Submission from the Planning Institute of Australia (NSW Division)

A New Direction for N.S.W.
State Plan

Executive Summary

The NSW Division of the Planning Institute of Australia strongly supports the Premier's State Plan initiative as a positive and gutsy commitment to the future of the State, and commits to working closely with the State Government to realise the Plan’s full potential. PIA NSW makes the following recommendations to move the plan forward.

1. The Plan should guide and make explicit the links to the State Infrastructure Strategy, Regional Strategies and Sub-Regional Plans (once adopted) so that their integration is clear. The Regional Strategies, Sub-Regional and local Plans should be consistent with the principles of the State Plan.

2. The State Plan needs to set out the Government’s policy on population growth across the State by region and major centres as well as over time. Population change is the key variable in all of the “themes” in the Plan – services, jobs growth, environment and building communities. It is necessary for agencies to know the number of people for whom they are planning. This in turn should lead the decisions on settlement patterns. The development and investment in key regional centres should be seriously considered and opportunity costed as a means of partly reducing growth pressures in metropolitan areas.

3. The State Plan should focus on water as a separate priority, as it will be the defining factor in the State’s development over the coming decades. Water efficiency should go beyond NRC targets to address industry use of water, including rural industry. Settlement should be directed to those areas which have more sustainable access to this precious resource.

4. The State Infrastructure Strategy should follow the State Plan rather than the other way around. Much greater attention should be paid to road and rail infrastructure links and interchanges in primary production areas. These areas contribute strongly to the State economy, but are often overlooked due to important metro matters. Public/private partnerships can work in regional areas too!

5. The great State of NSW requires the establishment of a “NSW Productivity Commission” whose role would be to scenario test and benchmark the National and global competitiveness of the State, the openness of the economy, the benefits and disbenefits of the current expanding regulatory environment and the reality or otherwise of the “open for business culture” among the various State portfolios.

6. PIA supports the development of scenario testing for alternative State or regional outcomes similar to the “Metroquest” program in Vancouver. Scenario testing can be used to verify the impacts of different outcomes that support the direction by the State Plan. Scenario testing will help clarify the key driver of change, inform the community and industry as to why the preferred direction is better than others (as well as the trade offs in choosing the preferred direction) and why planning is not just “good luck” but
rational choice between different outcomes. Testing allows the community to be involved in setting the strategic direction for the city/town or suburb rather than involvement on the next-door site. It enables the “trade offs” to be transparent to the community and strategic in approach.

7. PIA strongly supports the establishment of an independent State Plan “commission” to oversee the scenario testing, review progress with the CEOs and report to the Government on outcomes and the priorities. A “commission” could include a representative of each of the key NGO’s, industry groups, local government and the Premiers Office.

8. PIA supports broad economic, environmental and social plans, which provide a framework for the whole of government. These should be supported by a whole of State policy and spatial plan (binding on all portfolios and agencies) progressing down to Regional policy and spatial plans to be clear enough to set the direction while allowing the destination to be reached by appropriate paths. Local plans can then be developed to respond to these frameworks and with greater certainty.

9. The State Plan should recognise issues that cross State boundaries and where cooperative government responses are required to achieve the targets of the plan.

10. A legislative basis to the State Plan is recommended, so that successive governments review and adopt the State Plan within 12 months of coming to power. However strategic plans by definition need to be robust given the financial implications and the timeframe. Significant change to the State direction should be accompanied by extensive and meaningful community engagement.
Introduction

The Planning Institute of Australia congratulates the Premier on the initiative to develop a State Plan. The initiative of the Chief Executives and their staff to draw together key issues for the future planning of the State is a landmark for NSW planning. The draft for consultation is an excellent platform for the State Government, the private sector and Local Government to start work on setting priorities for investment, budgeting and longer term project planning beyond the election cycle.

