



BACKGROUND PAPER 10: Regional perspective

What was said during Time to Talk Canberra 2030

The community gave clear comments about Canberra in relation to its region through Time to Talk Canberra 2030. Comments included:

'By 2030 the community seeks a national capital, with a strong sustainable economy built on government, policy research, higher education, science and tourism, culture, sport and service provision for, and to, the region.'

'Canberrans would like to strengthen Canberra's role as a regional hub.'

'Canberra has re-engaged with the region by blurring and rubbing out the borders.'

Definition of issue

There is no formal definition of what constitutes the Canberra region. The region is typically defined according to the particular issue under consideration, such as health, transport or water catchment management.

Peri-urban land is defined as 'belts of non-urban land fringing metropolitan centres. They usually contain important natural resources, remnant biodiversity and significant landscapes, often remain important for agriculture and recreation, and attract diverse populations of people'¹

Role of strategic land use planning

Taking a regional approach to strategic land use planning provides the opportunity to cohesively view settlement patterns for both future urban areas and peri-urban uses, and analyse infrastructure needs across jurisdictional boundaries, particularly transport connections and social infrastructure.

A regional perspective to planning is critical to achieve many of the goals of the ACT Government. However, there are formal regional planning and development mechanisms, such as Regional Development Australia ACT (RDA ACT), and the Regional Leaders Forum to engage in regional planning initiatives.

There are multiple and increasing interactions between the ACT and surrounding areas of New South Wales. Regional Development Australia ACT2 (RDA ACT 2010) describes the scale of this interaction by saying 'As Australia's largest inland city, Canberra serves as a major centre for the surrounding towns and districts of south-east New South Wales'³. Of particular note is the fact that 20,000 Canberra employees live in New South Wales while a further 200,000 NSW residents travel to Canberra to use the city's services.

To meet the Canberra 2030 outcomes, statutory and strategic planning needs to:

- be founded on a firm understanding of demographic change in the region and its impacts on Canberra
- help resolve how more people in the region can live responsibly by consuming less natural resources
- recognise the high cost and lack of choice of Canberra's housing is driving regional change
- manage the impact of work commuters from outside Canberra and offer park and ride opportunities
- deliver great public places and developments that attract people to visit and work in the city
- address cross border infrastructure provision creatively and collaboratively.

What issues does the ACT Planning Strategy need to consider?

The Canberra Social Plan 2011 states that since 2004 'Canberra's role as a regional centre for health, education, employment and business is shaping a longer-term regional approach to the planning of infrastructure and service delivery'.⁴

With the growing regional interaction, the ACT Government and Canberra community recognise that a regional approach to planning and development can provide important benefits for both the ACT and the surrounding region. Currently there are a range of regional strategies, agreements and forums addressing sector specific issues including:





- ACT Natural Resource Management Plan: The Bush Capital Legacy (2011)
- ACT Regional Strategic Plan (2010)
- Transport Eastern Regional Taskforce (2010)5
- Memorandum of Understanding between ACT Health and Greater Southern Area Health (2008)
- ACT and Region Tourism – Our Industry – Our Future (2006) ACT and Region Tourism 2006 and beyond (2006)
- Memorandum of Understanding - RDA ACT and RDA Southern Inland (SI)
- Sydney-Canberra Corridor Regional Strategy 2006-2031 (2008) Regional Leaders' Forum (RLF), meeting biannually.⁶

Both the Canberra 2030 consultation and the consultation for the preparation of the RDA Southern Inland Regional Plan 2010-15 found that more regional consideration is desirable. The Southern Inland Regional Plan was quite specific in its summation: 'What is missing is a high level approach from the ACT to engaging with the region – acknowledging its role as an employment and services hub, and setting out a pathway for more active engagement with regional communities in the future. The NSW regional communities are looking for better cross border opportunities in certain areas. Examples include:

- better cross border transport such as Queanbeyan and ACT bus fare transferability and better links to Yass and Bungendore
- ACT recognition of its regional role in education, health and disability support
- building pathways and responding to needs from around the broader region
- ACT support for more research activities at tertiary facilities relevant to broader regional issues.⁷

People and place

Because there is no agreed definition of the region, it is difficult to define the region's demographic profile. Several different regions need to be considered when planning for Canberra's future, for example: the cross-border arrangements and integration for the Canberra-Queanbeyan city; the commuting catchment for workers in the ACT (e.g. within 50 km); and the broader region for economic influences and service delivery (e.g. Australian Capital Region).

