

The Draft Illawarra Shoalhaven Regional Plan 2041 is generally satisfactory as a broad plan.

It is pleasing to see that Climate Change is now influencing planning, with a regional emissions target having been stated and that urban greening with its multiple benefits is being encouraged. It is also reassuring to see that the concepts which underlie liveable communities are being expanded upon.

I am somewhat more cynical about the proposed protection of biodiversity corridors, given that offsets are still regarded as suitable to use in maintaining biodiversity. In practice offsets don't benefit locally displaced ecological communities and the biodiversity equation that underlies their use is purely pragmatic. In developments to the west of Shellharbour, biodiversity and fragile wildlife corridors always seem to come off second to developers and species range is consistently being reduced. I hope that throughout the life of this plan there will be more than just lip service paid to maintaining environmental integrity.

I am disappointed that the primary reason for partnership with Aboriginal communities appears to be obtaining access to their land for use as offsets or development. Surely that's not the only way to boost the economic development of this community.

Another area of concern relates to protecting the biodiversity of the Region's extensive coastline. The Plan emphasises Urban Greening yet there is a continuing assault on vegetation all along the coastline – mostly illegal, in pursuit of views. As well as its supportive role in coastal ecosystems, coastal vegetation buffers adjacent housing from storm surges and rising sea level and should be enhanced and protected for its role in climate change adaptation and as biodiversity land. To achieve urban greening, both coastal and urban vegetation will require increased protection through Local Environmental and Development Control Plans and will need funding to be made available so that Councils can monitor vegetation in vandalism hot spots.

It is critically important that "identified" important agricultural land is protected, but quite frustrating to see this being emphasised when the reality is that the mapping process to identify this land has stalled, with no progress on it taking place in our region since the previous Regional Plan. As a result, there is continued uncertainty. Farmers can't afford the land and speculative purchasing for future development continues. The resultant land may become leased or used as rural residential, but it may also become weedy with both its agricultural potential and local biodiversity suffering. There needs to be more commitment to "identify" important agricultural land through seeking that the state-wide mapping project is completed, so that this land can then be understood purely and enduringly as farm land.

It is also important that agritourism becomes defined better in planning controls, to ensure that farm stays can only occur on land where the primary business is farming. Otherwise farm properties will continue being purchased for tourism purposes and once again, the usage of viable agricultural land becomes compromised and the agricultural potential of the region suffers.

The thought of connected communities with housing in the right places and all people having access to some of the green space of a green grid sounds idyllic and I truly hope that this is the reality that I will see evolving as the years go by.

At this point I want to draw your attention to one particular area where available green and shaded space may become threatened in the future. I have become aware that Sydney Trains are interested in developing the land above the railway tunnels in Kiama Heights. Since this land is not windswept and coastal like the majority of "public" land in the area, it is flourishing with native trees and has become a major thoroughfare, gathering and play space for local people. I sincerely hope that this living spine of Kiama Heights will be exactly the type of land that becomes protected during the term of this next Regional Plan.

Thank you for allowing me this opportunity for comment.

Kathy Rice