Regional plans, regional roadmaps and regional resilience?
Or Did Noah have a regional roadmap and if he did would it have helped?

Abstract
A short introduction will provide some historic context for regional planning in Australia and will very briefly examine the waxing and waning of various governments’ appetites for regional planning and how it relates to the current program of regional planning. Over the past two years the Federal government has re-invested in regional planning. This movement towards regional planning was well underway in several States before the political landscape changed with the results of 2010 election. This was the election which signaled the rise in power of the regionally based independents.

The major developments in the current approaches to regional planning will be examined through the regional plans and regional roadmaps which were funded by the Regional Development Australia program. However, since the completion of those publicly available documents, natural disasters have overtaken the fortunes of many regional areas.

This paper concludes by posing a challenge to regional planning. Do regional plans have the capacity to improve the resilience to natural disasters? The strategies employed in the current crop of regional plans will provide some partial answers to this challenge.

NOTE: The author notes that she was part of a Federally funded consultancy project where the Parsons Brinckerhoff team which provided assistance to Regional Development Australia committees across the country, particularly Darling Down and South West Queensland and Ipswich and West Moreton committees. The Executive Officers from both of these committee provided generous assistance with this paper.

Introduction
In Australia we have a history of regional planning which has produced mixed results. The latest change to the Federal government’s interest in the investment and operation of regional planning was in 2009 with the advent of the Regional Development Australia program. It should be noted that this pre-dated the results of the 2010 Federal elections which saw the regionally-based independents hold the balance of power. This paper introduces the current Regional Development Australia program through two brief case studies which focus on the theme of water.
Regional planning – again?

Many interventions in the lives and economies of Australians could be termed ‘regional planning’. The definitions have been wide and even the concept of a region remains stubbornly elusive. Regional planning has the following characteristics:

- a style and approach to planning which has a geographic scope larger than one local government area
- it will generally integrate the aspects of sustainable planning and some will have stronger focus on specific areas than others
- the purpose is generally to improve the lives of the people who live and work in the region and this often involves shaping government investment.

Many regional plans sit within the land use planning regulative framework while others are non-statutory and have terms of reference that prioritize economic development or social inclusion. The diagram below from the South East Queensland Regional Plan 2009 (SEQ RP) summarises the relationship between other state government agencies and the SEQ RP.

The regional plans from the Regional Development Australia plan (RDA plans) discussed in this paper are not included in ‘the-line-of-sight’ concept that most Queensland planning professionals are familiar with from the SEQ RP. This paper will return to this diagram in later sections.

Nor was the role of community engagement role to be included in this diagram but the relationship between this ‘line-of-sight’ and the community is an interesting concept.

![Diagram](https://example.com/diagram.png)

**Figure 1** SEQ RP 2009:106 – State agency interests

This diagram was not intended to provide insight into relationships to the Federal government. It has been noted elsewhere (particularly Neil Savery see below), that the relationship between the Federal government and land use planning is a complex one, which can vary considering between different governments and over time.
It should be noted that on careful inspection it is clear that the Regional Development Australia ‘strategic plans’ are included in this complex arrangement under the heading Other Groups.

Using the SEQ diagram as a basis the following is posed:

- Are there other types of regional planning which could provide input into this hierarchy?
- Where does the community input and role sit?

These two questions are explored in the final section of this paper.

**Federally led regional planning**

Planning in our context at the Queensland Planning Institute conference (2011) is an activity of government and regional planning has enjoyed varying levels of interest from governments since Federation. There is or should be a considerable overlap between regional development through federal government investment and regional planning. Some of the highlights of federally led regional planning or investment in regional areas since Federation are listed below:

- Government investment in ports lead to the development of industry and commerce from settlement times
Government investment in railways opened up inland areas through 1890’s

- some of the aspects of Federation itself could be described as a type of regional planning but it was not conceived as such at the time

- Government-planned settlement schemes including the soldier settlements after both world wars with their patchy successes (e.g. Stanthorpe and Peachester 1920s)

- the Whitlam initiatives of the early ‘70’s with the relative success of Albury-Wodonga

- Government investment in Gladstone, Mt Isa and other major infrastructure.