'The Australian Capital Region [as defined by the Office of the Commissioner for Sustainability and Environment's Regional State of the Environment Report] is the third most populous non-metropolitan region in Australia (571,561), following the NSW Hunter region (626,000) and the Qld Gold Coast (903,000).⁸ Land

use is diversified across agriculture, forestry and national parks. The towns closest to Canberra are Queanbeyan and Yass, both of which predate Canberra.

The RDA Southern Inland Regional Plan notes that towns which lie outside the Sydney to Canberra corridor generally are declining in population. It suggests three key areas to support these towns, namely:

- strengthening general medical and specialist medical services in regional towns
- greater employment diversity and increased diversity in work options for spouses of professional and other specialist workers
- securing water supply, especially for the smaller towns, and providing incentives for households and businesses to invest in and convert to superior water storage, use and management techniques and processes, e.g. the Sustaining Our Towns program.⁹

Different problems exist for growing towns such as Queanbeyan and Yass, for example, demand for housing and services is outstripping supply particularly with regard to public transport into Canberra. Queanbeyan City Council has been one of the fastest growing regions in NSW over the past 15 years. From 2002, the annual growth rate has been between 1.2% and 3.5%.¹⁰

Sustainability

Sustainability of the region is a key policy concern that requires consideration of the social, economic and ecological interactions between Canberra and the region. One key concern is Canberra's ecological footprint. 'The 2008-2009 ecological footprint shows Canberrans take up an actual area approximately 14 times its administrative boundary.'¹¹

The 2009 Regional State of the Environment Report (RSOE) highlighted a number of environmental concerns. Weed management and salinity, as well as the appropriate match between soil capacity and land use, were identified as key land management concerns. Regional cooperation on biodiversity protection is an important part of addressing the triple bottom line for the region. Canberra is known as the Bush Capital, but we must address the importance of regional linkages for biodiversity. Across the region natural habitats vary. Ninety seven percent of the Shire [of Harden] is under agriculture with the majority of native vegetation having been removed. None of the remaining native vegetation remnants are considered to be in a fully functional ecological state. There are no conservation reserves within the Shire.¹² The RSOE noted a major problem with data in almost all shires, compromising the ability to effectively manage the region's remaining biodiversity.

Climate change is a major threat to the region. Agricultural industries are obviously threatened by any changes to temperature and rainfall. An analysis of the impact of climate change on the Snowy Mountains showed winter tourism is likely



to suffer considerably by the expected loss of visitors. Climate change will also impact on alpine ecosystems.¹³

One example of recent regional cooperation has been on climate modelling. The ACT and New South Wales governments are jointly preparing climate projections, downscaled to regional areas, that will provide planners and policy makers with a common set of data from which to develop regionally specific responses.

Valuing agricultural land and operations

Fibre, food and meat production are significant rural sector businesses. The loss of good quality agricultural land to other uses is particularly concerning, with the Southern Inland Regional Plan noting this problem.¹⁴ While Canberra does not have a peri-urban ring of development like many other Australian capital cities, the fragmentation of land holdings is an issue on both sides of the ACT/NSW border.¹⁵

As soils take hundreds, if not thousands of year, to develop, and as Australia's soil fertility is generally low, the existence of good quality soil is a significant asset. However, it is under threat. As the Southern Inland Regional Plan explains, the farming sector is under multiple pressures which are externally driven and hard to resist.¹⁶

Food

Canberra sits in a highly productive region, but despite the growing popularity of the farmers markets, very few Canberrans source their fresh produce locally. Further community interest in regionally sourced produce would help support the economic viability of the agricultural sector. Food can also be incorporated into tourism marketing and help diversify incomes in the region. The region has developed and is expanding its agri-tourism sector, based on wine.