As one of the peak groups representing key stakeholders involved in social, environmental and infrastructure planning in NSW, the Planning Institute of Australia (PIA), sees the adoption of a State Plan as a significant foundation for future policy, funding and allocation of resources.

PIA believes that a State Plan is essential as an overarching framework where, in one place, the State Government states its position on key planning objectives. The targets under the plan are to be linked to performance indicators and responsibilities are to be sheeted home to the relevant agencies to report on their ability or inability to meet targets and to identify impediments. The State Plan is the key document in the planning reform agenda of the State Government with which the NSW Regional Strategies (including the Metropolitan Strategy), Sub-Regional Plans, State Infrastructure Strategy and the various State agency programs will interact as a total package. There is an opportunity to lay out a clear direction for NSW as a whole and where each of its individual regions and sectors make up parts of that whole.

The Institute represents over 4000 Planners working in NSW in many fields of industry and research. The Institute has advocated for the preparation of a State Plan for many years and acknowledges the budgetary and inter-agency difficulties of making this commitment.

Members in recent meetings and focus groups stress the need for changes to the N.S.W. approach to corporate and strategic planning and dissatisfaction with the legalistic approach, education and skill levels of planning practitioners.

They highlight the need for a State long-term view, further evolution of the Metro Strategy as it currently stands; transparency and state involvement in strategic planning decisions and the need for design and locality based planning, with a move away from a one size fits all approach.

Description of The Plan

The plan is set out with five themes Plan Ahead, Respect and Responsibility, Improve Services, Prosperity and Environment and Living.

Against these themes there are a total of 29 priorities. These themes are inter-related and mutually reinforcing.

The plan is to be aligned with the state budget and the priorities are to set the agenda for cabinet. Existing key plans related to the various portfolios are to be integrated into the State Plan.
Many of the desired outcomes listed under the priorities are fully or partially dependent for their success on the physical arrangements of urban areas, that is the spatial organisation of the city relative to the context. This spatial organisation varies from city to region, town to rural area.

Clearly the State Plan is a broad strategic document, ultimately however it needs to be linked to/and represented via spatial planning, which provides the framework for evaluating and testing options.

Town Planning can only influence certain areas outlined in the State Plan, but obviously the physical arrangement of our cities and towns has profound implications on social, economic and environmental outcomes. The Institute recognises that the draft State Plan has been produced as a continually evolving document, written to be meaningful to the widest possible cross-section of the community.

Themes

PIA’s comments related to the specific themes of the State Plan are as follows:

Plan Ahead

Time Frame Strategic Planning requires long time frames in terms of preparation, testing of the plan and implementation. The time frame is not commensurate with the political cycle.

This raises two issues:
- firstly sufficient time needs to be allowed to undertake the planning and produce robust long-term decisions.
- secondly a bipartisan approach politically in terms of the physical organisation for the state is required to ensure that the objectives for the plan can be met.

Respect and Responsibility

Priorities 1,2,3 and 4 - Safety and Harmony in the Community

Failure to develop urban places of high quality compounds problems of social isolation, unemployment, lack of involvement in community activities and street crime.

Planning outcomes can influence accessibility to employment, recreation and education. Urban areas can provide opportunities for social interaction and places to meet. They can ensure streets and public places are overlooked and defined by buildings or they can form no go wastelands. They can engender community identity and pride or they can create despair.

PIA supports the use of government projects, both buildings and infrastructure, as exemplar projects within all areas of the State.
Ensuring that physical outcomes deliver the objectives in terms of safety within and outside the home together with social cohesion requires greater involvement of all agencies at the strategic planning level.

Indigenous Social Planning

The State Plan needs to promote and endorse the use of the Indigenous Land Use Agreement concept as a leading focal point of State reconciliation initiatives. Where they have been used successfully it has empowered local aboriginal communities with land ownership, business opportunities and employment, with inherent positive social outcomes. Indigenous policy should be a separate priority.

Improving Services

PIA supports the provision of better services in the state.