During the ‘90’s and the first decade of this century new models which focused on greater community participation were employed by both State and Federal governments with varying degrees of success. These included Regional consultative committees and Area Consultative committees and these could be reasonably described as much more of a bottom-up approach.

These Federal programs of the prior to the ‘90’s and most before were much more of the top down approach based on federal government policy. The programs of the ‘90s began the progress towards much more local community involvement.

The discussion around top-down – the usual government approach versus bottom-up or community driven planning has continued for many years in most westernized countries. The figure below is a European attempt to balance these opposing approaches.

![Figure 3 European attempt to balance the government approach versus bottom-up or community driven planning](source)

The Commonwealth Government began the Regional Development Australia program in 2009 which continued the community based or bottom-up approach to regional planning. By 2009 or so the investment in the earlier committees had continued to varying degrees across the country; although, some states, such as Victoria and NSW maintained relatively strong organizational structures.

The results of the 2010 election signaled some changes in the electorate, particularly regional electorates with three independents holding the balance of power. The RDA program was reinforced as and Federal government funding priority.
The recognition of the RDA program as a bottom-up approach and its political significance was evident in the quote below from Minister Crean’s speech entitled ‘Driving regional economic development through localism’. No longer top-down versus bottom-up planning we have localism to ground regional plans or in Queensland (and South Australia) regional road maps.

The new regional policy landscape

These are exciting times for regional Australia, full of potential and promise. Through the agreement signed with Tony Windsor and Rob Oakeshott, there has been a renewed focus on regional development. This renewed focus has been reflected in my appointment as the dedicated Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government, and the creation of my department.

The Hon Simon Crean MP (2010)

The RDA program

This new localism approach to regional planning is being delivered through the Regional Development Australia program (RDA). The focus of this program (RDA) is on the role of the RDA committees which:

...complements the work of Local government. RDAs are there to perform a strategic role – one that is rooted in strong engagement with Local Government, Regional Organisations of Councils and other stakeholders. RDAs are there as facilitators, mentors and brokers on regional development.

The Hon Simon Crean MP (2010)

The RDA Charter includes the following which provides the essence of what the RDA committees are to do for their regions:

- A key focus of Regional Development Australia will be on the economic, social and environmental issues affecting communities. Regional Development Australia will be an important contributor to and driver of:
  - regional business growth plans and strategies, which will help support economic development, the creation of new jobs, skills development and business investment
  - environmental solutions, which will support ongoing sustainability and the management of climate change (including the impact of drought, flood or bushfires)
  - social inclusion strategies, which will bring together and support all members of the community.


The program design or terms of reference for the RDA committees also require the preparation of a regional plan or regional road map in states where the term ‘regional plan’ already exists. Very nearly all of the regional plans or road maps are available on RDA website www.rda.gov.au.

There are 55 RDA committees around Australia and nearly all have produced regional plans or regional roadmaps. My firm, Parsons Brinckerhoff has been privileged to work with many of these organizations. Parsons Brinckerhoff has offered different levels of assistance and always subject to what and how the RDA committee desired.
The role of the executive officer was critical as few of the committee members I dealt with had much experience with regional planning – although most had considerable experience with corporate planning.

The major components of these plans vary with the specific format and structure left up to each RDA committee. From an overview of several plans it is clear that the major features which generally occur in most plans include:

- an overview of the region – often with sub-regional narratives
- a summary of the stakeholders
- the strategic framework – strengths, and weaknesses, constraints and opportunities relationship to other documents
- regional issues and priorities
- economic growth and job creation
- often includes actions.

The major departure from other regional planning approaches is the concentration on economic growth and job creation.

The focus in the next section of this paper is on one aspect of the regional roadmaps prepared by the Ipswich and West Moreton and the Darling Downs and South West Queensland RDA committees. (Note: Through Parsons Brinckerhoff, I had a small advisory role with the Ipswich and West Moreton and a much more significant and role with the Darling Downs and South Western Queensland plan.) It is important to recognize that both these documents are authored by and the responsibility of the respective RDA committees.

