

Future Directions for Regional NSW: A Discussion Paper

In New South Wales, the increasing share of population concentrated in Sydney has heightened the debate around the merits of different approaches to the development of regional NSW. Over the past 50 years, Sydney has grown rapidly. At the same time, parts of regional NSW have been in decline or have grown at much slower rates than Sydney. In recent years, these disparities have arguably widened due to a number of social, economic and technological changes associated with globalisation.

Driven primarily by social and political agendas, governments have pursued a number of strategies to influence the spatial distribution of people and jobs to favour areas outside major metropolitan areas, particularly Sydney. In the past, governments have attempted this through large scale decentralisation programmes. This was the predominant approach during 1960s and 1970s.

The past two decades however have witnessed a considerable shift in the both the objectives and content of regional policy. The process of globalisation has reconfigured many of the forces driving development in regional NSW, including new technologies, new production methods, new lifestyle preferences, and new business and investor location decisions.

The policy response from government has been receptive to these new drivers and reflects many of the recent 'breakthroughs' in regional economic development literature. Government has generally supported the view that regions should capitalise on their location-specific competitive advantages. In practice, this has meant developing region-specific policies, delivered through a bottom-up governance approach.

The role for planning however remains vague under this approach. This is compounded by the lack of a clear spatial framework to guide to planning policies and actions and provide certainty to both public and private investment across the various regions of NSW.

In response to this policy gap, the NSW PIA Policy Committee is preparing a Policy Position Paper to guide the role of planning to support the economic development of regional NSW. This paper represents the NSW PIA Economic Development Committee's contribution to the debate.

The objective of the paper has been to provide a broad strategic planning and spatial framework that allow regions to respond to economic opportunities in NSW. To meet this objective, the paper outlined seven strategic directions for Regional NSW:

- 1 State and Regional Spatial Frameworks
- 2 Stronger Regional Centres
- 3 Networked Smaller Towns And Rural Areas
- 4 Infrastructure Development and Regional Connectivity
- 5 Amenity and Lifestyle Opportunities
- 6 Environmental Sustainability
- 7 Managing Decline

Ultimately, the directions advocate that planning has a key role in shaping the future of regional NSW by reinforcing a sustainable spatial structure and 'hard-wiring' the elements necessary for regions, centres and towns to pursue sustainable economic growth strategies.