Infrastructure considerations

The ACT Government Infrastructure Plan 2011-2021 acknowledges the ACT as the economic and service centre for the Australian Capital Region, yet much important infrastructure lies in New South Wales. There are many issues to do with the coordination, financing and operation of new and existing infrastructure, with resilience to future climate change being a key issue

The ACT is not independent for its water and energy. The Territory's power supplies rely on a distribution network based in New South Wales and Victoria. Solar energy generation in the Territory will lessen this dependency, but energy self sufficiency remains a long way into the future.

Agreement for supplying potable water to both Queanbeyan City Council and the ACT from Googong Dam was set out in the ACT and NSW Cross-border Water Resources (2006).

Social infrastructure

Provision of community services is a key issue requiring management between the ACT and surrounding jurisdictions.

Canberra provides multiple facilities and services for regional populations, particularly health facilities and services. For example a new cancer treatment centre for the region is being constructed in Canberra. The RDA noted that the ACT may incur costs for providing these services which 'may not be fully reimbursed by NSW. Analysis indicates that the costs of service provision to non-ACT residents will increase in the future, especially for health services, exacerbated by the ageing population.'¹⁷ Education and artistic, sporting and cultural services should be included in this broad notion of services.

Transport

Canberra's relationship to its surrounding region and beyond is important. The transport network involves road, rail and air facilities.

Around 20,000 people commute from outside the ACT to work. This figure is likely to grow because housing outside the ACT is usually cheaper. This means greater demand on the regional transport network, particularly the road network, and parking, as people travel to work.

Regional road transport pressures may be partly alleviated by the intelligent use of telecommuting, which in itself is infrastructure dependent. The rollout of high speed broadband will also greatly assist the region for many other reasons. However, all the regional plan consultations have been clear that better public transport linking the regional towns with Canberra is important in the short and long term.

The possibility and viability of a very high speed train between Brisbane, Sydney, Canberra and Melbourne is being discussed, as is the future role of the airport and its precinct. Three million passengers passed through Canberra Airport in 2008, roughly equivalent to 910 flights a week. This will rise to 7.2 million within 20 years. The Airport Master Plan also states the intention to work towards international facilities.¹⁸

Economy

The regional economy is highly interdependent. For example, while many New South Wales residents work in Canberra, many Canberrans enjoy the recreational and spiritual opportunities afforded by the rural, coastal and alpine areas of the surrounding region. The variety of environments in the region, combined with Canberra's national capital status, make the region a compelling and interesting visitor destination. Australian Capital Tourism estimates both domestic and international visitors will rise, with international visitation stronger than domestic. Income generated in 2009-10 from visitors was \$1.5 billion dollars.

Things to think about

The regional context to settlement is highly complex and multifaceted. Any future regional settlement strategy must build upon work to date, as summarised in Table 1 below.

Any future regional settlement strategy should address questions such as:



- How best to provide for urban growth while reducing greenhouse emissions and oil use generated by the lifestyle of a growing and affluent population?
- How much development should occur in established areas? What is the scope for mixed use development?
- What is the most appropriate land use-transport strategy for a city growing towards 500,000, and a growing region? What mechanisms are available to influence travel behaviour? What are the appropriate transport technologies?
- How can existing agricultural businesses grow sustainably, and what new and sustainable economic ventures can be encouraged?
- How to adequately fund investments in new physical and social infrastructure to support regional growth?

Table 1: Cross sectoral issues in existing planning documents

Regional Issue	Topics	Reference
Service provision	health, education, training research, arts, cultural, tourism and recreation, entertainment, sport	RDA ACT 2010, 2004 Canberra Spatial Plan, Canberra Social Plan 2011, ACT and Region tourism (2006), MOU on health.
Infrastructure	transport, housing, water supply, community facilities, telecommunications	ACT Government Infrastructure Plan 2011-2021 (2011) (2010), Canberra Social Plan 2011, 2004 Canberra Spatial Plan
Sustainability	environment, food, biodiversity, climate change	Grattan Institute (2011). The Bush Legacy (2011), 2004 Canberra Spatial Plan
Human capital	knowledge, governance, population, demographics	CEDA, RDA ACT 2010, Canberra Social Plan 2011
Economy	business, innovation, labour force	RDA ACT 2010, 2004 Canberra Spatial Plan
Settlement	housing, facilities	RDA ACT 2010, 2004 Canberra Spatial Plan



Relevant documents

ACT Tourism 2006. ACT and Region tourism – Our Industry – Our Future.