**RDA and Water – two brief case studies**

The title of this paper queries the relationship between RDA regional roadmaps and the recent floods in Queensland. I have examined the RDA regional plans or roadmaps for two regions where flooding was experienced in January 2010. The first is from the Ipswich and West Moreton Region and a second from Darling Downs and South Western Queensland Region. As noted above the Executive Officers from both of these RDA generously provided assistance with this paper.

**Case Study No 1. – Ipswich and West Moreton RDA**

In September 2010 the Interim Regional Road Map 2010 (IWMRDA Plan) was released. This document was clearly identified as a transitional step towards a regional roadmap.

This interim document has been followed in August 2011 with the publication of the 2011/21 Roadmap ready for community comment. This is an update of the first roadmap and where available demographic and other statistical data have been included. Significantly the there is considerable reference to the natural disasters that struck the region in January 2011.

During the January floods of 2011 there was tragically loss of life and considerable damage to private property as well as significant impact on infrastructure across the region.
The structure of the current Regional Roadmap are basically the same as the interim document, however the following additions were identified:

- a clearer view of the role for the RDA
- increased recognition of the role and potential of the not-for-profit sector
- commentary and actions relating to the January floods
- strategies clearly identified as aimed to build up community resilience
- this later document shows clear indications of a significant amount of work since September 2010. This is evidenced by:
  - clear statement of achievement by committee members
  - increased sophistication and evolution of strategies and actions
  - clear messages supported by editing and strong layout.

The regional boundaries have remained the same (see map below) and include the four local government areas of:

- Ipswich City Council
- Scenic Rim Regional Council
- Lockyer Valley Regional Council
- Somerset Regional Council.
This is a peri-urban region with boundaries to the greater Brisbane metropolitan area, it includes the majority of SEQ Queensland’s dams and the dominant land use is agricultural. The largest centre is Ipswich which is the focus of the region’s State and Federal government functions, including a large hospital.

The purpose and method of the RDA is encapsulated in the following quote from the IWMRDA plan which is very similar to each of the regional plans and the RDA program itself. RDA is working to create successful and sustainable communities. In partnership with the private sector and the community, RDA committees are:

- supporting informed regional planning
- consulting and engaging with stakeholders to identify and resolve critical issues
- liaising with governments and local communities about the best, most appropriate programs and services to support regional development
- contributing to business growth and investment plans, environmental solutions and social inclusion strategies.
IWMRDA 2010:1

The Interim IWMRDA plan contained a detailed statistical and geographic overview of the local government areas which make up this region. The economic outlook for the region is stated as very positive and it is well supported with a range of economic data. The updated version (August 2011) included later economic data which while reflecting national trends provided a slightly less optimistic outlook.

Both editions of the regional roadmap identify in considerable detail the stakeholders in the region this is in and illustrated in the diagram below. This detailed analysis of the stakeholders and how relates to the purposes and methods of the RDA committee is a distinguishing feature of this type of plan.

![Figure 5 Stakeholders](image-url)

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Sharon Boyle  
Qld PIA conference, Planning with Attitude  
23 September, 2011
In the Interim Roadmap there is a strategic review of the region, then seven overarching themes. These themes include ‘Access to reliable water supply’ and ‘Caring for our natural environment’:

- access to reliable water supply theme highlights the essential nature of water for the growth of the region for food, industrial and urban growth. The emphasis was clearly upon increasing the efficiency of water use
- caring for our natural environment theme looks at the abundance of natural assets including water ways and notes the pressure from a variety of land uses on the waterways.

The impact of the January floods is particularly clear in the priority themes, as the current Roadmap includes reference to water and/or flooding in the following:

1. Improving information and communication infrastructure.
2. Enabling access to an affordable and reliable water supply.
3. Developing our transport infrastructure and services.
4. Growing our primary industries.
5. Caring for our natural environment.

