Central West Regional Plan

planning for a stronger, more liveable and sustainable community

September 2009

Queensland Government

Central West Regional Plan

Prepared by:
The Honourable Stirling Hinchliffe MP, Minister for Infrastructure and Planning, in accordance with the *Integrated Planning Act 1997*, Division 4, Section 2.5A

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Release notes

The Central West Regional Plan is released by the Minister for Infrastructure and Planning in accordance with the *Integrated Planning Act 1997*, section 2.5A.15. It is a statutory instrument under the *Statutory Instruments Act 1992*.

The regional plan applies to the Central West regional local government areas as defined under *Integrated Planning Regulations 1998*, Schedule 3A, Part 4. It replaces the *Draft Central West Regional Plan* (the draft plan) released by the planning Minister on 5 August 2008. The draft plan was subject to community consultation and comment up to 30 November 2008. A consultation report, which summarised the issues raised during the consultation period was released on 10 September 2009. It is available at www.dip.qld.gov.au/centralwest or by calling 1300 724 061.

The regional plan has been prepared in good faith, taking into account all public submissions, to provide a framework for the management and development of the Central West for more than 20 years.

The regional plan represents an agreed Queensland Government position on the future of the Central West region. Any plans, policies and codes being prepared or amended by state agencies or local government must reflect and align with the regional plan.

The regional plan does not commit or pertain to commit any government, industry or community organisation to implement, fund or otherwise resource specific activities or programs.

All maps are intended to represent general concepts for the purpose of broad-scale regional planning. These maps do not and are not intended to identify or give attributes or rights, including land use and development rights, to specific land parcels. Boundaries and locations are indicative only and may be subject to further refinement. The Department of Infrastructure and Planning, does not guarantee or make any representations as to the accuracy or completeness of the information shown on these maps, nor does it accept any responsibility or liability for any loss or damage arising from its use.

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Copies of the regional plan are available:
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for viewing at most council chambers, libraries and customer service centres within the local government areas covered by the regional plan
on CD-ROM or in hard copy by contacting Department of Infrastructure and Planning offices in Longreach, Rockhampton and Brisbane
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Central West Regional Plan

planning for a stronger, more liveable and sustainable community

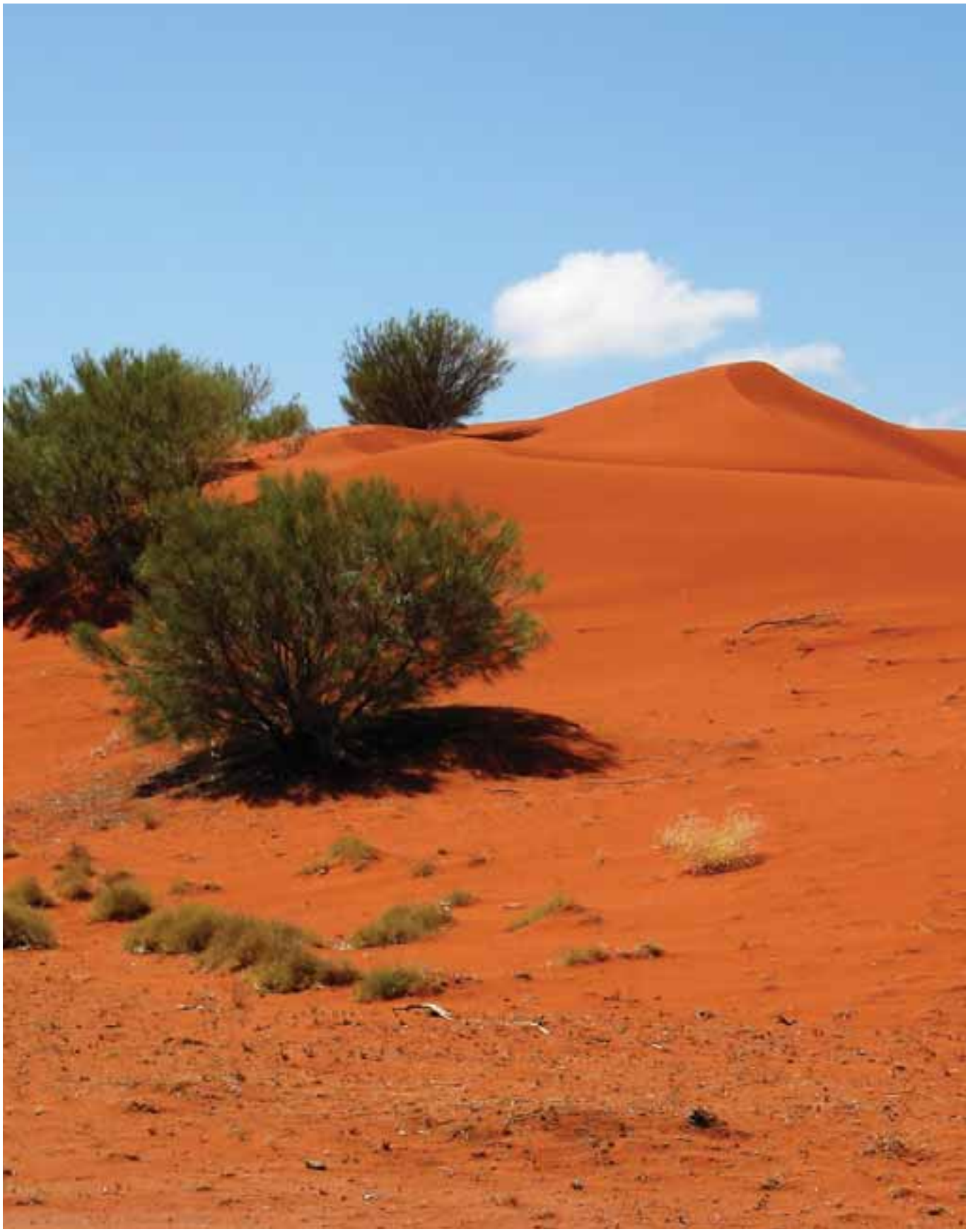
Regional vision

The quality of our region's relaxed, balanced lifestyle is widely known and sets us apart from other regions in Queensland and Australia.

As custodians of Australian history, we take our stewardship of history, culture, natural resources and the environment, seriously.

Ours is a region that provides the opportunity for strong, diverse and creative industries to develop, driving the economic development of our communities.

People choose to live in and visit the Central West due to our liveable, affordable, safe, vibrant, prosperous and cohesive communities.



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PART A—Introduction

Background and purpose

The Central West region, despite its small population and remoteness, hosts a number of sustainable communities. The sustainability of these communities is closely tied to the responsible stewardship of the natural environment, the residents' spirit, pride and sense of community, and the innovation of small businesses to provide required services.

The region forms part of the Lake Eyre catchment and includes the Mitchell Downs, Channel Country and Desert Uplands biogeographic regions. The region is classified as semi-arid to arid. The Central West covers 418 512 square kilometres, has a population of 12 535 and is expected to experience slow population growth of about 0.3 per cent over the life of the regional plan.

Seven local governments cover the region extending west from the Central Highlands to the Northern Territory border. They are:

- Barcaldine Regional Council
- Barcoo Shire Council
- Blackall-Tambo Regional Council
- Boulia Shire Council
- Diamantina Shire Council
- Longreach Regional Council
- Winton Shire Council.

The Central West and its people have significant employment and growth potential in existing and new industries such as:

- clean energy from geothermal energy, solar voltaic and solar thermal production
- carbon farming[1], good land management and stewardship of grazing land
- organic agriculture, aquaculture and agribusiness
- ecotourism, Indigenous tourism, palaeotourism, education/study tourism and heritage/cultural tourism
- macropod[2] and wild game harvesting and by-products
- cottage industries and niche marketing
- mineral, coal, gas and shale oil resources.

Embracing these opportunities will ensure that the region will grow, despite the challenges facing the region over the life of the regional plan. The major challenges include:

- planning for, and managing, the impacts of resource and energy development
- attracting and retaining skilled workers
- providing opportunities to halt outward youth migration
- transport networks—accessing and providing essential services to the region's smaller centres
- remoteness and access—distances people have to travel to gain human and social services, such as health and education
- maintaining safe and secure air access in and out of the region, while meeting the increasing security requirements applicable to regular passenger transport flights
- low capacity to meet increasing public and private sector environmental outcome expectations
- access to intrastate, interstate and international markets to export goods and services
- effects of climate change, such as changes in rainfall patterns
- extremes in weather conditions, such as drought and floods
- fluctuations in commodity prices.

1 Carbon farming is the cultivation of trees in order to remove carbon and then to obtain tradable rights in that carbon. These rights can then be sold to emitters of CO^2 and other interested parties' from *The Carbon Farmer Model: A report for the Rural Industries Research and Development*

2 Macropod refers to herbivorous maruspials comprising kangaroos, wallabies, rat-kangaroos and tree-kangaroos

Map Title: Locality Map
Region: Central West Queensland
Date: July 2009

Disclaimer: The information on this map should be treated as indicative only and subject to ongoing refinement.
Based on or contains data provided by the State of Queensland (Department of Environment and Resource Management) 2008. In consideration of the State permitting use of this data you acknowledge and agree that the State gives no warranty in relation to the data (including accuracy, reliability, completeness, currency or suitability) and accepts no liability (including without limitation, liability in negligence) for any loss, damage or costs (including consequential damage) relating to any use of the data. Data must not be used for direct marketing or be used in breach of the privacy laws.
Data Source: Department of Environment and Resource Management, Department of Infrastructure and Planning.

Meeting the regional challenges and exploiting the opportunities is imperative for the region to meet its potential. *The Central West Regional Plan* is a key tool for integrating Commonwealth, state and local government agendas.

Regional plans are about thinking regionally and acting locally, with an increased focus on achieving outcomes. Regional plans under the *Integrated Planning Act 1997* seek to achieve environmental, economic and social sustainability, by planning at a regional level.

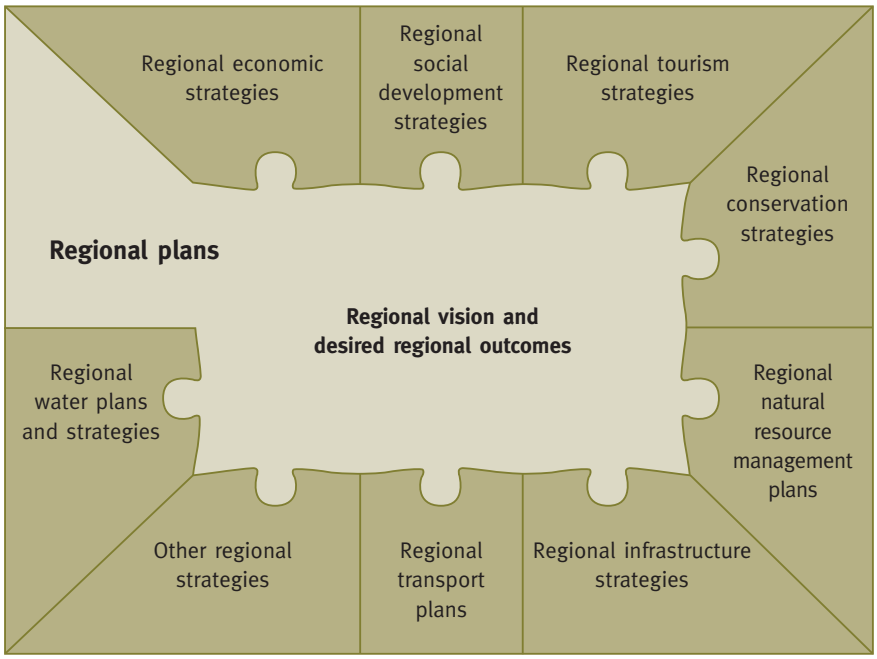
Regional planning and coordination is essential for managing and shaping the future of our communities. There are unique challenges posed in the bush in the planning and coordination of infrastructure, services and programs to meet current and emerging community needs. Potential future changes in climatic conditions may also affect the region.

The Queensland Government's *Blueprint for the Bush* regional planning initiative outlines what the regional plan will address. The plan will contribute to the objectives of building a sustainable, liveable and prosperous rural Queensland by:

- addressing key economic, social and environmental issues
- prioritising infrastructure and service needs
- maximising benefits and managing impacts of major projects
- driving innovation and productivity
- mobilising the public, private and community sectors
- aligning efforts across agencies and all levels of government.

This plan is a part of a wider process to ensure that a consistent and contemporary regional planning framework is operating for the whole of Queensland. This framework will be the mechanism for integrating state and local government planning agendas, linking infrastructure and service provisions, to meet the needs of, and provide greater certainty for, communities located in the Central West region.

Figure 1. Relationship between regional plans and other plans and strategies



Statutory planning

Amendments to the *Integrated Planning Act 1997* allow new or amended regional plans to take statutory effect. Under a statutory regional plan, all development and land use in the region will need to comply with the regional plan. The regional plan prevails where there is an inconsistency between the regional plan and planning schemes within the region. In the case of an inconsistency, the responsible local government must propose how it will amend its planning scheme within 90 business days, to align with the regional plan.

Preparation

The *Draft Central West Regional Plan* was developed with extensive advice from the Central West Regional Coordination Committee 'the Regional Coordination Committee', under provisions of section 2.5A of the *Integrated Planning Act 1997*. The primary role of the committee is to:

- provide advice to the Planning Minister on regional planning matters
- assist in the preparation, implementation and review of the regional plan
- facilitate the resolution of regional planning issues
- promote a coordinated approach to regional planning.

The preparation of the regional plan was a joint undertaking between all levels of government and key community interest groups. These interests are represented on the Regional Coordination Committee.

The *Draft Central West Regional Plan* was made available for public comment for a period of 84 business days, as per the provisions of the *Integrated Planning Act 1997*, which requires a minimum consultation period of 60 business days. Following consideration of comments received from the public and other state agencies through formal submissions, the state government produced the final regional plan.

Application, implementation and review

The regional plan is a statutory instrument under the *Statutory Instruments Act 1992* and is a planning instrument under the *Integrated Planning Act 1997*.

Local government planning schemes are the primary mechanisms for managing urban development. Best practice will be achieved through the implementation of local planning schemes, resulting in sustainable regional communities.

Regional policies and strategies provide the planning principles and guidelines for managing future land use and development. Where appropriate, a combination of land use policies and aligned strategies are used to achieve the desired regional outcomes for the regional plan.

Land use policies are those policies relating to land use matters of the *Integrated Planning Act 1997*. These are primarily implemented through local government planning schemes and any other mechanisms that fall under the *Integrated Planning Act 1997*.

Aligned strategies are designed to assist in achieving a desired regional outcome, generally through a collaborative approach, and are aligned with other legislation, plans, processes and voluntary programs.

They may be implemented by various stakeholders, including local, state and Commonwealth government, non-government organisations such as community or natural resource management groups, and the private sector. Resourcing for programs to achieve these policy outcomes may come from government, non-government or private sector investment. Aligned strategies do not commit the government to provide funding for any particular action or program.