Improved services, including efficient and affordable public transport is essential in developing sustainable urban areas.

Priorities 5,6,7 and 17 - Health

Planning has limited influence on some of the services which are required by the community outlined in this theme however physical outcomes particularly street and block patterns relative to topographical considerations can influence the use (or not) of public transport and walking as a mode of transport.

The city should be organised so that the disabled, mentally ill, elderly and young have access to jobs; recreation, cultural pursuits and education. Providing pleasant safe, understandable places in which to live can influence the feelings of well being in the community. Blighted and isolated neighbourhoods can exacerbate health problems.

Priorities 10,11 & 12 - Transport

Transport Priorities 10,11 and 12 seem to focus mainly on the needs of the Metro area. Public or part funded community based transport needs to be available daily in rural areas to move people between villages, towns and regional centres, for employment and access to government services. Appropriate public transport between centres allows for the concentration of services in larger centres as the rural community can access these services.

Transport priorities should include the movement of agricultural product from farm to storage or processing then to export. A state wide strategy of transport routes needs to be developed starting at a sub regional level and working to the state level to develop the transport corridors needed to move goods and materials through and around the state. Such a strategy should tie road, rail and air corridors into an infrastructure network with programmed funding that makes export of product via NSW ports and airports the preferred priority rather than the current situation that see much NSW product exported via Geelong or Brisbane.

PIA questions:
- the priority of increasing the share of use of public transport only in peak times PIA and supports a broader aim in the reduction of car use.
- the lack of "a systems" approach to public transport in metro areas.
- failure to mention the need for public transport in regional areas.

The state requires effective metro and regional transport strategies. These establish and maintain integrated and sustainable multi-modal transport systems now and in the future.

**Prosperity**

**Priorities 18-22 – Financial Management, Productivity, Investment and Regional Growth**

Growing prosperity in N.S.W. sound financial management and strengthening regional and rural economics, are important goals. However PIA supports a broader approach to prosperity. This approach includes a sharing of the prosperity so that it is linked to relevant social indicators and broader wealth sharing across the State. Cohesive, happy and productive communities are not borne of increasing inequality. The prosperity theme should recognise this.

Robust strategies which target growth in green fields and regional areas serviced by appropriate infrastructure; increased research related to soil and food production, the development of complementary industries rather than competitive industries across the state can facilitate the desired fiscal outcomes while also meeting the social and environmental aims.

Importantly Priority 18 should recognise that a AAA credit rating can be maintained in conjunction with a sensible and balanced borrowing program to support the infrastructure requirements suggested in this submission, particularly in relation to water saving measures and road/rail interchanges in primary production and port areas.

**Inland Regional Planning and Rural Planning**

The State Plan needs to be more supportive of regional planning initiatives such as the Far Nth Coast Regional Strategy. Although the draft of this is flawed, it is the document that the State can use to really achieve some clear planning targets and structure for Local Govt to work with. It is potentially to Non Statutory missing link in local and regional planning that provides policy "meat" on the "bones" of the statutory Regional Environmental Plan.

State Plan Priority 22 misses the key underlying economic driver of rural and regional areas outside the coastal regions and that is Primary Production, whether agriculture, forestry, mining or fisheries. Only a small part of the rural landscape comprises a lifestyle choice. In reality primary production is a business with industrial overtones.

Rural areas should be viewed according to their key economic role and huge latent potential to provide innovative sustainable industry such as crops for biofuel and ethanol
production. Water use in rural areas should focus on the most efficient use of water and a balance between the greatest biomass and the most useful allocation of water for the State and export market.

Certainly rural centres need diversification of activity to broaden the economic base and the skills shortage is keenly felt in all sectors of the economy however none of the strategies in the State Plan address these issues in rural and regional NSW. Land use planning in rural and regional areas should revolve around effective regional strategies, with less focus on dwelling entitlements in agricultural areas and better planning and protection for more intense agriculture that uses off farm income to provide the investment to increase technology uptake and value adding to production on farm. Strategies should focus on transport, education and training provision of skilled and unskilled labour, services for communities and encouragement of business investment.