ACT Government Infrastructure Plan (2010).

ACT Government (2005). Memorandum of Understanding between ACT Health and Greater Southern Area Health Service (2005 – 2008)

ACT Natural Resource Management Council. The Bush Capital Legacy (2011) http://www.environment.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/168526/NRM_plan.pdf

ACT and Sub-Region Planning Committee. ACT and Sub-Region Planning Strategy (1998).

Grattan Institute (2011) – Investing in Regions, making a difference. Grattan Institute Report No. 2011-4 MAY 2011

Integrated Sustainability Research Group (2010) Canberra's Ecological Footprint. http://www.environmentcommissioner.act.gov.au/publications/fact_sheets

RDA ACT (2010). Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) - RDA ACT and RDA Southern Inland (SI).

Regional Development Australia ACT (RDA ACT 2010). ACT Regional Strategic Plan - A framework for economic, social and environmental development initiatives in the ACT and region.

Endnotes

- <http://www.periurban.org.au/>
- Regional Development Australia ACT is the current regional planning initiative in the ACT. It has been formed in response to a new Commonwealth Government regional development program. It has produced a Regional Development Strategy for the ACT (2010).
- Regional Development Australia ACT (2010) Regional Development Strategy
- ACT Government (2011) Canberra Social Plan 2011 p12 www.cmd.act.gov.au
- The taskforce focuses on public transport provision between Canberra and Queanbeyan and how barriers to provision can be overcome.
- RLF - organised through the ACT Government's Chief Minister's Department and the NSW Government, the RLF is held twice a year, attended by the ACT Chief Minister, NSW Government representatives and the Mayors and General Managers of the 14 surrounding Local Government Areas.
- Regional Development Australia Southern Inland Region (2010) Southern Inland Regional Development Plan 2010-2015 p12
- <http://www.envcomm.act.gov.au/soe/rsoe2009/regionalsnapshot02.shtml>
- Regional Development Australia, Southern Inland Regional Plan, p13-14.
- Queanbeyan City Council Community Profile, <http://profile.id.com.au/Default.aspx?id=288&pg=210>
- The 2008-09 *Ecological Footprint of the population of the Australian Capital Territory*, Report on consultancy work carried out for the Office of the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment by Integrated Sustainability Analysis Research Group, The University of Sydney, Dec 2010. http://www.environmentcommissioner.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0015/211182/ACT_Ecological_Footprint_08-09_final_report.pdf
- <http://www.envcomm.act.gov.au/soe/rsoe2009/harden/issues/biodiversity.shtml>
- <http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/resources/climatechange/08507SouthEast.pdf>
- Regional Development Australia, Southern Inland Regional Plan, p16.
- <http://www.periurban.org.au/index2008.htm>
- <http://www.periurban.org.au/index2008.htm> Mega is described as 'include the impact of transport and telecommunications on work location, competitive pressures, and the impacts of worldwide systems of production, consumption, distribution and exchange... the growth of part-time, short-term and female employment, and the growth of knowledge and information based economies'. Regional is described as 'suburbanisation, counter-urbanisation, population retention and centripetal migration... demographic change, power relationships, institutional arrangements, regional cultures and government policies'. Personal is described as 'preferences for lifestyle locations based on amenity landscapes, small towns and rural settings, and reactions to metropolitan living environments'.
- RDA, Australian Capital Territory, 2010.
- Canberra Airport Master Plan, p55. http://www.canberraairport.com.au/air_planning/masterPlan09.cfm It should be noted that The Canberra Airport Masterplan 2009 is made under the provisions of the Airports Act 1996 (part 5) and is approved by the relevant Federal minister. Neither the National Capital Authority or ACT government planning instruments take precedence over federal legislation. Despite this, the Master Plan is largely consistent with the National Capital Plan.