



Coffs Harbour Greens
Coffs Harbour
NSW 2456

02/07/2020

Coffs Harbour Draft Regional City Action Plan

To NSW Government Planning Portal

Thank you for the opportunity to comment regarding the NSW Government's Coffs Harbour Regional City Action Plan.

Coffs Harbour Greens can see the NSW government have taken great lengths to consider the future of our region with this draft action plan. With our population forecast to grow to over 97, 000 people by 2040 sound planning is vital.

Our submission identifies what we consider are essential components that are omitted from the current draft action plan and to reinforce existing objectives.

Arts and Culture

We support a healthy and diverse creative arts sector in our community but the action plan seems to have completely overlooked this important industry. The economic and social values the creative industries bring to Coffs Harbour should be a priority objective.

To establish city drivers without a clear objective for the creative industries seems to fail to fully appreciate why people visit Coffs Harbour. While we acknowledge that our coast has many natural and cultural reasons for people to visit, the creative industries are often the central experience for visitors.

In 2016, Coffs Harbour was awarded the globally-acclaimed International Festivals and Events Association (IFEA) World Festival and Event City Award.¹ We are proud of our city's reputation for its creative industries and while sporting events are also a welcome visitor drawcard, we believe our arts and culture should be prioritised in the action plan.

¹ <https://www.coffskoastadvocate.com.au/news/coffs-harbour-global-party-capital/3095537/>



Coffs Harbour City Council have historically recognised the value arts and culture bring to our region. This prioritisation on arts in Coffs Harbour has been driven primarily through rigorous community consultation and adopted in the MyCoffs Strategic Plan – Theme: Community Wellbeing².

Council's efforts to fulfil the MyCoffs Plan's *Community Wellbeing* theme has been achieving the outcomes of the plan. Arts and Culture are recognised early in the plan because the industry contributes significantly to the plan's objective of a *Vibrant and Inclusive Place*. In particular, the indicator:

WE ENRICH CULTURAL LIFE THROUGH ART, LEARNING AND CULTURAL ENDEAVOUR

We call on the NSW Government to work closely with the Council and the Creative Arts Industry in developing an objective that is inclusive to this action plan. Our community wants opportunities to attend arts and cultural activities in the LGA and we know that this is a major drawcard for the visitor economy.

Objective 14: Nurture the Coffs Coast Food Bowl

We would like to see planning instruments that support small-scale fresh food producers who are resilient to natural hazards and climate change meeting Objective 18.

The Coffs Harbour Greens want to prioritise sustainable agricultural practices producing healthy and diverse food staples locally and at scale. We believe there is enormous demand, from domestic households to local businesses (who cater for travellers), workers or local consumers, and for markets inter-state. Our “world's best” climate and soils, especially around Bonville, make this focus obvious.

Examples of local producers already in operation include New Life Farm at Sapphire, Synchronicity Farm at Nana Glen and First Choice Organics Limited at Sandy Beach who provide to a range of markets. Demand for local high quality produce is high but supply is low - reports from local distributors Bello Food Box and Synchronicity Farm indicate that demand has grown rapidly during the coronavirus pandemic. We would like to see all levels of government reinforce and support these small to medium enterprises so direct and indirect employment in this sustainable sector can be developed.

We believe that for small-scale agriculture specialists to succeed, government must proactively support their industry. We would like to see research and development goals associated with the Draft Regional Action Plan that reinforce this emerging agricultural

² <https://www.coffsharbour.nsw.gov.au/Your-Council/Contact-Us/Documents/Corporate%20Planning%20and%20Reporting/MyCoffs%20Community%20Strategic%20Plan.pdf>



sector. The economic value in prioritising this land use has ongoing positive benefits for our community both socially and environmentally especially in terms of carbon farming and diversifying incomes.

Communities across Australia are behind this sector and in particular the SAGE Farmers Markets on the South Coast of NSW:

The public demand for locally grown and locally made is enormous and shows no sign of diminishing. Meanwhile, the organisation behind the market – Sustainable Agriculture & Gardening Eurobodalla – is working hard to revive the local agricultural and horticultural heritage of our region. Through training, mentoring and support, SAGE is helping families and individuals with a passion for growing, get established in the area as farmers. The demand for sustainably grown, local, fresh, healthy, delicious produce is growing faster than can currently be supplied. The future of local food in the Eurobodalla is full of opportunities and promise.³

With our sub-tropical climate well suited to a range of food products, it makes economic and employment sense, to diversify agricultural land use. We support the establishment of specific directions for primary producers who are NOT part of the intensive horticulture industry to be supported in self-employment.

The intensive plant horticulture industry does provide an “anchor” industry for Coffs Harbour and in particular the Woolgoolga area. However, the industry comes at a cost environmentally and its economic stability is intertwined with trade security and itinerant worker availability. Dependency on a single sector comes with risk.

We believe Coffs Harbour would benefit from diversifying our primary productivity to include employment lands that create produce for artisan markets that have lower environmental impacts and more sustainable economic returns.

This is not true for the production of blueberries, which it has repeatedly been shown, by Southern Cross University researchers, that the industry pollutes our coastal waterways.⁴ Mitigation efforts to manage pollution are being trialled but the ecological risks associated with the industry continue.

Too much reliance on the blueberry industry would appear in conflict with the North Coast Regional Plan’s vision for a thriving environment where people can live, work and play.⁵ The challenge for government is not to accept the blueberry industry as an employment

³ <https://sagefarmersmarket.org.au/about/>

⁴ <https://www.scu.edu.au/research/research-impact/impact-case-studies/blueberries-and-water-quality/>

⁵ <https://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/Plans-for-your-area/Regional-Plans/North-Coast>



kingmaker but embrace the overarching values the community want in the MyCoffs Strategic Plan: Connected, Sustainable and Thriving Employment Lands.

We would like to see all levels of government support this emerging sector with economic and planning resources that lead to a genuinely sustainable agricultural sector that benefits all Coffs Harbour families.

Collaboration with council, other government agencies and the non-government sector will aid the economic and sustainable development underpinning local market gardening. Synchronicity Farm, for example, has developed the Agribusiness Incubation Program, that links new willing farmers to land and mentors.⁶

We believe this essential employment growth area, is largely unrecognised by local and state governments. Developing small-scale agriculture and market gardens would provide a sustainable farming anchor across the Coffs Harbour community whereby small-scale diverse and resilient agricultural services would coincide with education hubs such as schools and TAFE that provide courses and training specifically targeted to this sustainable farming industry.

Our hope is that Objective 14 genuinely develops Coffs Coast as a diverse inter-connected and resilient food bowl with employment lands prioritised making our region renowned for its market garden produce over the next 20 years and beyond.

Conclusion

We recognise the time has come to plan effectively for Coffs Harbour's future and we support the NSW government considering how we best adapt to new cultural and environmental pressures. While acknowledging that several important objectives have been addressed as part of the *NSW Government Draft Regional City Action Plan for Coffs Harbour*, we believe that our Arts and Culture industry and sustainable food production should be prioritised. With the population increases expected and climate change a genuine threat to our way of life, these industries will help build community resilience and assist adaptation into the future.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment.

Kind regards,

Jonathan Cassell

Coffs Harbour Greens Convenor

⁶ <https://synchronicityfarm.com/agribusiness/motivation/>