The statutory regional planning framework provides for a formal monitoring and review process across the state, which is an important element in any regional land use planning framework. The outcomes and policies of the regional plans will be monitored and used in the formal review of the regional plan. A formal review will be undertaken at least every 10 years. Notwithstanding the above, the Planning Minister can amend the regional plan at any time, under the procedures set out in the *Integrated Planning Act 1997*.

Structure of the regional plan

The regional plan is set out under the following sections:

Part A Introduction—provides background material to establish the context and intent of the regional plan. It outlines the need for a regional plan and the relationship with other planning documents developed by government agencies for the region.

Part B Regional vision—outlines the desired future for the Central West region.

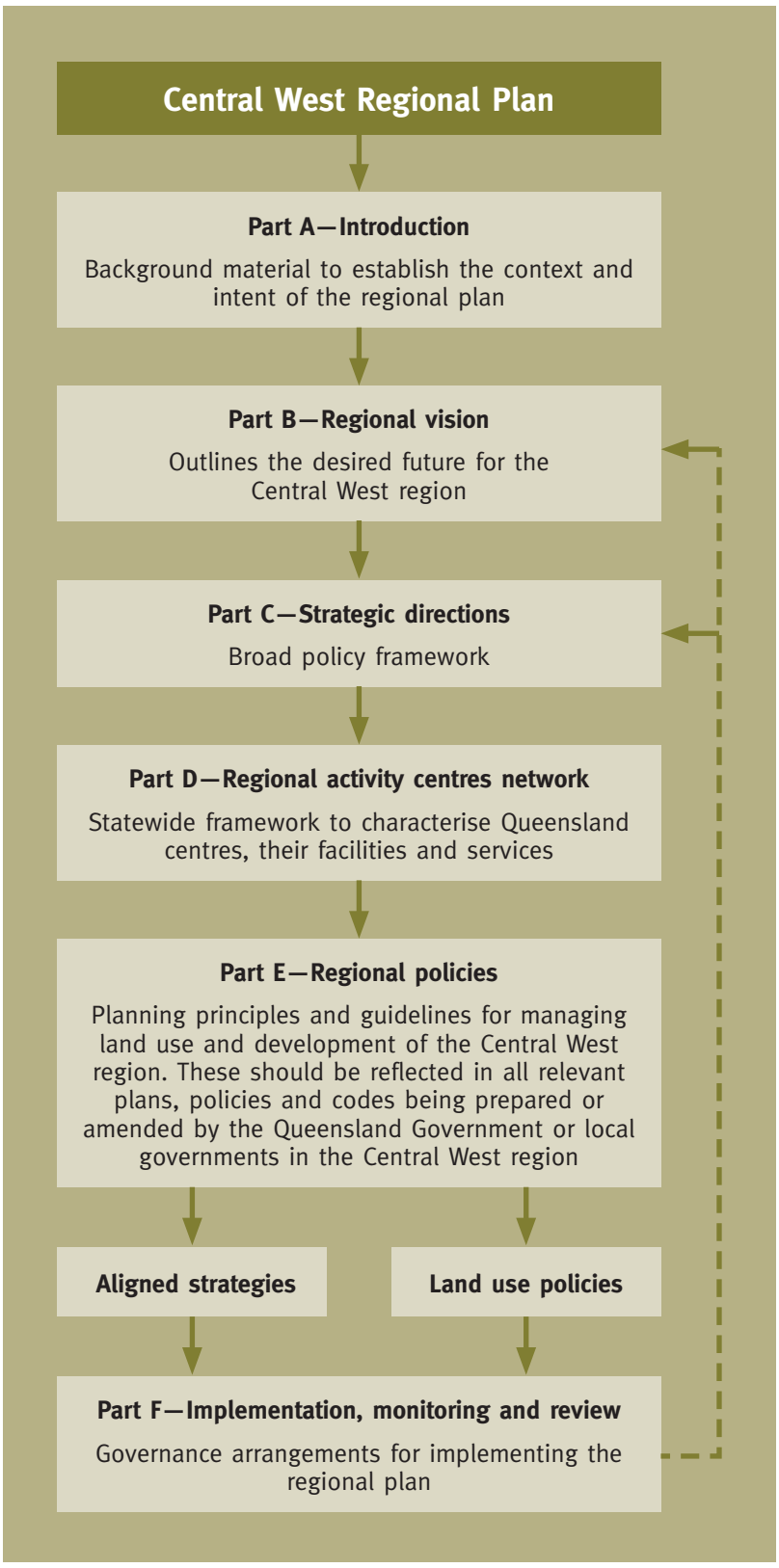
Part C Strategic directions—sets down the broad policy framework for the regional plan.

Part D Regional activity centres network—applies a statewide framework, used to characterise Queensland's centres, their facilities and services. This will guide existing and future planning intent for these centres. The regional activity centres network is linked to many regional policies.

Part E Regional policies and strategies—provides the planning principles and guidelines for managing the future land use and development of the Central West region. They should be reflected in all relevant plans, policies and codes being prepared or amended by the Queensland Government or local governments in the Central West.

Part F Implementation, monitoring and review—sets out the proposed governance arrangements for implementing the regional plan and describes how these will be monitored and reviewed.

Figure 2. Regional plan flow chart



Maps

The maps contained in the regional plan are based on available data at the time of printing. The information sources used to prepare these maps vary, with respect to scale, accuracy and currency.

The Department of Environment and Resource Management has prepared mapping showing areas of ecological significance. The maps have been prepared from high quality data sets of terrestrial vegetation, key threatened species habitats and wetlands. The accuracy of mapping is considered reliable for planning purposes at a detailed level. Given the size of the region, the scale used in map 2 (see appendix I) of the regional plan should only be used as general information. More detailed information on the region's areas of ecological significance is available from the agency's website.

The maps in the plan are not regulatory maps and are to be used as information guides only.

PART B—Regional vision

The quality of our region's relaxed, balanced lifestyle is widely known and sets us apart from other regions in Queensland and Australia.

As custodians of Australian history, we take seriously our stewardship of history, culture, natural resources and the environment.

Ours is a region that provides the opportunity for strong, diverse and creative industries to develop, driving the economic development of our communities.

People choose to live in and visit the Central West due to our liveable, affordable, safe, vibrant, prosperous and cohesive communities.

The vision for the Central West defines the community's long-term aspirations. It provides a conceptual image of the type of lifestyle the community aspires to have in 20 years time, and the environment it wishes to protect for future generations. The regional vision for the Central West is consistent with the statewide ambitions of the Queensland Government's blueprint for the future, *Toward Q2: Tomorrow's Queensland*, which sets targets for the most pressing issues of Queensland's society. These targets are to be achieved by 2020.

The vision was developed with the contribution of many people, including members of the Regional Coordination Committee, working groups and community members. It focuses attention on the region's sustainability in the following key areas:

- economic prosperity, especially from heritage-related tourism and rural production
- the community's character and social wellbeing
- responsible stewardship of the region's natural resources and environment.

To realise this vision, the region will celebrate the past and the region's current identity while fostering vibrant communities and a healthy landscape.

Sustaining the Central West's community structure ensures that development is compatible with the region's character and natural resources. This can be achieved by:

- marketing the Central West as custodians of Australian history
- ensuring development throughout the region is carefully managed to protect the region's character
- planning for, and responding to, the challenges resulting from new resource and energy developments
- ensuring that development and environmental standards for the region are sustainable, affordable and appropriate for the communities being serviced.

It is essential to provide responsive regional governance and leadership in managing growth and change in order to realise the vision, by:

- being responsive to citizens' concerns and encouraging them to become well informed and involved by offering a wide variety of opportunities for active participation in civic affairs
- providing leadership in promoting greater intergovernmental coordination with Commonwealth, state and local governments.

The region's physical and social character and natural beauty can be preserved and enhanced by:

- protecting the good condition of the region's natural resources and environment, through responsible stewardship
- protecting and maintaining the community's character, such as the diverse tapestry of liveable communities, the scenic, walkable centres, and the variety of community activities
- honouring the region's rich heritage, by protecting its historic buildings, landmarks and artefacts
- preserving the region's distinctive character and identity.

Keys to improving quality of life within the communities are:

- keeping communities safe, healthy, accessible and inclusive
- providing a range of employment options, quality infrastructure and equitable services, including health and education
- recognising the importance of youth and their potential to strengthen the region
- encouraging recognition of a vibrant arts and cultural life, museums, libraries, arts activities and events, as a source of pride and shared experience for residents and visitors
- retaining the region's tradition of engaging the community through volunteering with active participation in a variety of arts, cultural, public-safety, faith-based and other community organisations.
- celebrating and encouraging diversity—Central West is a welcoming region that invites newcomers of all cultures and backgrounds to participate in the civic life and economic prosperity of the region.

PART C—Strategic directions

To achieve the region's vision and desired outcomes, the regional plan proposes a range of policies to manage change for a sustainable future within the Central West. These policies are guided by strategic directions necessary to achieve change and sustainability in the region.

Create a more sustainable future

A key objective of the regional plan is to ensure that development is managed in a sustainable way. The regional plan aims to:

- establish a connected network of centres
- build and maintain community identity
- add value to any economic initiatives developed within the region
- improve transport infrastructure
- support a prosperous community
- protect biodiversity
- address climate change.

The regional plan also proposes that communities have access to the most up-to-date and effective measures to conserve water and energy. Building design and location should improve liveability and reduce the impacts of the region's highly variable climate.

Protect regional biodiversity and support agricultural production values

The Central West contains distinctive natural landscapes that are highly valued by the region's population. The regional plan identifies four assets within the region:

- land
- water
- biodiversity
- community.

The plan identifies threats to Central West Queensland's natural environment, such as land degradation and erosion, reduced water flows, and the spread of invasive weeds and feral animals. Measures are in place to deal with these threats, however, it is likely to need ongoing commitment from large sectors of the community to overcome them entirely.

Water and energy will be a key focus of the regional plan. The region will seek to reduce consumption and manage demand, while increasing the use of renewable resources in the interest of developing a more sustainable region.

These natural and economic resources underpin the region's liveability, form an essential part of the economy, and will be protected and managed in a manner that does not reduce their value to the region.

General knowledge of these assets is quite modest given the vastness of the region. The regional plan identifies areas where more information is required, to develop meaningful targets for managing the region's natural resources.

Enhance the identity of regional communities

Communities in Central West Queensland have long been recognised as custodians of Australia's early European history. The region boasts a number of authentic heritage attractions, many of them icons of the outback legend. The Central West is synonymous with an Australian experience that embraces the nation's cultural heritage and pioneering spirit.

The network of regional activity centres encourages the expansion of the larger centres, to support the lifestyles of communities in the region. The maintenance and development of these centres is encouraged in a way that also maintains their character.

Provide infrastructure and services

The Central West is a diverse region, in terms of geographical spread, demographics and culture. A coordinated approach to human services delivery is needed to ensure equal opportunities and access for all community members and to address current and emerging community needs. Available and accessible services and infrastructure are vital for the Central West, particularly given the remoteness of settlements in the western part of the region.

The regional plan advises not only on 'hard' infrastructure (e.g. road, rail networks), but also social infrastructure and services required to support the development of the region.

Integrate land use, transport and economic activity

Extensive grazing is recognised as the traditional mainstay of the Central West economy. The agricultural sector needs to diversify and add value to products, to enhance economic development within the region. Another major economic driver is tourism. The ongoing development of airports in the region to meet increased security demands and the expanding air traffic market is vital for sustainable tourism development. Opportunities also exist to expand, diversify and value-add to the region's resources, by identifying competitive advantages and encouraging new economic opportunities that are ecologically sustainable. This will generate sustainable, high-quality employment and income necessary to enhance quality of life for the region's population.

Community needs, quality of life and economic development opportunities are enhanced by access to good transport and telecommunications systems. These systems must balance the need for more efficient and effective access to national and international marketplaces and service centres.

PART D—Regional activity centres network

A classification system has been developed to describe towns within regions, based on their population, employment, business activities, facilities and services. This classification system, called the regional activity centres network, will help governments plan how and where services and infrastructure should be located.

There are four classifications of activity centres that apply to the Central West:

- *major rural activity centres*
- *district rural activity centres*
- *community activity centres*
- *specialist activity centres.*

The regional activity centres network will contribute to the Central West's sustainable future, by providing an objective basis to assist planning and decision making by service providers. Maximised social benefits and economic efficiency will accrue from:

- strategically identifying where growth, infrastructure and services should be located
- making informed decisions in relation to large developments capable of affecting the functioning of centres
- identifying the type and scale of developments and activities appropriate for each centre category
- promoting cost sharing of infrastructure and services between centres, thereby reducing competition between local governments in obtaining funding, services or facilities.

The development of the resource sector within the Central West region, through projects such as the Galilee Basin, provides unique opportunities for the growth of the larger centres through:

- increased employment and economic prosperity
- infrastructure upgrades
- development of locally based value-adding opportunities
- growth of support industries that have the potential to drive economic growth.

The network of centres is dynamic and there may be change over time. Subsequent reviews of the regional plan will reflect any significant change in role and function of the centres.

Major rural activity centres

Longreach

Generally, major rural activity centres serve catchments of subregional to regional significance, with populations typically in the range of 2500 to 5000 residents. These centres accommodate concentrations of employment, businesses and shops.

The major rural activity centre in the Central West is Longreach, with a population over 3750. Although Longreach has a low urban population compared to coastal activity centres, it services an area of 418 512 square kilometres, in conjunction with the region's district rural activity centres and community activity centres.

Longreach is the major rural administrative centre for a range of state government services. It is the focal point for employment and economic development and provides a mix of businesses and administrative services required to support the economic development of the region.

Longreach has a strong rural service focus and supports one of the largest cattle sales complexes in Queensland, with average sales of 91 190 head per annum.

With good access to the arterial road network and established rail networks, Longreach acts as the region's transport hub. It has good road links to service centres such as Brisbane, Toowoomba, Townsville and Rockhampton. It also has a daily air service to Brisbane and a twice-weekly service to Townsville.

Queensland Rail provides two passenger services a week to Brisbane, with connections to Emerald and Rockhampton (the Spirit of the Outback), three general freight services a week and cattle trains on an order basis. Coach services connect travellers to Brisbane and Mount Isa daily and to Emerald and Rockhampton twice-weekly.

The regional plan intends that Longreach retains its role as the major centre of the Central West. Maintaining and improving its current level of services and facilities is desirable. This will allow the local population and surrounding districts to access adequate services. It is well-positioned to respond to future demands and changes in population and demographics.

District rural activity centres

Barcaldine, Bedourie, Blackall, Boulia, Jundah, Winton

District rural activity centres in the Central West provide essential functions for surrounding districts. The population range for each centre is generally between 300 and 2500.

