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ACT Planning Strategy Submissions  
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## **Regional Development Australia ACT – Submission on the Draft *ACT Planning Strategy***

RDA ACT recognises the significance the Draft *ACT Planning Strategy* places on the value and importance of the ACT's place and role in the region, but considers there is scope to further develop the regional perspective within this document.

Within the Draft *ACT Planning Strategy*, regional issues are spread throughout the document. However, there is a strong argument for introducing a new *Strategy 10: strengthening the ACT's role as the hub of its surrounding region, and building an holistically prosperous and sustainable region*. Such a strategy would unify the multifarious regional issues under one section, and encourage regional issues to be considered in their wider context.

The context is provided by the Australian Capital Territory and New South Wales *Memorandum of Understanding for Regional Collaboration* signed by the ACT Chief Minister Katy Gallagher MLA and NSW Premier the Hon. Barry O'Farrell MP on 2 December 2011, in which both First Ministers agreed that taking a regional approach towards cross border issues in the ACT-South East NSW region would optimise economic, environmental and social outcomes for the people of this region.

### **The Region**



The definition of the 'region' of significance to the ACT varies depending on the issue being discussed. However, it is increasingly recognised that there is a need to define our regional boundaries - the ACT's 'surrounding region', in a way that will best facilitate development and progression of the majority of issues that are relevant to the ACT and region holistically.

If a region is largely defined by, "a shared sense of place, and a common purpose or destiny"<sup>1</sup>, then the structure provided by the three RDA regions: the ACT, Southern Inland and Far South Coast - as outlined on the map, offers an appropriate model for an ACT-SE NSW region into the future.



## Relevance of the ACT

The ACT is located in the centre of the SE NSW region, and is the principal service centre for this region. Although both the ACT and NSW retain different governance structures, building closer collaboration between them would optimise regional outcomes in areas that have identified potential synergies that would benefit both. Both the ACT and its surrounding region have different strengths to offer, and different needs to be met. It therefore follows that, working together, they would be able to take a stronger position to resolve issues than they could were they to approach those same issues in isolation.

Much of the Draft *Planning Strategy's Background Paper 10: Regional Perspective* refers to 'service provision for and to the region'. Yet 'regionality' has the scope to encompass so much more than just the ubiquitous regional issues of the provision of health and education services to residents of the ACT-SE NSW region, or developing the important transport corridors between nodes within the greater region, or even developing the proposed regional biodiversity and regional settlement strategy plans.

True regionality is about giving a regional context to all issues as they arise, and viewing each through the lens of regional perspective. There are regional initiatives currently being progressed by RDAs and NSW/ACT governments that include: developing a South East NSW-ACT Region of Renewable Energy Excellence, and a South East NSW-ACT Regional Food Initiative to grow the regional food economy. Both are examples of broader regional issues that will provide mutually beneficial synergies, and have been noted briefly in the Draft Planning Strategy i.e. renewable energy generation on p.59 (Strategy 9), and food security issues on p.55 (Strategy 8).

A little more detail on the strong progress of these regional initiatives is outlined below, illustrating the burgeoning impetus to adopt a regional lens on local issues.

- **Renewable energy –**

Previously work had been undertaken - funded by the NSW Government, to explore the potential to develop renewable energy production facilities/employment opportunities in the 'ACT-NSW Border Region' – but the working definition of this area did not include the ACT. To redress this perceived omission, a joint Steering Committee (with members from both sides of the border) was established to create an ACT- South East NSW Region of Renewable Energy Excellence.

### **South East Region of Renewable Energy Excellence (SERREE)**

**The SERREE Steering Committee** has formed a collaborative network between NSW and ACT government agencies, Regional Development Australia – Southern Inland, ACT and South Coast, and with industry, education, and community stakeholders. Keen interest has stimulated increasing momentum for the SERREE initiative since the Steering Committee's inception in June 2011, and Commonwealth Government funding is currently being sought to progress the initiative.

