

## COMMENTS ON DRAFT RURAL FUTURES STRATEGY

The following general comments are made on the draft Rural Futures Strategy released in September 2008. Submissions on the draft Strategy are to be made to the Department of Infrastructure and Planning closing on 3 November 2008.

### General comments

1. The draft Strategy's focus is on the identification of "the priorities of rural communities and key areas for action" on how "economic prosperity, environmental wellbeing and quality of life can be improved" for rural communities.
2. It is pleasing to have the draft Strategy released and made available for public comment. It is hoped that the delay in its release does not result in a loss of momentum to achieve its finalisation and its subsequent implementation.
3. The proposed move towards a consistent strategy for all rural areas of Queensland has merit provide it provides the flexibility to accommodate local differences. The suggested expanded Sustainable Agriculture Committee and an appropriately resourced lead agency to coordinate the implementation of the Strategy are likely to be vital to its success.
4. Recognising the inter-relationship between rural and urban areas and that population growth has both positive and negative effects for rural and urban communities, it is unfortunate that the draft Strategy still appears to be treating rural areas as being distinct and separate from urban areas rather than treating rural areas in a regional context.
5. It is surprising that a draft Strategy, arising from a SEQ Regional Plan 2005-2026, is limited to short to medium term priorities for implementation over the "next three to five years". There may be merit in Local Governments engaging the community in scenario planning for the longer term, especially to enable the community to better comprehend the consequences of population growth so that appropriate action can be taken to address those consequences.
6. The inclusion of economic data is warranted and applauded. However, as presented it is unlikely to be convincing to those that need to be committed to investing to secure a future for rural communities.
7. The draft Strategy fails to incorporate a number of issues:
  - a. It doesn't as yet provide specific details on the draft Strategy's priorities and leaves its implementation on yet unspecified actions by the State government, local governments and by a

range of community and industry groups. To maintain credibility with the community it is important that urgent attention be given to the identification of priority projects, action plans be prepared and there be a minimum delay in reaching an implementation phase.

- b. While there is general reference to the need to address conflict, guidance needs to arise from the draft strategy on:
  - i. how to balance denser development with environmental protection and for mitigating any adverse impacts.
  - ii. how conflicts between incompatible land uses, might be resolved.
  - iii. how the “rights” of existing rural residents might be recognised when managing change.
  - iv. how conflicting desirable regional outcomes are to be identified and resolved.

8. The draft Strategy would be strengthened if:

- a. It was more outcomes-oriented with clearer linkages between suggested tasks and the outcomes sought.
- b. It did not simply list the other strategies that should be supported but linked the common outcomes being sought through the various strategies.
- c. It was less dependent on “development” as the driver.
- d. It included, by way of guidance, specific details on:
  - i. The suggested interests and thus roles of each of the key stakeholders.
  - ii. Regional outcomes sought by the State Government, to justify those outcomes (e.g. to “identify and protect good quality agricultural land”) and to qualify them where appropriate.
  - iii. Criteria and framework for establishing priorities.
  - iv. The statement on State government priorities and outcomes sought by them.
  - v. The impediments that the State Government believes it could address to achieve its priorities.
- e. It did not appear to be seeking endorsement for actions which were those that possibly should have already been undertaken by the State government.

9. Accordingly, the draft Strategy and subsequent action plan would be enhanced if it provided details on:

- a. Agreements on the priority actions (within those already listed in Summary of the draft Strategy rather than seek additional items); the agencies commitments to specific priority actions (projects); and, details on their resourcing.
- b. How local governments might undertake and coordinate their planning schemes to adequately address rural development and landscape planning issues (rural production, biodiversity conservation, natural resource and open space management) as part of an integrated planning effort. A project which identifies relevant economic data for rural planning by Local Governments appears warranted. The process for precinct planning, as set out in the State government guidelines needs to be revisited as it could lead to less rather than more coordinated regional outcomes.
- c. A State government project which identifies actions that can be taken for dealing with the loss of economic options for commercial agricultural enterprises as a result of government decision-making (such as through the regulatory provisions of the SEQ Regional Plan) appears warranted. Such actions might include rural adjustment and reconstruction. These actions need to recognise the aging rural landholder population and the lack of family succession opportunities.
- d. A State government project which identifies how the long-term security of access to vital agricultural inputs (e.g. water) and infrastructure might be ensured appears warranted.
- e. A multi stakeholder project which identifies ways that the capacity of the stakeholders to undertake the priority issues might be enhanced appears warranted.
- f. As written the draft Strategy is written for a "Government" audience and while it provides good counsel on what various stakeholders might do to be more self-reliant it needs to be communicated to those stakeholders in a form that is likely to be understood them. A multi stakeholder project that achieves this appears warranted.

10. It would be unfortunate if the draft Strategy led to further investigations rather than to the development and implementation of "an action plan".

11. I would be interested in being involved in the development of action plans, especially any relating to the *Healthy and productive rural landscape theme*.

H Briggs (22 October 2008)