These centres provide weekly and essential services, such as grocery shopping and postal services. Outlying properties may face a travel time of up to four hours to access these centres. They offer local government services and health services that may include a local general practitioner or non-resident medical services, such as visiting specialist medical services. These centres have educational facilities, in some cases to Year 12, and police stations, often with more than one officer, and multiple government services. The current services provided in these towns need to be maintained.

These centres have sealed airstrips and service regular flights by commercial airlines. The airports also provide access for the Royal Flying Doctor Service and charter services.

These centres are the local government administration centres for the local government areas and provide a range of services to the community.

The rail line to the Central West ends in Winton and is an important railhead for the transportation of livestock and wool.

Each of these towns is a centre for district and regional community interaction and social events. Historical trends show peaks and troughs in population, investment and employment based on commodity prices and resource demand.

Community activity centres

Alpha, Aramac, Ilfracombe, Isisford, Jericho, Muttaburra, Stonehenge, Tambo, Urandangi, Windorah and Yaraka.

Community activity centres in the Central West provide essential functions for surrounding subregions. They are characterised by low populations, usually fewer than 300 residents. These centres provide weekly and essential services, such as grocery shopping and postal services. Outlying properties may face a travel time of up to three hours to access these centres.

The local government provides many services to the residents of these communities that fall outside of the normal responsibilities of other local governments, due to the limited public and private service providers within their boundaries. Councils see their role as building sustainable local communities and providing the social structure of their respective local communities. Local governments in these towns endeavour to respond proactively to community needs as they arise, regardless of which level of government traditionally has jurisdiction.

In some cases, health services are run by non-resident medical services. These centres have educational facilities, in some cases to Year 10, police stations with one officer, and a multiple government agency in some locations. They have access to a major rural activity centre and district rural activity centres.

Some services exist due to a single industry or tourist attraction, for example, the interpretive centre at Isisford. Other centres, such as Yaraka, were developed during the construction of the rail line. Yaraka has a church, police station, post office and recreational facilities. Tambo and other centres have historic significance and provide recreational facilities for tourist and locals.

The driving force for all these centres is a strong sense of community and generous volunteerism. These centres have a much larger proportion of the population involved in volunteer activities such as Meals on Wheels and sporting associations. It is also important to note that these volunteer groups provide their community with networks that make working towards sustainability goals more achievable.

Further employment and growth opportunities are expected, with the potential development of four major coal mines with a capacity of 25 million tonnes per annum near Alpha and Jericho over the next 10 years.

The need to sustain facilities and services is recognised. However, with improved technologies and methodologies, the mechanisms used to deliver services in the future may not necessarily reflect existing service delivery models.

Specialist activity centre

Birdsville

Specialist activity centres are precincts of regional economic significance. They provide a primary focus for specialised economic activity. The core emphasis for Birdsville is the tourism industry, which results in high visitor numbers.

Birdsville has become an Australian icon through its history, remoteness and essential outback character. This iconic status means that Birdsville has approximately 300 tourists staying per night during the tourist season (March to September). Birdsville provides essential services and social interaction for residents and the travelling public.

Birdsville is situated at the cross-roads for outback travel, with famous routes like the Birdsville Track, the Strzelecki Track (via Cordillo Downs or Walkers Crossing) and many of the Simpson Desert tracks, all converging at Birdsville.

Major road-sealing programs in the Diamantina and adjoining shires have allowed for the development of the tourism industry, by catering for travellers with small and medium-sized conventional vehicles.

The resident population of Birdsville has always been small. With a small rate base, it is often difficult to develop or improve infrastructure and services to cater for high tourist numbers. The large number of tourists that visit the town therefore places pressure on the community's social services and infrastructure.

Other community hubs

Other localities provide the focus for social interaction and services, often centred on a school, church or sporting facility. Due to their limited population and service diversity, these community hubs are not classified as part of the regional activity centres network.

PART E—Regional policies and strategies

This section outlines the fundamental principles, policies and desired regional outcomes that will guide planning and development assessment in the Central West over the next 20 years.

The policies guide state and local government planning processes and decision making, as well as private investment in the region. They also assist the federal government in determining funding priorities for natural resource management under other federally funded programs.

The regional plan is the primary planning document in the Central West. Local government planning schemes must be consistent with the intent of the desired regional outcomes, objectives and policies contained within this plan.

The policies are set out under the following headings:

1. *Natural environment*
2. *Natural resources*
3. *Strong communities*
4. *Urban development*
5. *Economic development*
6. *Infrastructure.*

Underlying principles

Ecological sustainability

Ecological sustainability is defined under the *Integrated Planning Act 1997* as a balance that integrates:

- protection of ecological processes and natural systems at local, regional, state and national levels
- economic development
- maintenance of the cultural, physical and social wellbeing of people and communities.

The purpose of the *Integrated Planning Act 1997* is to achieve ecological sustainability by coordinating and integrating planning at the local, regional and state levels, managing the process by which development occurs, and managing the effects of development upon the environment.

Sustainability and climate change

The overriding intent of the regional plan is to ensure the region grows and changes in a sustainable way. The challenge is to reduce the region's ecological footprint, while enhancing the region's economy and people's quality of life.

Since 1994, sustainable development principles have been included in a range of Queensland's legislative instruments, such as the *Environmental Protection Act 1994*, the *Integrated Planning Act 1997* and the *Water Act 2000*. The Queensland Government is also a signatory to the *Intergovernmental Agreement on the Environment 1992* and the *National Strategy for Ecologically Sustainable Development 1992*.

The Queensland framework for ecologically sustainable decision making has been used to inform principles and policies of the regional plan. The framework comprises:

- integrated and long-term decision making—incorporating long and short-term environmental, economic and social considerations
- inter-generational equity—ensuring that the health, diversity and productivity of the environment is maintained or enhanced for the benefit of future generations
- intra-generational equity—ensuring a fair share of resources and opportunity among present generations

- an underlying precautionary principle—ensuring that where there are threats of serious or irreversible environmental damage, a lack of full scientific certainty is not used as a reason for postponing measures to prevent environmental degradation
- conserving biological diversity and ecological integrity—protecting the variety of all life forms, their genetic diversity and the ecosystem of which they form a part, recognising the various services they provide to humans, as well as their intrinsic values
- internalising environmental costs—ensuring that the true costs and life-cycle costs (incurred from when inputs are produced through to waste disposal) of protecting from, and restoring after environmental damage are reflected in the price of a product or service
- engaged governance—ensuring broad community involvement in decisions and actions that affect its members.

Queenslanders are becoming increasingly concerned about climate change and its impacts. There is overwhelming scientific evidence that human-induced climate change is occurring, primarily due to increasing concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. Increased temperatures, decreased rainfall and increased severity of droughts are only some of the expected changes. The expected changes in temperature and rainfall are likely to affect the industries of the Central West region.

International and Australian research indicates that there are significant benefits in responding immediately to climate change, by both reducing the emission of greenhouse gases and adapting to climate change impacts that will occur regardless of global efforts to reduce emissions. In simple terms, earlier reduction of emissions and adaptation to climate change will mean fewer costs to economic growth and lifestyle.

Table 1. Specific climate change projections for the Central West

	Increase in annual temperature (°C) (Region: Central West)	Number of days greater than 35 °C (Location: Longreach)
Present		112
2030 average (mid emissions)	1.1 [0.8–1.6]	133 [126–144]
2070 average (low emissions)	1.9 [1.3–2.7]	149 [135–166]
2070 average (high emissions)	3.6 [2.4–5.2]	185 [158–213]

(Source: CSIRO, baseline period 1971-2000)

Toward Q2: Tomorrow's Queensland sets a target to cut Queensland's carbon footprint by one-third through reduced waste, fuel and electricity use by 2020. Regional climate change actions for the Central West will also be influenced by statewide and national climate change initiatives and policies, including the Queensland Government's *ClimateSmart Strategy* and the Commonwealth Government's proposed *Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme*.

The state government web site at www.climatechange.qld.gov.au provides the most up-to-date information on the Queensland *ClimateSmart Strategy* and provides links to other relevant information.

Responding to oil supply

Most of the world is now dependent on a diminishing number of oil-producing countries for their oil needs. The amount of oil discovered each year peaked in the mid–1960s and has been falling steadily since. Whilst oil production has been essentially stable since 2005, current rates of production are predicted to decline within the next five years.

On a national level, Australia no longer produces enough oil to meet the nation's needs. Australia and Queensland are therefore becoming more dependent on imported oil and oil-based fuels, so that Queensland's consumption (and that of other states) is strongly linked to global supply and demand. As in many parts of the world, Central West communities and economic sectors are firmly structured around an abundant supply of low-cost oil, which puts the region at risk from changes in the supply and price of oil.

Reducing travel by private vehicle is a key component in achieving the *Toward Q2:Tomorrow's Queensland* target to cut the carbon footprint by one-third. Given the region's dependence on vehicular transport and industries that are heavy users of oil-based fuels, such as agriculture, mechanisms that contribute to the reduction of greenhouse emissions and reduce vulnerability to rising oil prices are incorporated throughout the policies in Part E of the regional plan.

1. Natural environment

Desired regional outcome

The area, function and value of the region's terrestrial and aquatic natural assets are effectively protected and enhanced, and are resilient to climate change.

The region has a hot and dry climate with highly variable rainfall. Rainfall is most likely to occur between December and March. Temperatures range from –2°C to 49°C. Most of the region experiences more than 2.8 metres of evaporation per annum, with extremes of up to 4 metres in drought years. While the region's flora and fauna are adaptable to irregular rainfall and flooding events, the highly variable climate is one of the major challenges for both the pastoral industry and town communities. The impact of climate change is a concern for the region, with projections of significant moisture deficits. Even a small (1–2°C) rise in temperature can have a significant impact on biodiversity and natural systems. This may place additional stresses on the productivity and ecology of the region.

The topography of the region is generally flat and broken only by dissected, residual hills scattered through the region, with the exception of the Desert Uplands, which encompasses part of the Great Dividing Range. Most of the geology in the region is of sedimentary origin. These sediments also form the beds of the Great Artesian Basin, one of the world's largest, underground water resources. The Great Artesian Basin supports much of the urban population and grazing industry of the region. Surface water supply in the region is limited by the short duration of stream flow (usually brief periods after heavy rainfall) and high rates of evaporation.

The Georgina, Diamantina, Cooper Creek and Burdekin catchments make up the water catchment areas of the region. The Central West region is part of the Lake Eyre Basin. The region's 418 512 square kilometre area is part of the catchment for the world's largest, internal drainage system and is the same size as the Murray-Darling system.

The Central West covers seven biogeographic regions and is the most diverse in Queensland. It ranges from eucalypt woodlands of the Desert Uplands along the Great Dividing Range, through to the Mitchell Grass Downs and the vast flood plains of the Channel Country, to the Simpson Desert dune fields. It also includes the Mount Isa Inlier, significant areas of Mulga Lands and a small part of the Brigalow Belt South.

Compared with other regions in the state, the biodiversity of the region is relatively undisturbed and well-adapted to coping with the variable climate of the region. In the Channel Country, flooding plays a significant role in the life cycles of a large number of waterbird species. There are also a large number of reptiles and birds of prey found in the region.

Land-based resources are the key drivers of economic activity in the Central West. Efficient planning and management of the natural conservation areas and natural economic resources at the regional level is actively encouraged, to ensure these resources are conserved and protected for future use. This means the land will not be degraded or otherwise compromised through unsustainable land management practices, or inappropriate or unsympathetic infrastructure provision.

The Central West's environment and natural resources need to be managed sustainably in a coordinated, regional approach, involving all stakeholders on a cooperative and equitable basis.

There is a need to ensure that natural resource access, allocation and use throughout the Central West equitably recognises all environmental, economic, social and cultural values associated with its use. In particular, the strong cultural and spiritual values attached to the environment and its natural resources by Indigenous people needs to be recognised and considered in planning and management processes.

The involvement of landholders, industry and community needs to be encouraged through education and cooperative efforts. A mix of conservation and incentive measures should be considered to meet landholder aspirations, as well as natural resources management and conversation objectives.

1.1 Ecological values and biodiversity

Parts of the region are significant habitat for rare and threatened plant and animal species, and for species of conservation concern. The *Nature Conservation Act 1992* lists 55 animals and 67 plants in the region as having a status of endangered, vulnerable or rare.

There are 21 animals—10 mammals, 6 birds, 1 reptile and 4 fish—and 19 plants in the region listed under the *Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

The region incorporates a large part of the Desert Uplands bioregion, which straddles the Desert Channels and the Burdekin Dry Tropic regional natural resource management body areas. This bioregion is a declared biodiversity hotspot[3]. It is home to 22 rare or threatened animals and 29 rare or threatened plants and contains many water infiltration beds for the Great Artesian Basin, which spans the Central West.

Even relatively common species in the Central West, such as some international migratory birds listed under international conventions such as the *Japan-Australia Migratory Birds Agreement* or the *China-Australia Migratory Birds Agreement*, are considered to be of global conservation concern. Protection of wetland habitat for these migratory species is crucial when considering conservation planning.

Objective

To protect, manage and enhance the extent, diversity, condition and connectivity of the region's natural areas, in order to maintain ecological integrity and processes to reverse biodiversity decline and to increase resilience to the expected impacts of climate change.

Land use policies

1.1.1 Design and operate development for urban purposes within areas of high ecological significance, to avoid impacts on ecological values. Where avoidance is not possible, minimise the impacts and then offset residual impacts.

1.1.2 Design, operate and setback development for urban purposes adjacent to areas of high ecological significance, to avoid adverse impacts on the ecological values.

1.1.3 Design and operate development for urban purposes in, or adjacent to, areas of general ecological significance, to avoid, or where avoidance is not possible, minimise any adverse impacts on ecological values.

Aligned strategies

1.1.A Prioritise revegetation programs to be undertaken within state and regional conservation corridors or degraded areas of high ecological significance, using local and native species in a mix that enhances ecological and habitat function.

1.1.B Promote an understanding of the Central West's rich biodiversity and how it can be conserved through sound grazing land management and property management planning.

Explanatory notes

The areas mapped as having high ecological significance are those areas that the state has identified as being of particular interest, within which specific development controls are required, as shown in map 2. These areas of high ecological significance include wetlands, protected areas, endangered regional ecosystems, essential habitat for endangered, vulnerable and rare species, and non-woody regional ecosystems (not protected by the *Vegetation Management Act 1999* provisions). Areas of general ecological significance include other areas containing remnant vegetation of particular conservation value.

Corridors establish connections between core areas of remnant vegetation and provide opportunities for biodiversity to adapt to climate change.

Clearing of remnant vegetation for rural development is regulated under the *Vegetation Management Act 1999*. While broad-scale clearing of remnant vegetation for agriculture was prohibited in 2006 under the Act, clearing for urban purposes is not subject to the same level of control. As a consequence, the natural environment policies of the regional plan focus on protecting ecological values from impacts of urban development. Urban development is broadly defined and includes any non-rural use such as tourism, industrial or infrastructure development.