The floods were clearly a very significant event for this region and this is reflected in the current Roadmap where 5 of the 7 priority themes discuss water as opposed to the earlier roadmap included a reference to water in only 2 of 7 priority themes.

The themes of the Interim plan were addressed through 12 key actions or projects which the RDA committee identified as having the potential to ‘provide economic development and job creation dividends.’ IWMRDA 2010:50. The actions directly related to water are under 4. Best Practice Water conservation.

This project aims to set up best practice water conservation through a study of existing local government and water utility policies. This was seen as a crucially important aspect in the region’s development as no consistent approach was available across the region. The context for this initiative was a decade of drought.

The initiatives or actions identified in the current Roadmap now number 13 and some of the earlier actions have been moved to ‘Initiatives undertaken’ (see Table 20 page 60). The current list of initiatives still address the priority themes, particularly through the following initiatives:

1. Recycled water and food security.
2. Rural futures strategy.
3. Transport Services.

The RDA committee’s decision to produce an interim plan in September 2010 and arrival of the floods in January 2011 was a timeframe which allowed the Regional Roadmap to include reference to the natural disasters of January 2011. The responsive approach to these disasters is due to the energy and talent which resides in the the committee, its supporting organisation and the region itself.
The IWDRDA has truly embraced the opportunities inherent in the RDA program by:

- making their Regional Roadmap a living document
- taking a leadership role through such events as the Regional Leadership Forum May 2011 (RDA website www.rda.gov.au accessed 6 September 2011)
- demonstrating a clear role for the RDA committee in assisting the development of community resilience, particularly post January 2011 floods

Case study No 2. Darling Downs and South West Queensland RDA – (DD and SW Regional roadmap)

The Darling Downs and South West Queensland region includes Toowoomba and 9 other regional councils or councils. It stretches from Toowoomba to Camerons Corner and south to the border. The region comprises 10 local government shires and regions of Balonne, Bulloo, Goondiwindi, Maranoa, Murweh, Paroo, Quilpie, Southern Downs, Toowoomba and Western Downs (see Figure 6.). The region covers a total area of 397,240.8 square kilometres or 22.9% of Queensland’s total area. The region is home to 262,467 persons, with an expected population of 330,204 persons by year 2026.

This is a very different region to that of Ipswich and West Moreton with agriculture being the major economic activity, although the importance of the region’s administrative and commercial focus on Toowoomba is similar to the dominance of Ipswich City.

The focus of the DD and SW RDA regional roadmap includes the following:

...will be on the economic, social and environmental issues affecting communities. Regional Development Australia will be an important contributor to and driver of:

- Regional business growth plans and strategies, which will help support economic development, the creation of new jobs, skills development and business investment
- Environmental solutions, which will support ongoing sustainability and the management of climate change (including the impact of drought, flood or bushfires)
- Social inclusion strategies, which will bring together and support all members of the community.
The focus of this RDA is slightly different to the IWMRDA in that includes reference to natural disasters, i.e. (drought, flood or bushfires). Disasters, including flooding were anticipated in this Regional Roadmap and unlike the IWMRDA the DD and SW RDA had finalized their plan prior to Christmas 2010.

This regional roadmap (DD and SW Qld RDA plan) addresses the major requirements in a similar but slightly different structure to that of the IWMRDA plan with the following structure:

- a regional and sub-regional narrative well backed up by statistics
- a summary of stakeholders with emphasis on communication tools
- a strategic framework
- five goals with the most relevant to water being Goal 1: Promote the sustainable management of the region’s natural resources and environment. DD and SW Qld RDA plan 2010:46
- economic growth and job creation Strategy with an action list showing priorities and actions against each of the five goals
- action plan with five themes which identified responsibilities and timelines.

This regional roadmap is detailed to include goals, priorities, actions and key performance indicators. Each of these plan components relevant to water are shown below.

