

Friday 09 September 2011

Queensland Regionalisation Strategy
Department of Local Government and Planning
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Thank-you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the *Queensland Regionalisation Strategy* public consultation document, July 2011 (the Strategy). As you would be aware, Queensland Farmers' Federation (QFF) is the peak body representing and uniting 16 of Queensland's rural industry organisations who work on behalf of primary producers across the state. QFF's mission is to secure a sustainable future for Queensland primary producers within a favourable social, economic and political environment by representing the common interests of its member organisations'. QFF's core business centres on resource security; water resources; environment and natural resources; industry development; economics; quarantine and trade.

Our goal is to secure a sustainable and profitable future for our members, as a core growth sector of the economy. Our members include:

- Australian Prawn Farmers' Association,
- CANEGROWERS,
- Cotton Australia,
- Growcom,
- Nursery and Garden Industry Queensland,
- Queensland Chicken Growers Association,
- Queensland Dairyfarmer's Organisation,
- Queensland Chicken Meat Council,
- Flower Association of Queensland Inc.,
- Pork Queensland Inc.,
- Biological Farmers of Australia
- Fitzroy Food and Fibre Association,
- Pioneer Valley Water Co-operative Limited,
- Central Downs Irrigators Limited, and
- Burdekin River Irrigators Area Committee

QFF and its members are keenly interested in regionalisation and its subsidiary issues. Whilst QFF is supportive of the Queensland Government's efforts to appropriately plan for regionalisation it is extremely disappointed with the way agriculture and its associated industries have been addressed in this Strategy.

The spatial, infrastructure and workforce planning issues required for sustainable agriculture growth have been completely overshadowed by requirements of the mineral and energy sectors. It is perilous to underplay the planning required for the maintenance and growth of the agricultural sector since:

- In 2008-09, Queensland's primary industries directly contributed an estimated \$5.2 billion¹ to the State's economy, with an estimated 267,000 employees¹ either partially or entirely supported by the food sector. At the regional scale agriculture can be a critical economic activity where few other alternatives exist.
- Of Queensland's 173 million hectares, almost 144 million hectares (or 83 per cent)¹ of the land area is used for agriculture – the largest area of agricultural land of any Australian state and the highest proportion of land area in Australia dedicated to agriculture.
- During the 2008-09 global economic downturn when other sectors faltered, Queensland's agriculture, forestry and fishing sector performed strongly with annual growth of 10.4 per cent¹.
- The Queensland Government's *Food for a growing economy* sets a target for a Queensland food value chain worth \$40 billion by 2020² – a more than doubling of the existing output (\$18.7 billion in 2008).

QFF is exasperated by the inaccuracy in the spatial representation of agriculture. We understand that the current economic zones map (p. 20) and future economic trends map (p. 21) are indicative only. However even allowing for the error in the scale and accuracy associated with this type of graphic, the illustrations are *incorrect*. The maps and to some extent the text needs to address:

- The spatial representation of the coastal, central, central west and Darling Downs areas as important agricultural production zones.
- The inclusion of strategic cropping land (SCL). All SCL protection and management areas identified in the *Draft State Planning Policy: Protection of Queensland's strategic cropping land* (Annex 4) is located outside of the Strategy's current agricultural economic zone. Clearly SCL is an important economic resource for agriculture.
- The issues associated with meeting Queensland Government's food growth targets. To achieve these targets agricultural production systems will need to expand and/or intensify – there is no indication of this in the Strategy.
- Not all agricultural produce is exported from the coast. In fact a large portion is exported to other States (chiefly New South Wales and Victoria). The challenges associated with cross-border movement of produce (e.g. nursery plants, horticulture and cotton) is a significant constraint to agricultural growth.

As has already occurred in some regions, the growth of the agricultural industry is likely to increasingly encounter land competition from other sectors and land use conflict. The

¹ DEEDI. 2010. *Prospects for Queensland's primary industries 2010–11*. Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation, Brisbane.

² DEEDI. 2011. *Food for a growing economy*. An economic development framework for the Queensland food industry. Draft policy framework for public consultation. Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation, Brisbane.

Strategy needs to better acknowledge these issues as impediments to growth, and where appropriate identify actions to address them at the regional scale.

Queensland Government's broader policy agenda is delivered through a range of policy and planning processes which are implemented at different regional scales, across different timescales and by multiple organisations. It is therefore understandable and potentially unwarranted that all processes are integrated. However this Strategy could be improved by acknowledging the range of other planning processes which impact on regionalisation, identifying the important or highly relevant ones, and where possible co-ordinating if not integrating across these processes.