An environmental offset is a positive measure taken to counterbalance negative environmental impacts that cannot be otherwise avoided or minimised, to ensure no net loss of impacted ecological values. An offset may be located within, or outside of the development site, and should be legally secured. Approval of an offset requires, in the first instance, that the government's environmental standards are met. The Queensland Government's *Environmental Offsets Policy* and *Draft Policy for Biodiversity Offsets* jointly provide a policy basis and offset calculation methodology for achieving effective offsets.

Land-management practices have potential to adversely impact on biodiversity. In 2006, the Queensland Government passed legislation to phase out broad-scale clearing of remnant vegetation, to protect biodiversity, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and manage economic and environmental problems such as soil degradation, erosion and water quality.

3 It is one of 15 biodiversity hotspots across Australia, designated under the Australian Government's *National Biodiversity Hotspots Program*.

A small proportion of the region's biodiversity is protected in national park reserves. The most significant is the Diamantina catchment, with seven national parks, and the Cooper Creek catchment, with five national parks.

Management of the natural resources in the Central West is the responsibility of many stakeholders, including commonwealth, state and regional natural resource management bodies—for example, Desert Channels Queensland—and landowners.

Natural biodiversity provides ecosystems and landscapes with resilience against extreme local events, and also provides useful products and critical services, such as pollution breakdown, pest management and nutrient cycling.

As part of *Blueprint for the Bush*, the Queensland Government has commenced sustainable land management programs.

Current programs and projects to achieve regional biodiversity benefits at property scale include:

- the Back on Track program—an initiative of the Department of Environment and Resource Management that guides species conservation and recovery, and prioritises Queensland's native species
- recovery plans for specific species identified as threatened
- the Delbessie Agreement—one component of which awards longer term leases over state land, to reward improved management of biodiversity.

1.2 Watercourses and wetlands

The health of waterways in the Central West is good, with relatively undisturbed catchments, unregulated rivers and near natural flows. Grazing is the major agricultural industry. Accordingly, there is currently no large-scale water extraction activity in the region.

Wetland ecosystems of the region, in particular the Channel Country, are in near pristine condition, and support exceptional biodiversity values.

There are trends in some ecosystems, however that may indicate decline. The most commonly listed threats are:

- increased habitat fragmentation
- excessive total grazing pressure
- stock watering
- feral animals
- unsustainable water extraction
- weeds
- altered fire regimes
- changed hydrology.

Many of these threats combine to affect riparian zones and wetland areas. Unmanaged tourism is resulting in impacts such as damage to stream vegetation, inappropriate waste disposal and depletion of fish stocks at some of the more permanent waterholes in the region. Some of these are most evident in drought, when these areas become critical refuges.

The Central West has 23 wetlands recognised by the state and federal governments as being of national significance—17 within the Channel Country, 2 within the Mitchell Grass Downs, 3 within the Desert Uplands and 1 within the Mulga Lands. These are recognised by the state and Commonwealth governments as being of national significance because of their uniqueness or value to biodiversity conservation. Nationally significant wetlands include Lake Buchanan, Lake Galilee and Lake Yamma Yamma.

Objective

To manage the region's river systems, groundwater, wetlands and water resources for sustainable use and the protection of dependent ecosystems and water quality, in a changing environment.

Land use policy

1.2.1 Plan, design, construct and operate urban development to protect environmental values and meet the water quality objectives of the *Environmental Protection (Water) Policy 2008* for regional surface water, groundwater and wetlands.

Aligned strategies

1.2.A Support the development of appropriate management plans to protect or improve river systems, groundwater and wetlands of significance.

1.2.B Support the use of a range of mechanisms to protect, conserve, enhance and restore the environmental, social and economic values of river systems, groundwater and wetlands.

Explanatory notes

There has always been awareness about water quality and available water supply in the region. The Central West region relies on surface water and groundwater for agriculture, stock water, town water, industry, mining, recreation and tourism. Maintenance of water quality and environmental flows is required to sustain dependent ecosystems. To avoid further environmental decline and costly restorative measures, a whole-of-catchment management approach needs to be adopted in future resource management decisions affecting water quality. These measures will need to be tailored to specific industries and include appropriate education and incentives, improved technologies, and water monitoring programs.

There are a number of government instruments, relevant to the *Integrated Planning Act 1997*, aimed at achieving ecologically sustainable management of water, waterways and wetlands. These include:

- *Environmental Protection (Water) Policy 1997* Schedule 1 (environmental values and water quality objectives for waters) and the *Queensland Water Quality Guidelines 2006*, which provide environmental values and water quality objectives for water quality management and protection of aquatic ecosystems. The guidelines complement the *National Water Quality Management Strategy*
- regional vegetation management codes for western bioregions, which provide criteria for assessing development in proximity to wetlands and waterways.

The *Environmental Protection (Water) Policy 1997* is currently being reviewed by the Department of Environment and Resource Management and a state planning policy (water quality) is also in preparation.

The Environmental Protection Agency guideline *Best practice urban stormwater management - erosion and sediment control,* demonstrates how development and its construction can achieve best-practice environmental management. This guideline replaces the *Stormwater Quality Control Guidelines for Local Government 1998.*

Water programs, such as those run by organisations like Desert Channels Queensland, aspire to stabilise and improve the region's water quality and ecosystem health by 2050. The water programs aim to deliver integrated outcomes that protect wetlands and aquatic ecosystems, prevent a decline in water quality, address point source impacts and threatening processes, and promote sustainable use of the resource. They also focus on progressively setting catchment-scale water quality targets based on best available information.

1.3 Atmosphere and greenhouse gas emissions

Objective

To manage the potential impact of climate change and develop a regional approach to minimise greenhouse gas emissions.

Aligned strategies

1.3.A Manage greenhouse gas emission levels by:

- promoting responsible management of emissions
- developing mechanisms to ensure land use and natural resource management processes consider the greenhouse effect and are consistent with the regional strategy
- promoting alternative, renewable energy sources
- promoting economic instruments, such as renewable energy sources and carbon trading.

1.3.B Consider the potential of gas, geothermal and solar power-based industries within the region, through industry research and development of clean energy technologies.

1.3.C Develop solar towns, which capitalise on western Queensland's plentiful solar energy resources.

1.3.D Promote carbon sequestration[4] through the development of forestry, grazing and responsible land management activities, to offset carbon emissions as part of the carbon pollution reduction scheme.

1.3.E Support regional responses to ensure local benefits from national and state initiatives regarding greenhouse gas emissions.

Explanatory notes

The fourth assessment report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and current research indicate that there are significant benefits for Queensland regions in responding early to climate change—to both mitigate and adapt to future climate change.

In February 2008, the *Garnaut Climate Change Review: Interim Report to the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments of Australia*[5] was released to assist with the development of a national and state emissions policy. The Commonwealth Government is developing a national emission trading scheme, with its completion expected in late 2009. The adoption of this emission trading scheme is expected to create a national carbon market in which carbon permits are bought and sold, by placing a price on carbon.

With climate change expected to cause increased frequency of drought and decreasing rainfall, soil moisture and water availability, Queensland's primary production is expected to decline by 2030. The establishment of an emission trading scheme would allow primary producers within the region who choose to revegetate, to sell the carbon offsets generated through the carbon market.

Western Queensland regions have greater solar energy resources than any other area in Queensland, with areas receiving significantly higher solar energy than coastal settlements. This provides western Queensland settlements with the opportunity to capitalise on solar energy through the establishment of solar towns, in which a part of the town's energy supply is met through solar energy. The Barcoo Shire Council and the Queensland Government have already developed this concept in the town of Windorah.

4 Carbon sequestration refers to carbon removal.

5 Garnaut Climate Change Review - Interim Report to the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments of Australia 2008 at ‹www.garnautreview.org.au›

1.4 Air and acoustic environment protection

Objective

Development is located and managed to maintain or enhance the air and acoustic environment, to support the health and well being of the community and natural environment.

Land use policy

1.4.1 New development adopts urban design principles for both industrial and residential uses that:

- make best use of available infrastructure
- minimise the impacts of air and noise emissions so that environmental standards for the air and acoustic environments are not exceeded at the boundary of sensitive land uses
- minimise greenhouse gas emissions
- adequately buffer intensive uses such as resource developments, intensive agriculture and 'hard-to-locate' sport and recreation areas
- cater for energy-efficient, eco-friendly and climate sensitive design.

Explanatory notes

It is not always possible to eliminate the effects of air and noise pollution. Providing separation distances between industry and sensitive activities serves to reduce the potential impacts of air and noise pollution on health, amenity and quality of life. Wherever possible, sensitive land uses such as residential development should be located away from industrial or intensive agricultural land uses and major transport routes.

Air and noise pollution is currently managed under the *Environmental Protection Act 2008* and specific statutory instruments of that Act, including:

- *Environmental Protection Regulation 2008*
- *Environmental Protection (Air) Policy 2008*
- *Environmental Protection (Noise) Policy 2008.*

This legislation establishes local, regional or state standards for air quality and acoustic quality. A state planning policy for air/noise is currently being developed by the Department of Environment and Resource Management. The policy will contain a hierarchy of planning and management tools to protect sensitive land uses from the impacts of air and noise emissions, and also to protect land uses that are known to produce emissions from the encroachment of sensitive land uses. The planning tools will include separation distances and separation areas.

2. Natural resources

Desired regional outcome

The values of the region's natural resources are managed and secured to meet community needs and expectations in a sustainable way.

The Central West is rich in natural assets. These assets shape the way of life for communities and the environment, and underpin local industries. The natural integrity of most of the region is largely in place, reflecting that grazing production, when managed properly, can positively co-exist with the underlying natural values of the area.

The use and management of the region's land resources need to ensure that the region's long-term productivity and natural resource values can be sustained. Sustainable land management practices are required to ensure that impacts from soil erosion, the introduction of pest species and the alteration of natural systems are adequately addressed. These management practices need to be introduced through education and support programs, to ensure that they are implemented in such a way that also facilitates sustainable primary production.

Maintenance of biodiversity values provides ecosystems and landscapes with resilience against extreme events, and provides useful products and critical ecosystem services, such as pollution breakdown, pest management and nutrient cycling. The challenge is protecting environmental values for future generations through sustainable land use management, while ensuring economic viability for the grazing, mining and tourism industries and local communities.

The Central West has picturesque landscapes and natural and human wealth that provides long-term social, economic and environmental benefits for residents, visitors and future generations.

Areas of high environmental significance need to be comprehensively identified and managed, consistent with protecting the critical biodiversity values and adhering to Commonwealth and state government legislation.

The potentially adverse effects of natural disasters need to be minimised by appropriately locating, designing and constructing development in areas subject to natural hazards, to protect the integrity of strategic infrastructure. Emergency planning needs to be coordinated at the regional, subregional and local levels, and involve all levels of government, non-government agencies and the community.

Sustaining natural and cultural assets is recognised in *Blueprint for the Bush* as a major initiative in achieving long-term natural resource management.

Three large sedimentary basins (Eromanga, Georgina and Galilee) dominate the surface geology of the region that contains mineral, coal, extractive and petroleum resources. Current mining activity is limited to extraction of gypsum south-west of Winton, and small-scale opal mining over a broad arc extending from north-west of Winton to south of Blackall. Large thermal coal resources, amenable to open-cut mining, lie north of Alpha. Potentially significant shallow thermal coal resources are currently being mapped for development south of Blackall. Sedimentary phosphate resources are present north-west of Boulia, and a large subsurface salt deposit has been identified 40 kilometres south of Blackall.

Productive petroleum (oil and gas) fields to the south and south-west are within sedimentary rocks that extend into the region, which is currently being extensively explored. Significant indications of hydrocarbons are found in the oil fields south of Blackall, coal seam gas north of Ilfracombe, and advanced oil shale projects located southeast of Alpha.

Two extractive, key resource areas under State Planning Policy 2/07 have been identified near Winton. The Bladensburg key resource area and Windermere areas contain significant gravel and binding soil resources respectively, which are necessary for district road construction and maintenance.

The State Planning Policy 2/07, *Protection of Extractive Resources*, seeks to ensure that, as far as practicable, development within a resource/processing area and the separation of a key resource area and the associated transport routes separation are all compatible with existing or future extractive industries. However, both the regional plan and State Planning Policy recognise that there are acceptable circumstances in which this outcome might not be achieved, namely, where there are existing development commitments, or overriding public interest for another use of the land. The regional plan and State Planning Policy also recognise that extractive industry development in certain key resource areas will need to comply with the requirements of the *Vegetation Management Act 1999*, particularly to avoid or mitigate any adverse impacts on state or regional biodiversity values.

As some resources have not yet been fully explored in detail, the resource/processing area boundary may not accurately reflect the workable extractive resources. It is therefore possible that extractive industry developments may occur in the existing separation area. Extractive industry development, however, should only occur in the separation area where the function of the separation area is not compromised as a buffer.

Australia's only operational, geothermal power plant is in Birdsville. The plant's current nominal capacity of 150 kilowatts

is sufficient to provide the town's entire electricity demand at night and during winter periods. The region has significant potential for hot rock geothermal energy associated with high heat–producing granites beneath the sedimentary basins. Seven geothermal exploration permits have been lodged over a 4200 square kilometre area south-west of Winton.

2.1 Land and natural resource use and management

Objectives

- To develop and manage land and natural resources for present and future uses across the region.
- To adopt a coordinated, regional approach to sustainable management of the region's natural resources.

Land use policy

2.1.1 Identify land resources required for agricultural, mining, extractive industry and other sustainable economic development opportunities in local planning instruments, in order to provide certainty and protect the region's landscape and natural resource values.

Aligned strategies

2.1.A Promote a regional approach to raise awareness of, develop and implement measures for environmental conservation, management and use of natural resources among government, industry, academia and the community.

2.1.B Ensure processes for management and allocation of the region's natural resources consider the environment, economic and social values, as well as stakeholders' interests.

2.1.C Promote catchment-based, natural resource management programs, and the implementation of sustainable land and water management techniques.

2.1.D Investigate opportunities for the use of renewable resources throughout the region.

2.1.E Encourage communities to become actively involved in, and responsible for, natural resources and environmental management.

Explanatory notes

Ecological values in the region are generally considered to be in good condition. The most commonly listed threats to the biodiversity and ecology of the region are:

- increased habitat fragmentation
- total grazing pressure
- feral animals
- weeds
- altered fire regimes
- changed hydrology
- climate change
- salinity
- mining
- unmonitored visitor numbers to tourist sites.

Proposed mining in the Galilee Basin has the potential to produce statewide social and economic benefits, for decades to come. It will, however, also result in the need for increased management of environmental, social and economic impacts on communities. Multiple proposals for new and expanding mining development and related activities have led to increasing concerns about the cumulative impacts and appropriate means of mitigation.

The regional plan, together with the *Sustainable Futures Framework for Queensland Mining Towns* and the *Sustainable Resources Communities Policy* released by the state government in 2007 and 2008 respectively, addresses these impacts for future needs through a range of policies and strategies.