**Goal**

*Promote the sustainable management of the region’s natural resources and environment*

**Priority**

*Water sensitive urban design to preserve valuable water usages and consumption*

**Action**

*Investigate and promote water sensitive design systems*

**Key Performance indicators**

*Promotion of water sensitive design systems for industry and contribution to Murray Darling Basin review process*

DD and SW regional roadmap 2010:56.

The impact of the January floods in this region was intensely and tragically focused on Toowoomba. This formed a very different pattern to that experienced in Ipswich and West Moreton region. A different range of responses has been identified and these include:

- the DD and SW RDA will be adding appendices to their existing Roadmap which will include the flood mitigation strategies and associated infrastructure from the constituent Council Community Plans
advocating for flood mitigation projects to ensure a better preparedness for future events

provide strategic advice where to better place/replace infrastructure to eliminate, or at least limit, the impact of such events

working with bodies such as Job Skills Development Officer (JSDO), DEEWR and DEEDI to identify staff shortages as one of the major problems confronting local businesses on the road to recovering from the devastating floods of late 2010 and early 2011

putting forward concerns directly to the Minister in Canberra for example; the extension of the Flood Assistance monies paid to Councils from two years to four years and also the inclusion of the day labour rate in their disaster payments

advising applicants of funding availability and avenues accessible for flood mitigation.

Person communication with Executive Officer DD and SW RDA August 9, 2011.

This committee is also includes highly responsible and responsive community members and their priorities are necessarily different to those in the adjacent region. The Roadmap for this region will be amended to include references to these initiatives which is part of the on-going commitment to keep these documents live and relevant. The website for this committee provides an extraordinary amount of easily accessible information with an emphasis on grants including those available for projects associated with flood re-building.

Concluding comments re two RDA case studies

The economic importance of water is indisputable and well recognized in both of these regional roadmaps. Both plans were written at the end of an almost decade long drought and developing water security was the driving theme through range of actions was evident in both plans. The responsiveness of the IWMRDA was a reflection of the severity of the floods in that region as well as the opportunity they had to move from an Interim document to a full regional roadmap.

The focus of the DD and SW RDA regional roadmap included a reference to flooding which indicates that this region had this ever present issue in mind when the plan was prepared.

There is an obligation or at least an expectation that the RDA committees will regularly to update regional roadmaps to reflect changing community priorities and government program. IWMRDA have accomplished this with the recent release of their Regional Roadmap while DD and SW RDA have foreshadowed upcoming amendments while maintaining an information rich and current website.

The floods have presented the RDA concept with an opportunity demonstrate their potential to collaborate across many levels of government. This appears to be happening and is being recognized as Minster Crean has provided additional funding (press release 3 March 2011).

Concluding planning comments

The Senate committee looking into the Reform of the Australian Federation has included that each of the sates ‘...give consideration to strengthening existing regional governance frameworks’ and that the RDA program itself should be reviewed within three years (Commonwealth of Australia 2011:112). It will be very interesting to see how the Federal government responds to both these concepts in the evolving and on-going relationship between regional planning and Australian governments.
As planners one of our common traits is to look for linkages and hierarchies in planning systems. This discussion of the RDA program, planning techniques and outcomes suggest that linkages can be developed between land use planning and this more economically focused regional style of planning.

The linkage proposed is shown in the diagram below, which is an adaptation of our State Planner’s, Mr Gary White ‘line of sight’ diagram. The inherent message in this diagram is that the various levels of government and community input should be incorporated into the most relevant plan and its specific position in the planning hierarchy.

Figure 7  RDA Regional Roadmaps – State agency interests

RDA regional roadmaps or regional plans do not sit directly inside this hierarchy but should still have a clear and tangential relationship. The strength of the RDA regional roadmaps are their connection to a far wider and considerably more representative group than many of our land use plans. For this reason alone I recommend these plans for serious consideration by land use planners.

To return to the silly question posed in the title:

‘Regional plans, regional roadmaps and regional resilience? Or did Noah have a regional roadmap and if he did would it have helped?’

The chances are very low that Noah would have a regional road map, but if he was in South East Queensland for the next big flood, chances are that the local regional roadmap would actually help.
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