the Strategy)

- **Ensure protection of Biodiversity through a Regional Conservation Plan.**
(As mentioned at every stage of this critique it is absolutely essential that the Conservation Plan be an integral part of the strategy. Indeed the Strategy should have been based on the finding of the Conservation plan at the outset)

- **Future development outside strategy areas be subject to Sustainability Criteria and be required to contribute to additional urban infrastructure.**

(The Sustainability Criteria should be removed from the Strategy in its current form that is without the properly exhibited Conservation Plan. As an addendum it is not part of the Strategy and it relies on too many imponderables. The Strategy would also be more effective without the Investigation Areas and the need to develop outside the designated areas)

These may be achievable and desirable objectives but because the Strategy doesn't currently contain the basic tools to achieve them it is prone to fall short. Regrettably the Strategy has not identified the basic framework needed to create the sustainable future so earnestly needed.

Regional Conservation Plan

The proposed Regional Conservation Plan should be progressed as an integral part of the Strategy and not treated as something separate that can be added on later. The Regional infrastructure plan must also be part of the integral whole of the strategy. The Hunter REP suffered grievously from having the Urban Settlement Pattern added at a later date and not as an integral part of the Regional Environmental Plan when it was formulated.

Planning needs to be supported by a permanent planning authority that understands and advises on the implementation of the plan. Schemes can easily be distorted by arbitrary changes to facilitate growth without the in-depth revision that forms the base of good planning.

Health and sustainability must be the basic criteria and not growth and change. We believe that the Strategy should guide the revision of the Hunter Regional Environmental Plan.

We thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Lower Hunter Strategy.

Parks and Playgrounds Movement Inc.

Summary of the Exhibited Draft Lower Hunter Regional Strategy

Department of Planning PO Box 2213 Dangar NSW 2309

Preface: The Lower Hunter Regional Strategy complements the Sydney Metropolitan Strategy. Primary purpose to ensure adequate land for housing, employment and environmental needs for next 25years.

Aim: To be the pre-eminent planning instrument informing State and Local EPI's.

Foreword: *Hon Frank Sartor MP, Lower Hunter residents enjoy scenic beaches, world class winery district, vibrant cultural community and diverse economy. Population growing 4000 per year. Government committed to ensuring continued growth and prosperity. Strategy is about increased choices for housing, transport and employment. Also protect environmental assets. Region to grow in a sustainable way.*

Lower Hunter Region: 4291 Sq. Klms. Focused on city of Newcastle. Diverse landscapes & Land uses. 2004 population 505,000. mainly Lake and Newcastle LG. 80% of region rural land. Lower Hunter the sixth largest Urban Area in Australia. Strategy based on 630,000 forecast populations by 2031. Lower or higher population scenarios don't change strategy direction. *Historic growth in coastal areas. People attracted by region's lifestyle, beaches and liveable residential environments, culture economic base and employment.*

Careful planning needed so that growth occurs to ensure a sustainable future.

Regional Snapshot: Newcastle - States 2nd largest urban centre ½ region population. Characterised by rural & semi rural landscapes, population increasing 4,000 per year. 203,500 dwellings –85% detached 15% units. New release areas to take 75% new housing and existing zoned areas 25%. Under-utilised public transport & potential for renewal. *Growth and demand for new housing could lead to loss of biodiversity. Conflict caused by pressure on rural lands by rural residential lifestyles.*

Growth Scenarios based on forecasts from Gov's Transport & Pop. Data Centre. LG and Gov to respond to prudent middle projections. Growth accommodated within Region's infrastructure capacity including water supply. Capacity for higher growth if needed. Future assessment monitored under Sustainability Criteria 5 yr reviews.

Vision: Sustainable, affordable, prosperous, liveable.

- *Diverse employment opportunities, quality infrastructure education and health*
- *Ecological and cultural significant landscapes valued and protected.*
- *Choices for quality living, culture recreation and employment.*

Aim smooth and sustainable future growth and change. Without compromising future generations to meet their needs. Clean air & water, health, security adequate housing, education and employment now and long term..

- **Five-year reports to ensure consistent progress to sustainable future.**

Strategy at a Glance: Broad scale land use framework for 25% population increase.

- **Promote Newcastle as regional City with hierarchy of mixed & special centres.**
- **Provide 95 000 new dwellings by 2031- 50% (45,000) in existing zoned areas to accommodate 125,000 increased population.**
- **Identify new release areas and contain urban development. Ensure supply of employment lands within new centres for 50,000 new jobs.**

- **Focus new housing in centres to maintain urban character and reduce pressure on established suburbs.**
- **Provide housing choice and maximise use of existing and new public transport.**
- **Release 5,300 ha of rural land for new communities and extension to existing areas.**
- **Release Greenfield land in coordinated way, improved design and efficient use of infrastructure.**
- **Ensure protection of Biodiversity through a Regional Conservation Plan.**
- **Future development outside strategy areas be subject to Sustainability Criteria and be required to contribute to additional urban infrastructure..**

Key Features of Strategy:

- **Population increase up to 5,000 per year between 2006/2031.**
- **Potential for 95,000 new dwellings.**
- **35,000 for existing pop at decreased occupation levels.**
- **60,000 new dwellings for growth.**
- **Multi-unit development increase 5% to 20% giving greater choice.**
- **Some new employment land minor extension to existing employment areas.**
- **Specialised employment land at Newcastle airport**
- **Emphasis on mixed use dev. at centres and renewal areas.**

Lower Hunter At 2031 will be characterised by more compact urban form & reduction of urban spread and revitalisation of Newcastle CBD. Six Key Centres & two renewal areas proposed with population adjacent to centres and jobs and greater transport options with increased variety & level of employment.

Areas of high environmental value to the community will be protected.

Strategy Map shows >urban footprint, Greenfield Release Areas,>Employment Land, >Rural and Biodiversity Land.

Urban Footprint **Reinforces Newcastle as major centre by promoting urban renewal, mixed use and employment areas. 10,000 new jobs to a total of 30,000 predicted in sufficient commercial, retail and other employment land available.**

Mixed use Regional Centres: *Charlestown, Glendale/Cardiff, Raymond Terrace, Maitland, Cessnock and Morisset.* Newcastle Airport Special employment Centre & Port of Newcastle, University of Newcastle and John Hunter Hospital. These areas currently have 63,000 jobs and provisions will be made for a further 30,000.

Urban renewal areas at Maitland Road to Mayfield & Tudor Street to Broadmeadow.

Existing commercial and retail supported at Kotara and Green Hills.

Seven Greenfield Releases **provide certainty. Each more than 2,000 dwellings at Medowie, North R Terrace, Thornton, Lochinvar, Bellbird, Cooranbong & Morisset.**

A future investigation area for additional pop beyond projected figures if needed.

A future 100ha at Airport and 1,000ha inter-nodal freight facility for employment.

Rural and Biodiversity Land should retain rural zoning & Dep. of Environment & Conservation will prepare a **Regional Conservation Plan to protect biodiversity as part of the L H Strategy.** Rural Residential dev. in existing zones (7,000ha) & future 400ha. This plus existing rural subdivision can accommodate 5,000 dwellings. New dev. required to comply with Regional Strategy & other planning policies.

Summary by Doug Lithgow Monday, 19 December 2005