The policies and strategies outlined in the Sustainable Futures Framework focus on improving the gathering of quantifiable information about the mining industry, to support regional planning, address land use implications of individual projects and build capacity at a local government level, to help to manage these impacts.

2.2 Water management

The discovery of the Great Artesian Basin has been of great importance to the development of rural industries and towns in western Queensland. In many areas, artesian water has traditionally been allowed to flow uncontrolled from bores into open drains and creeks for stock to drink. Even in well-maintained drains, up to 95 per cent of the water is lost through evaporation and seepage.

A framework for groundwater resource allocation and management in the Great Artesian Basin is now provided under the *Water Resource (Great Artesian Basin) Plan 2006* and the *Great Artesian Basin Resource Operations Plan*[6]. It aims to ensure the long-term sustainable management of this resource, including the protection of existing users, the environment, and investments made under capping and piping programs. Under the water resource plan, access to limited amounts of new groundwater may be available in accordance with the established criteria. The plan also covers the protection of springs, the capture of water for existing use, and the maintenance and improvement of long-term trends in water pressure.

The Great Artesian Basin Sustainability Initiative is addressing management issues of the Great Artesian Basin, with the capping of free-flowing bores and piping of open bore drains. The regional plan can play a role by supporting the following initiatives:

- continuing the bore rehabilitation program
- ensuring new development does not negatively impact current users or the sustainability of the resource
- ensuring opportunities for rangeland conservation and biodiversity enhancement are considered in relation to bore capping.

The Lake Eyre Basin Intergovernmental Agreement is a joint undertaking of the Australian Government and state governments of Queensland, South Australia and the Northern Territory. The goal of the agreement is to ensure the sustainability of the Lake Eyre Basin river systems and, in particular, to avoid or eliminate crossborder impacts on water resources.

Under the agreement, Queensland must avoid or eliminate any adverse crossborder impacts, as far as reasonably practicable.

Objective

To develop and manage water for present and future uses in an equitable manner.

Land use policies

2.2.1 Development does not adversely affect the environmental water flows, including groundwater supplies and flood plains of the region, but instead, maintains flow integrity and quality.

2.2.2 Adopt demand management principles in the planning, design and construction of water cycle infrastructure, including water supply, sewage and drainage systems.

Aligned strategies

2.2.A Support the development and implementation of water efficiency, water demand and water quality management strategies for industry, community and other users.

2.2.B Ensure continued security and accessibility of water supply.

2.2.C Use water consumption targets for water supply planning and financial assessment purposes.

2.2.D Promote water use efficiency by encouraging water efficiency technologies and practices.

Explanatory notes

Regional water supply strategies are developed by the Department of Environment and Resource Management. Strategies identify the strategic direction for water supply planning and demand in a region, over a 50-year period. These strategies may influence water resources within the region.

The rivers, floodplains and associated wetlands of the Channel Country in the Cooper/Diamantina catchments are a unique asset to the region. The existing business ventures in the far west of the region rely on the current ecological health of these waterways for organic beef production, and as a tourism attractor.

Developments that endanger this balance will cause long-term economic and ecological problems for the permanent residents of this isolated area of Queensland.

The regional plan acknowledges that the Department of Environment and Resource Management has developed water resource plans for the Central West region.[7] These include:

- *Water Resource (Cooper Creek) Plan 2000*
- *Water Resource (Georgina and Diamantina) Plan 2004*
- *Water Resource (Great Artesian Basin) Plan 2006*
- *Lake Eyre Basin Intergovernmental Agreement*
- resource operations plans.

6 Department of Environment and Resource Management, Great Artesian Basin water resource planning at ‹www.nrw.qld.gov.au/wrp/gab›

7 Water resource planning at ‹www.nrw.qld.gov.au/wrp/catchments›

The Great Artesian Basin is a major contributor to water security in the region. This source of water beneficially provides water for towns, industry, grazing and natural springs. In the past, groundwater extraction has been unsustainable. As a result, falls in bore head pressure, drying up of springs and land degradation from free-flowing bores and drains are common problems.

Prolonged drought periods, uncertainty regarding the impact of climate change and variability of water supplies all highlight the need for adaptive water management regimes that are responsive to improved understanding of climate and competing uses of water in order to support ecological functions and meet human consumption.

The continued delivery of water to natural systems and users depends on the maintenance of both natural (wetlands, springs, waterways and aquifers) and built (storage, pumping facilities and reticulation systems) infrastructure.

2.3 Pest management

Objective

To manage animals and plants that are known pests, to protect present and future land use and economic opportunities.

Aligned strategies

2.3.A Prevent and monitor exposure to exotic and introduced pests, weeds and diseases in the region, through the combined efforts of government, industry, community and landholders.

2.3.B Support responsible pest management strategies that protect the environment and the productive capacity of natural resources, communities, industries and businesses.

2.3.C Improve the community's ability to manage, and where possible, eliminate pest weeds and animals, in a manner consistent with endorsed pest or biosecurity management plans or strategies.

Explanatory notes

Queensland's vegetation management framework regulates the clearing of native vegetation. It addresses land degradation problems such as salinity, soil degradation, erosion and declining water quality.

Under the framework, the Queensland Government ended the broad-scale clearing of remnant vegetation in December 2006. Vegetation clearing is, however, still allowed for certain purposes.

Clearing native vegetation for weed or pest management is one of the purposes for which landholders can apply for development approval. Under the vegetation management framework, the term 'weeds' also includes non-native plants that are not declared.

Pests are weeds or pest animals declared under the *Land Protection (Pest and Stock Route Management) Act 2002*.

There are three classes of declared pests under this Act. These pests are targeted for control, because they cause, or have potential to cause, serious economic, environmental or social impacts.

3. Strong communities

Desired regional outcome

Retain the sense of identity in the region's rural and remote communities, and support and encourage healthy and viable rural enterprise that enhances the interdependence and liveability of these communities.

At the time of Federation in 1901, almost eight per cent of Queensland's population lived in western Queensland. The share of Queensland's population currently living in the western area has fallen to around 0.4 per cent.

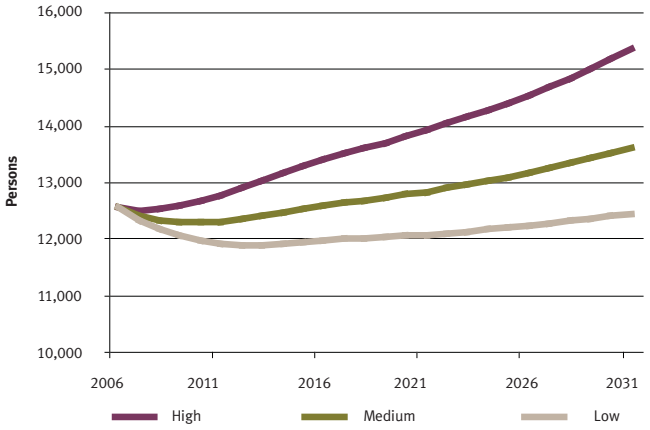
Currently, the Central West is experiencing a population decline or stagnation. Reasons for the decline vary, but include drought, high costs of housing, poor transport infrastructure, changes in property management practices and increased urbanisation of communities on Queensland's coast.

It is difficult to plan for a declining population, however, with the expected resource development in the Galilee Basin, there is a small increased projection over the next 5 to 10 years (see projected population at figure 3). It is also difficult to gain an overview of how changing economic conditions, population characteristics and population movements influence population size. In vast areas with sparse population, however, it is important to understand which parts of the population are declining and which parts are growing, in order to allocate resources, services and infrastructure. The region's small towns and centres need support from well-informed planning decisions to service their own populations and that of the surrounding rural and remote areas.

More than 60 per cent of the region's 12 535 inhabitants live in 19 towns (see figure 5), with populations ranging from 15 to 3800 people. The rest are widely scattered across extensive pastoral country. While the region's 900 Indigenous residents are spread throughout, most live in the west and north-west, the latter being home to several Indigenous communities.

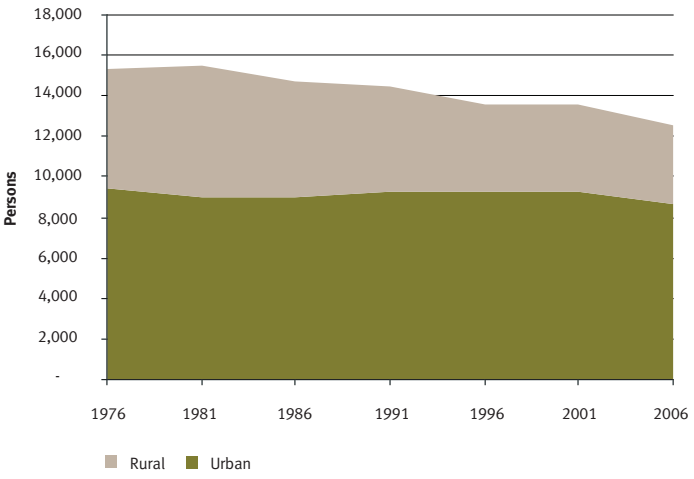
Based on statistical data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, Central West Queensland experienced an average annual decline in population of 1.6 per cent, between 2001 and 2006. In comparison, Queensland experienced an average annual growth rate of 2.4 per cent during the same period.

Figure 3. Population projections to 2031



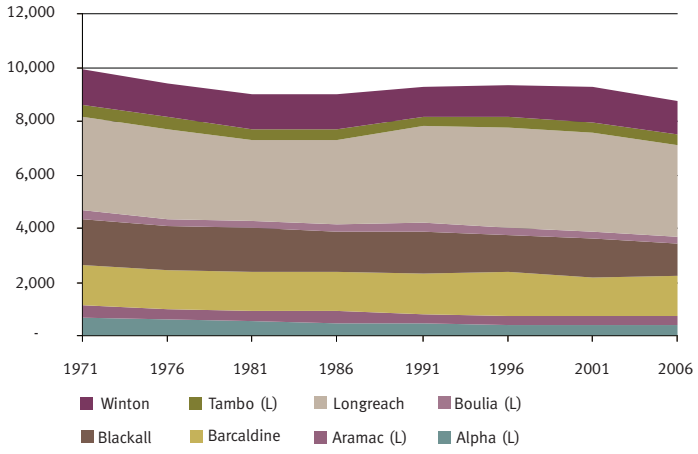
(Source: Planning Information and Forecasting Unit 2008)

Figure 4. Urban and rural population 1976–2006



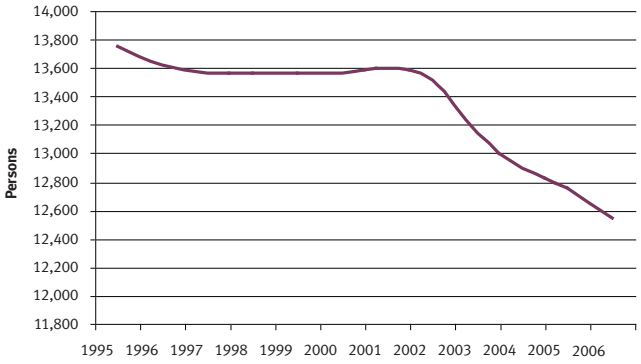
(Source: Planning Information and Forecasting Unit 2008)

Figure 5. Population in urban centres and rural localities 1971–2006



(Source: Planning Information and Forecasting Unit 2008)

Figure 6. Estimated resident population 1995–2006



(Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Regional Population Growth Australia, 1996–2006, cat. no. 3218.0)

Due to the region's projected average annual population growth rate between 2006 and 2031 (0.3 per cent) being lower than for Queensland (1.7 per cent), the region's share of Queensland's population is projected to decrease to 0.2 per cent by 2031.

Boulia Shire Council is projected to experience the highest rate of growth. Longreach Regional Council is expected to remain the region's major centre, increasing its share of the regional population from 34.5 per cent in 2006 to 36.9 per cent by 2031. Barcaldine Regional Council, Blackall-Tambo Regional Council and Winton Shire Council will have the next highest populations, in that order.

Data from the 2006 census indicated that 87.9 per cent of the region's residents were born in Australia. Approximately 6.4 per cent of the population identified themselves as being of Aboriginal or Torres Straight Islander descent.

Both rural and town communities are dominated by the pastoral industry. If the rural sector experiences economic decline, the towns' businesses are proportionately affected.

Since the end to both the labour-intensive early days of the pastoral industry and the boom of the 1950s, the population of the region has generally been in steady decline. Increased mechanisation and tighter margins in the pastoral industry have led to a smaller workforce, with fewer employment opportunities for young people. In addition, there is less willingness among young people to accept the financial burden and uncertainty of land ownership. Consequently, the average age of landholders has increased and many next-generation primary producers have left the area. This, coupled with improvement in roads and vehicles, has seen a major

change in the traditional, small and localised community. Once, residents travelled a rough and dusty one-hour trip to a central meeting place for sport, dances or a social event. Now, residents can readily access a centre with modern amenities on a smooth, air-conditioned drive of the same duration. One of the consequences is an increase in visitation to larger centres and a decrease in local events, such as gymkhanas and picnic races, which were once held several times a year.

Table 2. Estimated resident population, Central West Region, June 2006

Local Government Area	2006 ERP
Barcaldine (R)	3462
Barcoo (S)	383
Blackall-Tambo (R)	2138
Boulia (S)	450
Diamantina (S)	302
Longreach (R)	4326
Winton (S)	1474
Total	12 535

R- Regional Council
S- Shire Council

(Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Regional Population Growth, Australia, 1996–-2006, cat. no. 3218.0)

Over the last decade, the shift from sheep to cattle has been a major factor in population decline. Not only is less labour required on the farm, the flow-on effects to towns that were once home to hundreds of shearers and other sheep industry workers has been severe.

The number of shearing teams that can find permanent work in the region has dropped by about 75 per cent. This fall has brought with it a reduced cash flow within the community.

In recent years, agribusinesses have purchased grazing enterprises and managed them remotely. This has changed the dynamics of the grazing industry, from family operations to single or couple caretakers. In some instances there is no one at all in residence. For this traditional pastoral community, the upside has been the surge of interest from coastal fringe Australians in connecting with their cultural roots, and exploring the outback and its ethos. Over the past two decades, tourism has emerged as a significant industry and, in some councils, has overtaken grazing as the biggest income generator.

3.1 Regional lifestyle

Objectives

- To enhance the liveability, character and safety of the region through planned development.
- To promote the region as a distinct economic, cultural and social entity that reflects the image of the region as a custodian of Australian history.
- To ensure the region continues to be respected and has an easily recognised image, while maintaining existing local identities.

Land use policies

3.1.1 Ensure new major residential developments in larger centres provide or contribute to the provision of a healthy lifestyle, parkland, open space and recreation areas.

3.1.2 Ensure new major residential developments in centres have provision for walking and cycling connections within the development and surrounding land uses, and that established residential areas also support active travel.

3.1.3 New development in regional and rural activity centres avoids locations that are subject to natural or physical hazards.