Environment for Living

Priorities 24-29 relate to quality of the Living Environment

PIA supports improved living environments. While the priorities listed may improve some aspects of the living environment, meeting these priorities will not necessarily produce living environments of high quality. For example Priority 27, “increases proportions of freight on rail” may assist in minimising the increase of trucks on the road system but may beg the question of the environmental and social implications of increased importation.

The interrelationship of these priorities is a key factor in achieving the right outcomes.

Liveability in urban areas is a complex issue and includes accessibility; diversity; beauty; legibility and affordability. Issues related to liveability need to be further explored defined and tested in performance scenarios.

The physical organisation of an urban area has a major impact on liveability. It affects the community health (physical and mental), safety, interaction, ability to provide services, environmental performance, creativity and sustainability.

Physical planning strategies need to be related to work patterns (high levels of change and mobility); family structures (diverse) together, physical characteristics of people (how they see, move etc), landform, and taxation policies.

Priority 23 - Water and Energy

In the face of reduced rainfall and growing populations policies relating to water should include efficiency of use in both urban and rural areas. Meeting water targets may require a range of measures including:

- greater use of recycling and stormwater harvesting
- changes to crop production based on water efficiency,

Production of energy requires an extensive evaluation process to establish the most sustainable options for N.S.W. and Australia.
Higher levels of investment will be required in infrastructure and incentives for both water and energy delivery. Reduction of use should be a key platform for water and energy provision.

Priority 28 - Housing and Land Supply

Housing

Affordable housing should be a major discussion point in the State Plan where NSW (and particularly Sydney) is such an expensive place to buy and rent. A state document should promote concepts for provision of affordability in planning requirements. Intervention is needed now before many opportunities are lost. Homelessness related to affordability, mental illness, substance abuse is a growing problem and should be addressed in a comprehensive state wide housing strategy.

Housing choice is not simply related to building type but rather choice needs to encompass the characteristics of the urban/suburban place and the level of services. Sydney since WWII has developed with a very high proportion of detached dwellings. In the last 10 years some measures have been taken to address this imbalance but there has been very limited development of the compact medium/high density suburbs, like those which formed the majority of the city prior to the spread of car ownership.

Land Supply

This Priority needs to recognise that zoning and servicing more greenfield sites is not a good generic objective for all LGA’s and it should be tempered by "in accordance with agreed local and regional strategies" to ensure that its only promoted in that context. Many LGA’s have inherently limited opportunities to house significant additional population.

PIA advocates working with the development industry on new forms of cost effective greenfields and infill housing, to create greater recognition of the value of our urban environment. In this regard the development industry must be partners in the housing needs process.

Land supply needs to form part of a strategic tested physical outcome and related to servicing; accessibility; building typology; density and environmental factors. Importantly, the issue of mobility should be considered in conjunction with affordability. The ability to change ones housing location and style is also a good measure of housing stress and affordability.

Development of key major centres in regional areas (not dissimilar to Queensland) may lessen the pressure on the settlement patterns in Sydney Metro area and create a new hierarchy of diversity in urban areas.

Priorities 24,25,26 and 27 Clean Air, Improved Natural Environment, Better Transport

These promote efficient use of land, retention of habitat and reduced reliance of motor vehicles.
Improved urban and rural outcomes may be better promoted by considering a design based, physically specific, planning system as opposed to the process based system currently in use.

World wide best practice for urban areas recommends replication and duplication focused on design projects, not zoning, as the best method of producing successful urban outcomes. PIA supports a targeted and tested approach to densification related to transport provision and minimising environmental degradation to ensure that the environmental objectives of the plan are met.

**Conclusion**

PIA would like to make the following suggestions to move the State Plan forward.

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