The range and complexity of policy and planning processes has the potential to disenfranchise industry stakeholders particularly where processes appear to be running at cross-purposes. Disengagement of stakeholders risks stifling new and innovative solutions to the challenges of regionalisation. QFF would encourage the Department to make the Strategy as accessible as possible to agricultural industry stakeholders. This is particularly important at the regional scale where local engagement is crucial to success.

QFF is proactively working to improve the capacity of agricultural industries to engage in relevant policy and planning initiatives through a Rural Planning Project. The project is working on three fronts:

- a) Developing tools and processes to support the agricultural sector.
- b) Improving capacity to collate and analyse data for input into policy and planning processes, and
- c) Recommending tools and processes to support policy makers and planners.

Whilst in the early stages of implementing the project, significant progress has been made in collaborating to identify the nature of the problem from the perspective of industry and government stakeholders, and investigation of potential solutions.

More specific comments on the text of the Strategy are summarised in **Attachment 1** below.

QFF is committed to working with the Queensland Government to address the challenges associated with the sustainable growth of agriculture and the way in which our sector can support regionalisation. We look forward to future consultation to improve the way agriculture and its supply chains are considered in this Strategy.

Yours sincerely,



Dan Galligan
Chief Executive Officer

Attachment 1 – Specific comments on text in the Strategy

Page Ref.	Content	Comment
7	... recognising and harnessing regional difference ...	QFF appreciates regional differences in character do occur. However, investment in the agricultural industry requires consistency in application of planning systems across regions, particularly in the areas of NRM and local government planning.
7	... economies and supply chains stretch across regional boundaries ...	QFF strongly supports this point. Supply chains require investment security and this can only be delivered if each participant in the supply chain has confidence that there are not regional inconsistencies.
10	Infrastructure and investment	It would be equitable to include an example of a major infrastructure development that is not mineral and energy specific, or at the very least identify the multi-sector benefits from the developments described.
10	Lifestyle	QFF would challenge that Queensland regions have a low cost of living. There are a range of issues that can occur in regional areas to increase the cost of living such as higher transport and service industry costs, limited rental or housing properties, and competition from tourism. More recently, the minerals and energy sector has placed demands on some regional areas resulting in higher cost of living. These costs may be compensated for by employees within the sector, but it has in many cases excluded locals and tourists from economic participation – a major challenge which needs to be addressed in the strategy.
11	Principles for regionalisation	The strategy makes no reference to community happiness and its associated measures. Regional economic growth needs to consider the social infrastructure required for sustainable and resilient communities.
11	Build prosperity in the regions	Suggest that assisting the growth of traditional businesses should be explicit here.
12	Broadening the economic base	QFF considers that industry’s requirements for growth need to be front and centre in the “preparation for the future through a longer term series of developments to support growth”, rather than government-planned to facilitate growth. The current system of projects of state significant gaining approval through the Co-ordinator General appears to undermine strategic planning at the regional level – as does the absence of engagement at the regional level.
13	Queensland’s regions	As with any planning process there will be difficulties in aligning boundaries. QFF suggest that further consideration is given to aligning regions with the Regional Development Councils, Regional NRM Groups and/or Local Government Areas. At the very least this issue needs to be recognises as something that requires deliberate effort to manage.

Page Ref.	Content	Comment
19	First para	No reference is made to an increasing world population, nor of an increasing middle class both of which has major implications for agricultural production. Similar to the mineral and energy sector, agricultural growth is centred on appropriate supply chains. These issues need to be referenced here.
23	Proposed actions	The absence of timelines and accountabilities of the proposed actions detracts from the credibility of the Strategy and the lack of any reference to this means that stakeholders will wonder whether the actions described will be delivered..
23	People	The strategy does not reference or contain actions to address the movement of skilled workers to the resource and energy sector to the detriment of all other sectors.
23	2.1	What are the issues and how are they going to be addressed? Suggest that identify and prioritise may be more useful here.
24	2.3	The Strategy needs to address the active management of a workforce/skills 'bubble' that is created by construction and development phases of major projects. Once the operational or production phase commences a smaller workforce and different skills sets are usually required. This is a very significant challenge for regional development and planning for the transition in the size and type of the workforce should be a deliberate strategy.
24	Strategic direction 3	New and continued investment in agriculture (as with other sectors) requires certainty. This strategy does not reference or contain actions to address the lack of security for agriculture in terms of land use and management, water use and management, and supply chains.