**Vision:** to develop an exemplar clean green regional economy – a Centre of Renewable Energy Excellence in the ACT-SE NSW region, with a broad partnership of public and private stakeholders.

**Objective:** to boost growth and diversity in our regional economy, assist the region to move towards greater environmental sustainability, facilitate the provision of jobs, research and training opportunities, and boost the liveability and sustainability of the region.

**Rationale:** The 'clean economy' is a dynamic, fast growing movement that has the scope to generate significant benefits for the region. The ACT-SE NSW region is uniquely positioned to play a major role in the growing renewable energy industry. It is rich in natural renewable energy resources, well placed to capture surrounding clean, green energy markets, and has significant research and professional capacity.

SERREE synergies are in assisting the ACT to access more clean green energy - particularly in view of its ambitious target to reduce GHG emissions by 40% by 2020, recognising there is limited scope to produce it within the boundaries of its borders. Whereas NSW needs to provide employment opportunities throughout its regions and has land available on which renewable energy infrastructure could be constructed, but looks to the ACT research institutions for the cutting-edge technologies. Thus ACT research and education institutions are boosted, and regional jobs and businesses are strengthened, and the regional economies and environments of both benefit from the growth and diversity of a burgeoning regional industry.

- **Food security –**

The NSW Government recently funded a study into food production in this region, the result of which is the Discussion Paper: *South East Food: Growing the Regional Food Economy in the South East*, with a 'South East Food Action Plan' due for release in March 2012.

RDA ACT representatives will attend a meeting being held 21 February in Queanbeyan to discuss the actions required to increase regional food production with key stakeholders. This will provide an opportunity to broaden the parameters of the initiative to include the ACT in a regional food production strategy with a view to enhancing local food security and reducing the footprint/miles of food consumed in the ACT.

Such a strategy could include establishing a regional food 'brand' that can be used to promote and market local region produce, and regional tourism. It would also provide an opportunity to explore the potential to diversify the ACT and regions' economies into food industries where again, the synergies are in the creation of new jobs in regional NSW and the scope to utilise the ACT's knowledge wealth. The NSW region could provide the geographical scope (land) to help meet ACT food needs, and the ACT benefits in being able to source quality food with low food miles – environment benefit with security of local supply.

- **Services –**

- Transport – need to improve public transport options around the wider region, with particular focus on improving commuter access to the ACT from its immediate region e.g. Queanbeyan's 20,000 residents who travel to the ACT each day for employment.
- Health – the ACT's medical facilities are utilised by people living in surrounding NSW regions. This benefits not only these residents, but also those of the ACT as the economies of scale inherent in treating a larger number of people encourage more specialists and medical technology into the ACT.
- Education – the ACT's education institutions are also utilised by students from the broader region, with ensuing economies of scale that enhance the business of the university to grow and flourish.

### ***Regional Spatial Plan***

These and other regional initiatives would benefit from the provision of a *Regional Spatial Plan* that addresses regional planning issues holistically, while developing economic, environmental and social synergies between the ACT and SE NSW region.

A *Regional Spatial Plan* would outline a strategic direction for regional priorities across the policy spectrum dealing with cross border issues such as infrastructure e.g. transport, land use planning, and integrated service planning e.g. health and education. It is a Plan that would link urban planning with infrastructure planning and importantly, links them to the budget. It sets a vision and identifies regional priorities that give confidence to

investors. An initial step would be to map existing NSW and ACT plans and then to integrate them; however, governments need to invest to produce an outcome.

**To progress a regional initiative**

Developing an area of common/neutral ground on the border of the ACT and NSW may serve to facilitate continued cooperation between governments. A collaborative secretariat could coordinate meetings between cross border entities such as the Regional Leaders' Forum and the Eastern Region Transport Taskforce to progress identified regional priorities.

RDA ACT appreciates this opportunity to provide input into the future *ACT Planning Strategy*.

Yours sincerely,

***Craig Sloan***

Chairman, Regional Development Australia ACT