

Draft Central West and Orana Regional Plan 2041

February 2022



- Bathurst
- Blayney
- Cabonne
- Cowra
- Forbes
- Lachlan
- Oberon
- Orange
- Parkes
- Weddin

**CENTRAL NSW
JOINT ORGANISATION**



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To whom it may concern,

Re: Draft Central West and Orana Regional Plan 2041 (CWORP)

Local Government Regional Joint Organisations (JOs) were proclaimed in May 2018 under the NSW Local Government Act 1993. The Central NSW Joint Organisation (CNSWJO) represents over 200,000 people covering an area of more than 47,000sq kms comprising the Local Government Areas of Bathurst, Blayney, Cabonne, Cowra, Forbes, Lachlan, Oberon, Orange, Parkes, Weddin, and Central Tablelands Water.

Tasked with intergovernmental cooperation, leadership and prioritisation, JOs have consulted with their stakeholders to identify key strategic regional priorities. Please go to the CNSWJO website at <https://www.centraljo.nsw.au> for more information.

Central NSW Councils understand that a balance needs to be struck to allow flexibility and local determination in land use planning while providing useful guidance. This is more easily effected by sound consultation. Critical to the following response is the codesigned and published policy and procedure for consultation in region.

https://www.centraljo.nsw.gov.au/content/uploads/210217_Consultation-Policy_CNSWJO_RLE_Final-1.pdf

Arguably the plan would be better for having a consultation process more like the last iteration with more time spent in region with planners with added time to spend with elected representatives. Feedback was provided to the last plan regarding the need for an agreed consultation approach including working with elected representatives. This Draft CWORP is poorer for the poorer consultation.

The Central NSW JO speaks for over 157,000 people covering an area of more than 47,000sq kms comprising of Bathurst, Blayney, Cabonne, Cowra, Forbes, Lachlan, Oberon, Orange, Parkes, and Weddin.

This region has traditionally seen the Regional Plan as the jewel in crown for planning for Local Government and all NSW agencies – similar to the role that a Community Strategic plan for Councils. It should be the Plan to which all other agencies align because it has useful commentary and guidance across all government functions. If the Regional Plan does not do this what plan does? The step back from enabling regional development into a land use focus with a significant reduction in aspiration is seen as retrograde in the current version of the plan.

Councils in the region will provide their individual advice however the feedback from discussion in region and endorsed by the Central NSW JO Board is summarised as follows:

The use of Treasury’s common planning assumptions data

Unfortunately for the communities of NSW the significant spend on strategy in region using population data that has historically proved wrong and in the current socio-economic climate is wildly wrong - has serious implications for government investment in region. For example, investment in infrastructure such as schools and hospitals will not be fit for purpose for the actual population growth. This leads to a consistent, serious and substantial waste of public money; beyond the waste of money on the plans themselves. Uneconomical, inefficient or ineffective use of resources, resulting in a serious and substantial loss of public funds also leads to a loss of public confidence with its corollary political fall-out. The CNSWJO Board has resolved to provide feedback to the Auditor General’s Office in this regard as it understood that the decision to use these numbers is out of the hands of the various agencies planning in region.

At the very least scenario planning for alternative population numbers should be considered. This should be informed by lived experience in region including construction, the Parkes SAP, the Renewable Energy Zone and the migration from cities to regional Australia.¹

It is noted that p 41 “New population projections will be prepared early in 2022.” This region seeks to work with DPE on the assumptions in these projections. If it is going to be more of the same modelling and formulas it will be a waste of time and money.

Better recognition of the sub-regions of the Central West and Orana

The pattern of settlement, transport linkages, productivity, proximity to ports, Sydney and Canberra are very different for the Central West and Orana. Importantly, the collegiate relationships in the Central West, the support provided to the State through the JO and the governance arrangements in this region offer the opportunity for better consultation, a better plan and better implementation. Too often the Central West is swept into the “rest of the West” and the potential for leveraging the opportunity is lost.

Arguably, forestry being lost from the Draft Plan is reflective of the lack of recognition of the Central West. Further, this leads to the “regional cities” focus which overlooks the important network of large towns, small towns and villages.

¹ <http://www.regionaustralia.org.au/home/regional-movers-index/>

The CNSWJO Board acknowledges the importance of these regional cities, however **all towns and villages within the region are equally as important and should have their own specific objective** to ensure they provided with the same opportunity to be equally prosperous as the 3 regional cities.

Further this “hub and spoke” approach where a regional centre is surrounded by smaller centres does not apply to the Central West for example failing to recognise the opportunity afforded of the proximity between Bathurst and Orange; Forbes and Parkes.