Aligned strategies

3.1.A Coordinate a major regional events program that fosters community values and enhances community character.

3.1.B Encourage working groups that promote the region and include leaders within government, industry and community sectors.

Explanatory notes

The development of sustainable economic opportunities and improved lifestyles are instrumental to addressing regional population decline.

It is important for the region's residents to have a say in economic and social development. This will allow the Central West to develop as a region in its own right, and not simply as a subregion of Central Queensland.

Liveability equates to the provision of services and the level of amenity of a centre. To encourage population growth, it is important to ensure that developments enhance the liveability of rural and remote communities.

Walking tracks and parklands provide safe, well-lit areas for residents to interact and exercise, contributing to the mental and physical health of the community. Some centres have developed walking and cycling links, and they now play a significant part in short-distance transport and contribute to healthy lifestyle choices for residents.

In large developments, it is appropriate that the relevant planning scheme includes provisions to ensure that the character and amenity of the centre is maintained. The regional plan, however, does not intend to define small or large development.

3.2 Leadership, networks and coordination

Objective

To share and exchange resources between government and non-government agencies to enhance opportunities for extending services to communities.

Aligned strategies

3.2.A Investigate avenues to support growth, productivity and prosperity within the region.

3.2.B Establish processes for government and non-government organisations to increase coordination in the delivery of services.

3.2.C Develop and maintain an integrated, regional information system with comprehensive economic, environmental, social and infrastructure data that facilitates informed decision making.

Explanatory notes

An adequately resourced, community-based policy-making structure is needed. This structure may involve collaboration between government human services agencies to develop holistic responses to community needs from the local to regional levels.

The capacity of community-based organisations to improve service delivery can be strengthened, by identifying opportunities to network and collaborate with government, other community groups, education, training and business organisations. Collaboration can have a number of benefits for organisations, including the sharing of overhead costs.

The Regional Managers' Coordination Network and Regional Ministerial Forums are mechanisms that could be further utilised to drive action across government agencies, and the exchange of information across the region.

3.3 Social justice and safety

Objective

To meet the current and future needs of regional communities through coordinated and timely planning and provision of social services and facilities.

Aligned strategies

3.3.A Continue to build a strong partnership approach to crime prevention among police, government agencies and community groups in the region, including programs that target youths at risk.

3.3.B Provide adequate crisis and short-term accommodation to meet identified needs.

3.3.C Review support programs and improve service delivery for people at risk, to facilitate responses that meet identified needs.

3.3.D Planning schemes contain provisions that encourage development of a range of accommodation types and supporting social facilities.

Explanatory notes

Whole-of-community solutions must be emphasised for prevention and early intervention, to help individuals and families obtain a better quality of life.

The Central West is facing challenges in the area of health and education. In order to meet these challenges, the Regional Coordination Committee believes that:

- improving health service delivery within the region requires a stronger primary health care focus, recruitment and retention of a range of medical, specialist and allied health professionals, as well as the effective use of technology and other models that can enhance service coverage, particularly in remote areas
- schools should prepare students for a culturally diverse and knowledge-based society, in line with change brought about by advanced communications, global markets and international competition. Education and training activities encourage the development of holistic lifelong learning concepts at the early stages.

Increased support for these services will greatly assist the region to meet its potential, in terms of community health and social justice, over the next 20 years.

A wide range of housing types and supporting social facilities are required to meet various community needs, including crisis accommodation and the requirements of special needs groups.

Social housing is currently provided to clients who meet the eligibility requirements of the Queensland Government's *One Social Housing System*, which offers housing options for a range of household types on the lowest incomes.

3.4 Cultural values

Heritage places and landscapes of cultural significance, either in built form or natural sites, are of immense importance to the community. The Central West has a diverse range of historic settlements and occupations from mining to agricultural activities. The regional plan notes the significance of recognising and conserving all forms of culture, including natural, social and built cultural heritage.

Objective

The Central West's unique identity and cultural heritage values are identified, protected and maintained.

Land use polices

3.4.1 Identify heritage places in local government planning schemes.

3.4.2 Development on, or in proximity to heritage places, does not compromise the cultural heritage significance of those places.

Aligned strategies

3.4.A Local governments are encouraged to identify places of cultural heritage significance through a heritage survey, utilising key historical themes for Central West Queensland.

3.4.B Support the management and preservation of cultural heritage values of all significant places.

3.4.C Support the development of a regional arts and culture strategy that aims to protect, exhibit and promote the unique cultural heritage values of the region.

Explanatory notes

Non-Indigenous cultural heritage includes artefacts, places and buildings that are commonly of European origin. The major piece of historic cultural heritage legislation is the *Queensland Heritage Act 1992*. Development of a place registered under the *Queensland Heritage Act 1992* is assessable development.

This Act also requires local government to keep a local heritage register listing places of cultural heritage significance in its local government area. The *Queensland Heritage Regulation 2003* includes a Local Heritage Place Code, which is an Integrated Development Assessment System code for development on a local heritage place.

The Department of Environment and Resource Management is currently undertaking a statewide survey of Queensland's heritage places. Key historical themes that are relevant to the Central West have been identified in the *Queensland Cultural Heritage Places Context Study—reported to the Environmental Protection Agency*, and these themes should be used by a local government when undertaking a local heritage survey of its area.

Historical themes for Central West—non-Indigenous

Using the Land

- Beef industry—success and prosperity from channel country grazing
- Wool industry—evidence of success and prosperity as a result of the wool industry, for example, Australia's largest shearing shed.

Working

- The development of the trade union movement and the Australian Labour Party through the actions of the shearers during the shearing strike.

Moving people, goods and information

- Railway—the Central West vividly illustrates the impacts on opening and developing the interior by providing transport for goods and services and access to coastal ports.
- Air transport—the birth of Queensland and Northern Territory Aerial Service (Qantas commercial airlines in Central West).

Building settlements, towns, cities and dwellings

- Use of stone as a building material, for example, historic stone homesteads.

Places of cultural heritage significance

- Sites associated with nineteenth century settlements established to serve the pastoral industry—in particular, ruins of former settlements and coaching stops.
- Sites illustrating the importance of rail transport in developing the Central West, in particular, railway stations in Central West towns.
- Stone buildings in the Central West—these are significant, because stone has only been used infrequently in Queensland in the construction of buildings. For example, a small but significant group of buildings in Central West were constructed in stone, including homesteads at Darr River Downs, Cork, Elderslie, Oondooroo, and Cacoory.
- Sites associated with the historical development of the Central West, including the union movement, the development of air travel and wool scouring—namely, the Australian Worker's Heritage Centre, the Qantas Founder's Museum and the Blackall Wool Scour.

3.5 Indigenous cultural heritage

Objective

To recognise Aboriginal people's association with the environment and ensure Aboriginal cultural heritage is managed in an appropriate and sensitive manner.

Land use policy

3.5.1 Ensure that planning instruments undertake measures to protect items and places of Aboriginal cultural importance already identified by local and state agencies.

Aligned strategies

3.5.A Incorporate appropriate mechanisms to acknowledge and respond to cultural heritage and native title issues in decision making and administrative processes.

3.5.B Encourage the sharing of cultural information and resources between all stakeholders, subject to cultural protocols, intellectual property rights and privacy rights.

3.5.C Facilitate the engagement of Aboriginal people in natural resource and environmental management, as well as facets of planning.

3.5.D Recognise Aboriginal cultural and spiritual values as being intrinsic to natural values, and incorporate them into environmental and natural resource management.

3.5.E Facilitate appropriate training of staff involved in cultural heritage planning and management.

Explanatory notes

The Queensland Government strengthened the protection, conservation and management of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage through the *Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act 2003* and *Torres Strait Islander Cultural Heritage Act 2003*. This legislation recognises and protects the rights of Indigenous people. It establishes a statutory duty of care for all individuals and organisations to not harm Indigenous cultural heritage.

The Central West region forms the country of the Bidjara, Birra, Dharawara, Guwa, Iningai, Jirandali, Karuwali, Kuungkari, Maiawali, Mithaka, Pitta Pitta, Waluwarra, Wangkamana, Yagalingu, Yanda, Yarluyandi and Yirandali Traditional Owner groups. It is vital to the implementation of this regional plan that the links between natural resources, Indigenous cultural heritage and the health of the country are recognised.

3.6 Sport and recreation

Objective

To meet the current and future needs of regional communities through coordinated and timely planning and provision of sport and recreation facilities.

Aligned strategies

3.6.A Enhance the importance of sport and the arts in programs for establishing personal development, combating crime, improving health levels, creating a culture of learning, and developing productive, committed and responsible individuals.

3.6.B Identify unique sporting and cultural advantages and market them outside the region.

3.6.C Planning schemes incorporate cycling and walking facilities, in line with Queensland Transport's TravelSmart initiative.

Explanatory notes

The provision of connected pedestrian and cyclist networks in communities, enables safe and efficient access, and encourages walking and cycling as a travel choice. The layout and design of communities has a significant impact on choice of travel mode. Incremental and fragmented development makes it difficult to build communities that support pedestrians and cyclists. Well connected and accessible networks for cyclists and pedestrians can save travel time, costs, and reduce green house emissions through reduced motorised vehicle travel.

Sport and recreation planning is constrained by competing interests and a lack of understanding of long-term trends. A coordinated, regional approach to sport and recreation is required to establish regional priorities.

3.7 Community involvement and capacity building

Objective

To recognise and support the contribution and value of community organisations.

Aligned strategies

3.7.A Recognise volunteer community organisations as essential in providing valuable community services, and encourage and support their continued operation and involvement in the region.

3.7.B Improve the effectiveness of volunteer emergency service providers, such as rural fire brigades and the State Emergency Service, by providing resources and through efforts to attract and retain volunteers.

3.7.C Develop opportunities to enhance the role of partnerships between public, community and private organisations in the delivery of services to assist volunteers to meet community expectations.

Explanatory notes

These aligned strategies have been developed through community consultation and to meet the Queensland Government's Toward Q2 initiative.

According to the 2006 census *Basic Community Profile B18* (usual residents aged 15 years and over), more than a third of residents of the Central West Statistical Division indicated they did voluntary work for an organisation, compared to 19 per cent of residents in the Brisbane Statistical Division.

The dedicated involvement of volunteers within each community in the Central West has long been recognised by locals as imperative for providing services and maintaining social infrastructure in the region. Volunteer groups such as State Emergency Service, Rural Fire Service, Country Women's Association, Landcare, St Vincent De Paul, Red Cross, sporting groups, fellowship groups and many more are common to all communities in the region.

3.8 Advancing the region

Objective

To develop the capacity of local communities to advance the region.

Aligned strategies

3.8.A Develop processes that encourage strategic partnerships between leaders of public, private and non-profit organisations in the region.

3.8.B Build regional capability by developing training, mentoring and leadership capacity for youth, and develop a succession plan for the region's future leadership.

3.8.C Provide support and professional development opportunities for the education workforce, to respond to community needs and to provide educational leadership to regional communities.

3.8.D Hold forums between regional representatives of state and local government offices to enhance regional planning and outcomes, and to promote the regional significance of state actions and programs.

3.8.E The region's community organisations continue to explore innovative ways of providing or maintaining desired levels of social services.

3.8.F Use social research conducted as part of social impact assessment processes, to assist local and state government in guiding future development decisions and strategic planning for resource communities[8].

3.8.G Share outcomes of social impact assessments through regional forums and groups to ensure a greater understanding of the social impacts of new mining, petroleum and gas developments.

Explanatory notes

The Department of Infrastructure and Planning will provide leadership in driving regional development by:

- establishing a social impact assessment function in government to enable a whole–of–government response to applications for new and expanded mining and petroleum developments.
- assisting in preparing social impact plans to be implemented as a condition of mining tenure, where appropriate.
- developing a major housing policy to address the availability and supply of housing for major projects, and to guide investment in the provision of housing.

The *Sustainable Resource Communities Policy* includes a partnership agreement aimed at strengthening links between all levels of government. The policy will also underpin the guidelines for the social impact assessment of all new major mine expansions and petroleum and gas development.

Partnership group

The Sustainable Resource Communities Partnership Agreement will be implemented by a partnership group that comprises representatives from the state government, the regional councils of Roma, Dalby, Banana, Isaac and Central Highlands, the Local Government Association of Queensland and the Queensland Resources Council.

The initial focus of the agreement is on those particular areas in the Bowen and Surat Basins that are undergoing rapid growth, as a result of resource development. It is intended that councils in the North West minerals province, and other regional councils in the Bowen, Galilee and Surat Basins that can

8 Resource communities are those local or regional communities that depend on, or are affected by, mineral extraction and associated activities including petroleum and gas proposals.

demonstrate the impacts of rapid growth, will be included in the partnership group at a later date. Due to the rapid growth in these particular areas, the partnership group is currently considering projects that would support the *Sustainable Resource Communities Policy*.

Social impact assessments are undertaken by proponents of major new and expanded mining and petroleum developments, as part of the application and approval process for the granting of mining and petroleum tenures. These assessments are required as part of existing environmental impact statement processes under the *Environmental Protection Act 1994* and under the *State Development and Public Works Organisation Act 1971*, for projects declared to be significant projects under the Acts.

The social research conducted by resource companies as part of a social impact assessment is expected to provide government with improved information on the cumulative social impacts of mining and petroleum developments on communities. This information is critical for guiding future development decisions and strategic planning for resource communities for land use, service delivery and infrastructure requirements[9].

The state government, in partnership with industry and local government, is committed to strengthening social impact assessment in the mining and petroleum industries, through the *Sustainable Resource Communities Policy*. The policy includes initiatives that aim to build equitable and sustainable resource communities.

3.9 Promoting health and wellbeing

Objective

To plan and coordinate the effective provision of community infrastructure to enhance lifestyle, health and education.

Aligned strategies

3.9.A Investigate options to encourage public-private partnerships, to resource services to local communities.

3.9.B Investigate options to provide flexible education and training programs that are locally, culturally and socially appropriate, to maintain high-quality health services throughout the region.

3.9.C Develop new models of health care delivery and policy recommendations to improve services, such as visiting specialists to rural communities.

3.9.D Communities are actively involved in the planning of health services, to ensure these services are responsive to the needs of those who use them.

3.9.E Deliver services through effective partnership arrangements between agencies and sectors that make an important contribution to health.

3.9.F Continue to develop close working relationships and partnerships among health, education, welfare, legal and other professional areas and the local community, to address locally identified health needs.

Explanatory notes

Social infrastructure is a broad term encompassing all aspects of social services planning and delivery. Social infrastructure includes:

- collaborative planning and developmental structures and processes
- hard, physical components such as buildings
- service delivery functions undertaken by health care professionals, including ambulance services, teachers, community service organisations and government.

Queensland Health identifies with the principles of universal service obligations. Queensland Health is currently planning a suite of health services to provide safe and sustainable services to small rural and remote communities.

The range of services offered will need to address the needs of the community, be linked to services provided in larger communities, and be delivered in a safe and sustainable way.

Key health services that are currently funded by Queensland Health for the Central West communities are provided out of the activity centres of Longreach, Alpha, Aramac, Barcaldine, Blackall, Boulia, Isisford, Jundah, Muttaburra, Tambo, Windorah, Winton, Yaraka and Bedourie. Longreach is the key health service provider for the Central West. A primary level of emergency services is accessible at all activity centres within the region.

Longreach hospital is the main hub of health services for the Central West, with a number of services available, including those provided by visiting Brisbane specialist teams and services for the management of low risk pregnancies. It also has the capacity to manage some complex birthing, through its network of flying obstetric and gynaecological service providers.

9 Sustainable Resource Communities Policy – Social Impact Assessment in the Mining and Petroleum Industries 2008

Visiting service providers such as the Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) provide services including:

- health promotion programs
- occupational therapy
- social work services.

The service delivery of these programs varies across the region, with services offered daily in some centres, while others range from weekly to annual visits.

It should be noted that future service decisions will be guided by changes in need, demand, service models, workforce and other parameters.

Queensland Health is not the only service provider of health services. Queensland Health regularly reviews the range of services and also works with partners to ensure the provision of health services across the region. The suite of services offered may, in some cases, be delivered through partnerships with existing organisations such as the Division of General Practice, Queensland Police, Education Queensland, Department of Community Safety, Royal Flying Doctor Service and other community organisations. Consultation has occurred, and will continue to occur, with both the community stakeholders and service providers to determine sustainable service options.

Queensland Health now has 15 health service districts. The role of these districts is to plan and deliver health services in the following areas:

- promotion, protection and prevention
- primary health care
- aged care
- ambulatory health care
- acute in-patient care
- rehabilitation and extended care
- mental health
- health services for people with a disability
- Indigenous health
- multicultural health
- infrastructure and assets.

4. Urban development

Desired regional outcome

A well-planned region that has diverse, quality and affordable housing options supported by an appropriate level of infrastructure to complement the rural lifestyle of the region.

The Central West has 19 centres that vary in size and which service the region's grazing industry and provide community infrastructure, including community halls, sporting facilities, postal services, hotels and convenience shopping. These centres are of regional importance, due to their ability to generate social capital and wellbeing for their residents. Aramac's Harry Redford Cattle Drive, the Birdsville Races and Winton's Outback Festival are examples of events that generate this social capital.

The Central West's local governments provide many services that fall outside the usual responsibilities of the majority of local governments. This is due to the limited public and private service providers within their boundaries. Local government has usually endeavoured to respond to community needs as they have arisen or been identified, regardless of which level of government traditionally had jurisdiction. The region's councils are far more than just local service providers—they are an integral part of their communities. Local governments in the region do significantly more than simply deliver a range of traditional local government services and implement the regulatory requirements of the state government. They help build sustainable local communities and provide the social fabric of their communities.

The regional centre and towns of the Central West have managed to retain a 'small country town' feel, with their central business districts focused on the main street. The vast majority of residential housing is single, detached housing, with some multi-unit dwellings available. The region will need to develop a more diverse range of affordable housing options, supported by an appropriate level of infrastructure, that attracts high-end service providers such as executives, engineers, doctors and academic staff.

Industrial uses are generally located on the outskirts of the towns, with good links to the highway network for freight provision and access to markets.

The regional settlement pattern needs to fully consider economic, environmental, social and infrastructure factors and manage any development, based on the best and most efficient use of available infrastructure and land.

Environmental, visual and natural resource values must be protected from adverse and unplanned development. The region needs to provide a range of lifestyle choices in appropriate locations, with efficient access to the regional centre and towns.

4.1 Urban structure and settlement

Objective

- To support regional growth, particularly within locations that can be efficiently serviced by infrastructure and are the logical extension of existing centres to ensure a continued high level of amenity.
- To provide opportunities for the sustainable development of urban centres with timely and appropriate infrastructure.

Land use policies

4.1.1 Development occurs in an orderly manner, in accordance with the intent of the regional activity centres network.

4.1.2 Appropriate land use planning and design ensures that residential areas are protected from uses that have adverse impacts on amenity.

4.1.3 Ensure that adequate amounts of suitable serviced land for industry and commercial purposes are identified in accordance with the intent of the regional activity centres network.

Aligned strategy

4.1.A Ensure new infrastructure and service provision recognises the regional activity centres network.

Explanatory notes

The regional plan does not contain any regulatory provisions or urban footprint maps that would restrict development. The policies and aligned strategies in this plan, together with the designation of the rural activity centres, will help guide the location and development of any current or future projects in the region.

Changes in centres are most likely to be influenced by economic conditions and socio-economic factors.

A strong, viable regional centre and town needs to be planned and supported, to assist in consolidating urban areas and provide a network to support economic growth in the region.

Residential areas need to be protected from high-impact use areas, such as high-impact industry and intensive agriculture. This will protect residents' health, economic values and environmental sustainability for the long term.

When coal mining commences in the areas of Alpha and Jericho, rail and road infrastructure will need to be upgraded. Staff for these projects will require accommodation, which will need to be constructed or purchased. Planning schemes will need to have flexible planning provisions to manage development and accommodate the additional growth. It is important that all stakeholders continue to be consulted in the review of these plans, so that projected growth can be included in long-term planning.

4.2 Urban character and form

Objective

To plan and design urban centres that encompass modern urban design strategies.

Land use policies

4.2.1 Development enhances the image of the region's towns as custodians of Australian history.

4.2.2 Ensure equitable access in the design of urban streetscapes and buildings.

Explanatory notes

The Queensland Department of Communities, along with other stakeholders is currently developing plans to undertake disability access audits of towns, urban landscapes and agency-owned facilities within the Central West, with a view to developing a five-year action plan to address accessibility issues.

4.3 Housing mix, affordability and design

Objective

To provide for a variety and mix of dwelling types, sizes and tenures to meet diverse community needs, and achieve housing choice and affordability in rural communities.

Land use policies

4.3.1 New development and redevelopment incorporates water sensitive urban design principles such as rainwater roof collection.

4.3.2 Design and planning for residential development respond to the climatic conditions of the region, encourage innovation, maximise liveability and emphasise energy efficiency.

4.3.3 Housing options in residential areas of rural centres offer a range and mix of dwelling types, sizes and locations, to meet future demographic needs.

Aligned strategies

4.3.A Investigate and support the provision of solar hot water systems in communities in the region, to reduce their reliance on hot bore water or electrical hot water systems.

4.3.B Monitor and review social housing needs and stock, and develop programs to meet the housing requirements of special needs groups.

Explanatory notes

Housing styles in the Central West have historically used basic energy-efficient design. The old Queenslander style of house is common in the Central West, as are lowset houses with wide verandas and breezeways. These basic building design principles should be encouraged in new housing developments, to maintain the region's history and character, while promoting energy efficiency.

4.4 Disaster management

Objective

To prepare, review and exercise emergency and disaster management plans to cover the response and recovery of hazards likely to affect the region.

Land use policy

4.4.1 Development is not located in areas that are at risk of being affected by natural hazards.

Aligned strategies

4.4.A Ensure the region's disaster management practices mitigate the impact of natural disaster on the community, development, infrastructure and the environment, by including strategies to raise awareness of the implications of inappropriate development and infrastructure, within areas prone to natural hazards.

4.4.B Develop, implement and review a coordinated regional approach to disaster management among all levels of government, industry and community, that integrates regional, subregional and local level plans for risk assessment, disaster mitigation and emergency planning.

Explanatory notes

The Queensland Government has released the State Planning Policy 1/03: *Mitigating the Adverse Impacts of Floods, Bushfire and Landslide*, which provides policy to ensure development is not affected by these natural hazards.

Queensland Police and the Department of Community Safety are currently preparing interim arrangements for district disaster coordinators, and building relationships between district and local disaster management groups.

Fire and ambulance facilities are a form of social infrastructure within the meaning of the *Integrated Planning Act 1997*. The infrastructure map in this plan makes no reference to fire and ambulance facilities, due to the scale of mapping used. The plan recognises that the services provided by these facilities are important to the sustainability of the region's communities.

5. Economic development

Desired regional outcome

An economic base broadened by further developing existing export industries and by encouraging new industries or businesses with potential for growth throughout the region.

The main industry driving the economy of the Central West is agriculture, specifically sheep and cattle grazing. Tourism is also a major industry, contributing $29.1 million to the region's economy in 2006.

At the time of the 2006 census, the region had a relatively low unemployment rate of 2.9 per cent. In 2006, 30.5 per cent of people were employed in the agriculture, forestry and fishing industries. Public administration, health care, retail trade and education are also significant sources of employment in the region, as shown in table 3.

Regionally, agriculture and tourism have strong growth potential, but are vulnerable to commodity price fluctuation, industry rationalisation, cost-reduction measures, and changes to employment and work practices. These factors are partly responsible for the decline in population and services in the region's towns.

A broader and more robust economic base is needed to minimise the impacts of outside influences and provide a wider range of employment and economic opportunities within the region. Strengthening the economy will improve the long-term economic sustainability of the region.

As outlined in table 3, there is a significant gap between the lead employment sector, agriculture, and the next largest sector, public administration and safety. For the region to become more economically diverse, the gap between agricultural employment and other employment opportunities needs to be reduced.

Table 3. Employment within various industries in the Central West

Industry	Number of people employed	Percentage of total workforce
Agriculture, forestry & fishing	1831	30.7
Public administration & safety	790	13.2
Health care & social assistance	540	9.0
Retail trade	509	8.5
Education & training	454	7.6
Construction	318	5.3
Accommodation & food services	327	5.5
Transport, postal & warehousing	261	4.4
Manufacturing	164	2.7
Wholesale trade	157	2.6
Other services	154	2.6
Professional, scientific & technical services	111	1.9
Administrative & support services	75	1.3
Arts & recreation services	57	1.0
Mining	47	0.8
Electricity, gas, water & waste services	49	0.8
Financial & insurance services	59	1.0
Information media & telecommunications	34	0.6
Rental, hiring & real estate services	30	0.5
Total (a)	5967	100.0%

(a) excludes inadequately described and not stated
(Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Basic Community Profile 2006)

The region has significant employment and growth potential in industries such as:

- geothermal energy and solar thermal energy
- carbon farming
- organic agriculture, aquaculture and agribusiness
- ecotourism, Indigenous tourism, palaeotourism, educational tourism and heritage/cultural tourism
- macropod and wild game harvesting
- cottage industries and niche marketing
- mineral, gas and shale oil resources.

Agriculture, specifically meat and wool production, is historically the major industry in the Central West and is predicted to remain so in the future. Opportunities exist to improve freight road links to the west of the region, to improve product access. The development of value-adding industries will depend on accessibility to a viable commercial market.

The potential development of five major coal mines with capacity over 25 million tonnes per annum (MTPA), will provide significant employment and growth potential. Currently, two large projects are undergoing pre-feasibility studies in the Central West, which could provide direct, permanent employment of up to approximately 1300 people. Should the mine workforce be locally based, additional, indirect employment of several hundred regional mining service and equipment providers can be expected.

Table 4. Number of businesses, Central West statistical division, June 2007

Industry	Number of businesses	Percentage of total businesses
Agriculture, forestry & fishing	1182	58.9
Retail trade	162	8.1
Construction	153	7.6
Property & business services	126	6.3
Transport & storage	81	4.0
Wholesale trade	60	3.0
Accommodation, cafes & restaurants	60	3.0
Manufacturing	36	1.8
Cultural & recreational services	33	1.6
Personal & other services	30	1.5
Health & community services	27	1.3
Communication services	24	1.2
Mining	18	0.9
Finance & insurance	12	0.6
Education	3	0.1
Total	2007	100.0%

(Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Counts of Australian Businesses, including Entries and Exits, Jun 2003 to Jun 2007, cat. no. 8165.0)

Tambo Teddy

Table 5. Regional indicator snapshot Central West statistical division

Regional indicator	Latest available data	Average annual growth rate	Reference period
Estimated resident population 30 June 2006	12 535 persons	-0.82 per cent	1996–2006
Population projections 2031	13 580 persons	0.32 per cent	2007–2031 (medium series)
Household projections 2026	5454 households	0.26 per cent	2006–2026
Building approvals	$16.26 million (12 months ending June 2008)	49.2 per cent	12 months ending June 2007 to 12 months ending June 2008
Unemployment rate 30 June 2006	2.9 per cent	-	30 June 2006

(Source: Planning Information and Forecasting Unit 2008, Department of Infrastructure and Planning)

Table 6. Galilee mining potential

Site name	Company	Mine type / coal type	Regional council	Resource potential
Alpha	Hancock Prospecting	Open cut / thermal	Barcaldine	1820 MT
Blackall	East Energy Resources	Open cut / thermal	Blackall-Tambo	200 MT (potential)
Kevins Corner	Hancock Prospecting	Open cut / thermal	Barcaldine	1590 MT
North Alpha	Waratah Coal Inc	Open cut / thermal	Barcaldine	975 MT
South Alpha	Waratah Coal Inc	Open cut / thermal	Barcaldine	3330 MT

MT - million tons
(Source Department of Mines and Energy August 2008)

The Queensland Government is working to get the balance right between meeting the state's increasing energy demands, the world's anticipated increased demand for minerals and food, and the government's priority of building sustainable communities.

Challenges and opportunities for local communities

Resource developments can bring significant benefits for surrounding communities, including:

- increased employment opportunities
- investment attraction
- economic diversification
- attracting new people to the region
- keeping young people in the region.

On the other hand, large-scale development also presents local communities with a range of challenges, including increased demand for infrastructure and services.

Challenges facing resource communities in mining regions include:

- increased demand in the housing market resulting in high rents and property prices and reduced affordability
- increased pressure on local medical, dental and social services
- potential impacts of dust, noise and vibrations
- an increase in the number of drive-in and drive-out and fly-in and fly-out workers employed
- demand for new road infrastructure to support proposed new development.

The Queensland Government has also signed the *Sustainable Resource Communities Policy* (31 August 2008), developed by the Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation. The policy focuses on resource communities, where rapid development resulting from the resources boom has had significant impacts on community infrastructure and services, and on the social structure of local and regional communities.

The policy outlines a partnership between the state government, the Queensland Resources Council, local government and the Local Government Association of Queensland. This policy builds on the previous Sustainable Futures Framework for Queensland Mining Towns.

Key initiatives of the policy include:

- coordination of responses to cumulative social impacts and regional issues through the partnership group
- improved planning processes to strengthen regional land use planning and infrastructure coordination
- minor legislative amendments that require the establishment of social impact plans for all new mines and major mine expansions, as part of social impact assessment processes.

The agreement is aimed at strengthening links between all levels of government. It will improve the guidelines around social impact assessment that will govern all new major mines and expansions.

The plan also recognises that the resources sector operates within specific legislation:

- *Mineral Resources Act 1989*
- *Petroleum Act 1923*
- *Petroleum and Gas (Production and Safety) Act 2004*
- for major projects, the *State Development and Public Works Organisation Act 1971*.