Skills shortages

Central NSW Councils would like to thank the DPE for its investment development of the WRI Region Shapers’ Report. This region reiterates its offer to codesign the brief for this type of work and the CNSWJO Board has resolved to co-invest where it has the opportunity deliver an output that has greater use for Councils and community. **Arguably the 64,000 jobs coming into region identified in the Region Shapers’ Report is the most significant planning issue in region requiring an all of region response.** Action 6 page 53 is supported, however does not go far enough. This region seeks to codesign a broader scope including the population impacts.

Housing shortages

Ensuring adequate, fit for purpose housing is a core function of both Councils and the Department of Planning. It is understood that the Housing Taskforce will be making recommendations where feedback in region is that the NSW Regional Housing Fund is not fit for purpose. Given the timeframe for publication of the final plan, review of actions etc to align with the Taskforce is recommended.

Concurrently Councils in region are reporting challenges with getting planning and development staff as well as having any financial resources to procure any strategic work to support fast tracking housing development. Careful consideration and codesign of both action and collaboration activities by the Department will need to be undertaken to ensure their fit for purpose and that Councils can resource their roles. Councils are reporting little or no budget to support and of the activities identified in the Draft Plan.

The State Government recently announced the Regional Housing Fund with eligible councils able to apply for up to \$1.4m in funding under the recently announced Regional Housing Fund. This will provide a start but does not go nearly far enough to supporting regional housing development. For example, \$1.4m will not even deliver one key intersection improvement required to support housing growth in a centre such as Bathurst. This fund is limited to infrastructure projects only and does not support the critical strategic planning work identified in the draft Regional Plan that councils will need to complete but cannot fund. State government funding is critical for all LGAs in the region to support strategic planning and infrastructure provision.

There has been discussion in region on “spare capacity” projects in both housing and to address skills shortages and codesigned commentary and recommendations for action in both is suggested.

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Mapping

This region spent significant time in the last iteration of the CWORP in ensuring mapping best reflected patterns of settlement and movement. It is recommended that the mapping pp 11-12 of the existing plan be reinstated.

Focus on regional development

This region would prefer the focus on regional development to be reinstated in the plan. There are no actions and few collaborations identified to meet the objectives as described. This is disappointing. The current growth, skills shortages and housing shortages point to the need for significant action. If the Department of Planning does not do this work, who does? If it is not place based, in the region's place based plan, where is it? To what extent has the Department engaged with the agency representatives responsible for the Regional Economic Vision for the State and the Regional Economic Development Strategies to canvas their views and seek alignment? The previous Plan identified alignment with the Destination Management Plan for Destination Network Country and Outback. It is also understood that work is being done by the Department of Planning enabling agritourism. This should be referenced.

Consultation

Unfortunately, while called a 'steering committee,'² the steering committee for this project did not steer or meet with any regular frequency. Concurrently the Delivery Coordination and Monitoring Committee (DCMC) for the current CWORP did not meet at all. Indeed, the current CWORP seems to have been shelved. The progress, learnings and advice from the current CWORP have been either lost or overlooked.

While it is acknowledged the cumulative impacts of solar farms has been included as requested by the DCMC for the last plan, the actions need a rethink with Local Government to ensure the workability.

There ought be a codesigned "plan for the plan" codesigned and with oversight by a steering committee. This should include engagement with elected representatives.

More deliverables

There is a lot less "action" in this plan than in the last – an example is the section on heritage – the action in the last plan was not completed and yet it still required – will it now be dropped? To what extent is this a "plan to do less" and indeed "not enough." The plan has lost its aspirational quality.

² [Steering Committees \(Roles, How to Run Meetings\) \(tacticalprojectmanager.com\)](https://tacticalprojectmanager.com)

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Other comments

- This region supports the commentary on riverine activation.
- This region supports precinct planning where Local Government is not often well resourced to do the work.
- Given that Netwaste refuses to consider a subregion based on the JO footprint it is difficult to see how it will leverage the collaboration in Central NSW to efficiently and effectively lead initiatives in the circular economy.
- Strategic work undertaken in region should be referenced in the plan eg Housing Strategy by Orange.
- Members having their individual Council responses they were asked to draft, edited at times significantly without consultation.

Member councils will provide their own submissions regarding the specifics of their concerns.

Please contact me on 0428 690 935 for more information.

Yours sincerely,



Jennifer Bennett

Executive Officer

Central NSW Joint Organisation (CNSWJO)