The resources sector is therefore essentially exempt from the provisions of planning schemes and the *Integrated Planning Act 1997*. This means that the coordination of exploration and mining development under the *Mineral Resources Act 1989*, with development in planning schemes under the *Integrated Planning Act 1997*, occurs through provisions under the *Mineral Resource Act*. The Act requires notification of the granting of mineral development licences and mining leases by the relevant local government, followed by notation on the planning scheme of the granted tenure and consideration of this tenure in any planning decision taken by the regional council. There are no equivalent provisions in the *Petroleum Act 1923* or the *Petroleum and Gas (Production and Safety) Act 2004*.

Planning schemes that cover the settlements of Alpha, Blackall and Jericho will need to consider the supply of serviced land with infrastructure of sufficient capacity to support these mining activities. Local governments that surround these activities will need to have their planning schemes assessed and reviewed, to cater for any future development.

The other strong industry in the region is tourism which is focused around the region's natural and cultural heritage and unspoilt outback landscapes. There were domestic overnight stays of 158 854 in 2007 and international visitor stays of 9768 in 2007.

Diversification of destinations and tourism experiences throughout the region will benefit the region by:

- broadening the visitor's overall experience
- potentially reducing visitor pressure on fragile areas
- spreading the benefits within the community.

There is particular potential in the areas of nature-based, historical, cultural and arts tourism for the region.

An expanded tourism industry may require specialised infrastructure and services, as well as a wider choice of accommodation, to attract and service visitor populations. Sound regional branding, promotion and product development is needed as well as strengthened industry partnerships and community support for the tourism industry.

Tourism can have ramifications for the environment and the community. Visitors in environmentally sensitive areas can damage the natural values and lessen the intended visitor experience. Similarly, tourism can be intrusive to existing communities, thereby affecting the character and amenity enjoyed by residents. Tourism therefore needs to

be located, designed and managed sustainably, to ensure these values are not adversely affected.

The region has a number of competitive advantages that will assist in driving future economic activity:

- strong core industries in agriculture and tourism with opportunity to expand
- high-quality land, water, wildlife and resources
- desirable climate, environmental features and liveability.

Optimal conditions need to be created to allow existing industries to maximise their growth potential, and to attract new industries to the region. There are national, state, regional and local factors that may be inhibiting further economic activities, which should be identified and mitigated where possible.

Small business is a major component of the region's economic activity and the fabric of communities.

This sector requires recognition and support if it is to make the most of potential opportunities to further contribute to the wealth and employment of the region.

An appropriately skilled workforce is needed to support economic growth in the region. Education and training programs relevant to industries in the region should be further developed.

Economic development has the potential to influence the social profile of the region, affecting access to social infrastructure, cultural and recreation opportunities. Economic development initiatives need to consider the impacts on communities and social values, and the needs of special interest groups.

The Central West needs to identify and secure more of the domestic and overseas markets. The region currently lacks a clearly defined, integrated national or international image. The economic benefits of a common name and theme will assist in attracting and improving tourism numbers, and further developing industries such as organic beef and natural fibre enterprises.

5.1 Land availability

Objective

To ensure land is available to meet the requirements of the region's existing and future businesses and industries.

Land use policies

5.1.1 Approvals for new residential development in rural areas ensure:

- development only occurs in areas that can be effectively serviced by local government infrastructure
- agricultural and grazing land is maintained for productive agricultural purposes.

5.1.2 Planning scheme provisions relating to minimum lot sizes (rural) do not allow for subdivision of land into lots that are too small for viable rural production.

5.1.3 Planning scheme provisions have adequate flexibility to allow for rural and ecotourism development in rural areas, provided they have minimal impact on production, biodiversity and landscape values.

Explanatory notes

Long-term development must include opportunities for the development of primary industries and the resources they require. In consideration of future development, the region must recognise that the best and most versatile farming land is a productive resource. Development of agricultural land into lots that are too small for viable rural production is not supported, when equally viable alternatives exist, particularly where developments do not include specific location requirements for services and infrastructure.

In 2003, to simplify land release, the Queensland Government endorsed a policy that encouraged local government and state agencies to resolve native title issues on state lands, to make land available for development in rural communities. The policy enables particular land to be purchased from the state at no less than 50 per cent of market value, providing that authorities resolve native title issues at their expense. The state government also developed a policy to encourage greater use by agencies of the exchange provisions (section 18A) of the Land Act 1994—to negotiate Indigenous land use agreements that allow for an exchange of state land for the surrender of native title.

5.2 Business and industry

Objective

To maximise sustainability of business and industry, in order to develop the growth of small enterprises throughout the region, thereby increasing wealth and employment opportunities for local residents.

Land use policy

5.2.1 Planning schemes adequately provide for the development of industrial land needed to support and sustain business investment and expansion, with the provision of relevant infrastructure.

Aligned strategies

5.2.A Encourage regional small business and representative groups to work cooperatively and share information and resources to develop new and enhanced existing products and services.

5.2.B Assist in revitalisation of centres by establishing mechanisms to provide support for small business to locate in business districts throughout the region.

5.2.C Establish a mechanism to coordinate business and industry support services across all government and non-government agencies.

5.2.D Develop strategies to attract investment from organisations that develop products, processes and services that generate wealth and employment for local communities.

5.3 Regional economy

Objective

To develop a diverse regional economy that is responsive to challenging and changing economic and political environments.

Aligned strategies

5.3.A Identify the strengths, competitiveness and economic value of the region's existing major industries. Identify opportunities to diversify the region's economic base and options to assist emerging industries, and coordinate regional and subregional economic activities.

5.3.B Develop mechanisms to benchmark regional economic development and activities, including the means to monitor the cost of doing business in the region, and investigate options to reduce impediments.

5.3.C Encourage investment and reinvestment of capital into the region, to ensure long-term economic sustainability.

5.3.D Encourage and support the local production of competitive and viable, locally produced goods and services.

5.4 Agriculture

Objective

To maintain and expand a sustainable agricultural industry and diversify opportunities through agribusiness ventures.

Land use policy

5.4.1 Ensure land use plans and policies facilitate the development of primary industries, including forestry, carbon farming, intensive animal industries and other primary industries, in appropriate areas.

Aligned strategies

5.4.A Investigate options to undertake a regional, sustainable industry study to assist industries in achieving long-term environmental, social and economic sustainability.

5.4.B Continue to support agricultural and forestry industries by facilitating opportunities to expand sustainable production, processing and management practices.

5.4.C Develop environmental sustainability programs and specific industry strategies, to minimise environmental impacts and highlight options for cleaner production and waste management.

5.4.D Facilitate cooperative arrangements between agricultural and agribusiness industries, and other regional industries to develop value-adding opportunities. Continue to research and investigate the suitability of developing new crops and livestock breeds and products, or alternative higher value uses for existing products.

5.4.E Diversify meat production to increase supplies of other quality meat products such as game meats. Investigate opportunities for value-adding processing byproducts, such as hides and skins, pet food, and animal tissues and products for pharmaceuticals that are partly processed, or packaged within the region.

5.4.F Facilitate opportunities for diversifying agriculture, in order to provide local and regional food staples, particularly fresh fruit and vegetable produce.

5.4.G Support the continued use and promote the adoption of organic agriculture methodologies, and provide opportunities to expand supply to the organic market.

5.4.H Where extractive resources are removed from agricultural areas, such as through mining, access and rehabilitation agreements must be endorsed by key stakeholders, to minimise impacts on primary industries.

Explanatory notes

Long-term development must recognise opportunities for growth of primary industries and resources. The best and most versatile farming land is a resource that should be valued. Alienation of agricultural land is not supported when equally viable alternatives exist, and particularly where developments do not have specific location requirements.

The cattle enterprises of the Channel Country are an important part of the beef industry. Road transport or drovers move cattle from breeding properties in the North-West to properties in the Channel Country, where they are grown out to feedlot weight or fattened.

An estimated 500 000 to 1 million head of cattle are run in the Channel Country, with an estimated sale value of $150 million. This provides a gross value for primary production in the Central West of $193.4 million.

Emerging primary industries in the region include:

- goat meat production
- native foliage enterprises
- forage hay
- aquaculture
- sheep meat
- organically grown beef.

The operational and subsequent post-operational vacating of land used for extractive mining does not necessarily adversely affect the viability of the surrounding agricultural land. Agreements will need to be negotiated between key stakeholders, including land holders in the surrounding water table, the mining company and leading state agencies, to clearly define the responsibility of each stakeholder during and after the mining process.

5.5 Tourism

Objective

To recognise and develop the region as a distinctive and sustainable tourist destination that offers a diverse range of tourism opportunities and unique experiences that continue to attract visitors.

Land use policies

5.5.1 Designate tourist nodes that cater for a variety of visitor needs and experiences.

5.5.2 Identify areas that are suitable for tourism accommodation, activities and services that are based on economic, social and environmental considerations.

Aligned strategies

5.5.A Improve the tourism image consistent with the region's identity, encourage tourism and service industries to actively promote this image, and seek to improve promotional partnerships with state, national and international tourist organisations.

5.5.B Develop a range of regional tourist circuits that encourage longer stays and link opportunities throughout the Central West.

5.5.C Encourage redevelopment and upgrading of attractions, accommodation and product packaging, and ensure staff receive relevant training to meet visitor and industry expectations.

5.5.D Identify ecologically sustainable visitor numbers to sites to maintain the integrity of the sites and visitor experiences, and maintain community and environmental values.

5.5.E Improve the coordination, availability and quality of information to promote tourism activities, for example, by enhancing signage to improve public knowledge, access, education and safety awareness.

5.5.F Develop a regional tourism strategy that:

- recognises the various tourism elements within the region
- establishes a shared vision and identifies sustainable growth opportunities
- supports appropriate levels of infrastructure and services
- provides unique and safe tourism experiences
- introduces new opportunities in nature-based arts, culture, business events and niche markets.

5.5.G Facilitate the development of mechanisms to coordinate the efforts of the tourism industry, environmental and natural resource management agencies and other stakeholders, to facilitate and develop tourism activities.

5.5.H Establish mechanisms to collate and communicate research and statistical information, to support new and improved tourism infrastructure and products[10].

Explanatory notes

Findings from the Lake Eyre Basin Coordinating Group's project, *Lake Eyre Basin Heritage Tourism—Future directions 2004*[11], show that tourism is rapidly emerging as a major form of land use, alongside the more traditional pastoralism, agriculture and mining. Natural and cultural heritage assets are commodities with commercial value. This has significant bearing on issues of access for both pastoral leasehold lands and protected areas. It is also becoming a major consideration in the sustainable management of key visitation sites such as waterholes.

In 1996–1997, the tourism destination of outback Queensland attracted 323 000 visitors, with direct tourism expenditure totalling $86.3 million. In 2006, 530 100 people visited the region, with 2 374 700 nights spent in the region. Over the three years to December 2006, total visitor numbers to outback Queensland have steadily increased by five per cent each year, with visitor nights increasing by five per cent each year.

Attractions include corporate-style heritage centres, including the Australian Stockman's Hall of Fame, local council initiatives such as Boulia's Min Min Centre, and privately run enterprises such as the Birdsville Machinery Museum.

Local governments view tourism as a viable and important economic activity, and this is reflected in their employment of tourism officers and the development of tourism plans.

From a tourism perspective, regional branding is presented under a wider 'Queensland's Outback' brand. Brand and product development activities are ongoing, and are regularly reviewed to ensure they remain relevant. Tourism Queensland has developed strong regional partnerships, and continues to work across the region to assist with tourism development such as with the Australian Stockman's Hall of Fame.

Local governments also maintain and develop airports in the region to facilitate access to the region by air. These facilities are seen as crucial to the long-term sustainability of the significant number of tourism facilities and related industries in the region.

In wider domestic and overseas markets, Tourism Queensland promotes Queensland's outback to key target markets. The Central West is a key region in the integrated image and brand of 'Queensland's Outback'. In international markets, the outback is promoted as part of a wider Queensland experience.

10 This action will be delivered through the preparation of the *Outback Regional Tourism Investment and Infrastructure Plan (RTIIP)* to be undertaken in 2008–09.

11 Lake Eyre Basin Coordinating Group at ‹www.lakeeyrebasin.org.au/archive/media/future_directions›

5.6 Knowledge and technology

Objective

Develop the region's capability to maximise the transfer of technology, knowledge and innovation to commercial applications.

Aligned strategies

5.6.A Encourage business support of, and investment in, research, development and knowledge for commercial applications.

5.6.B Foster cooperation between the organisations involved in education, training and research, to facilitate the exchange of ideas, information and knowledge.

5.6.C Encourage industries to adopt new technology, to enhance environmental outcomes and improve the efficiency of production processes.

5.6.D Establish a system that provides accurate and current market information to potential investors, facilitates information sharing and networking between industries, and promotes strategic integration and cooperation of industry market intelligence and programs.

5.7 Innovation and marketing

Objective

To improve and integrate marketing and promotional activities, market development and access, as well as developing industry partnerships.

Aligned strategies

5.7.A Develop a regional corporate image consistent with other imaging processes being carried out in the Central West that reflects the region's key capabilities, opportunities and unique attributes as a centre for investment and employment.

5.7.B Develop a marketing plan to provide direction on investment and promotional activities to existing and potential businesses and industries that are establishing, relocating or expanding their operation in the region.

5.7.C Promote and extend excellence awards throughout the region, to highlight business and industry strengths at regional, state and national levels.

Explanatory notes

The Centres of Enterprise initiative by the Queensland Government's Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation is an example of a program consistent with these aligned strategies.

The Remote Area Planning and Development Board (the Board) has developed a brand name logo for the region called 'Legendary', and featuring an iconic windmill. The Board is looking for opportunities to promote this brand in tourism, business and local government.

5.8 Employment, labour force and skills

Objective

To establish, attract and retain a skilled workforce to strengthen economic opportunities and the social fabric of the region, and to improve regional business performance.

Aligned strategies

5.8.A Encourage initiatives to attract, retain and support a demographically diverse and skilled workforce, especially in areas of high demand or skill shortage.

5.8.B Enhance the provision of flexible distance education, learning and training, to meet the diverse needs and circumstances of staff in the Central West.

Explanatory notes

Organisations such as the Remote Area Planning and Development Board and the Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation, have undertaken major initiatives to develop strategies to attract and retain staff. The work of these groups, and the expansion and adoption of strategies by other community and business groups, will continue to support the growth of the employment sector in the region.

5.9 Education and training

Objective

To maximise job creation and employment diversity associated with economic activity development.

Aligned strategies

5.9.A Coordinate specialised education and training programs that meet the requirements of the region's major industries, and provide skill development opportunities to support new and emerging industries in the region.

5.9.B Consider local employment options when planning major developments in the region.

5.9.C Encourage greater involvement of, and collaboration among, education and training institutions, government, industry, business and community sectors to develop strategies to enhance community development.

5.9.D Develop and implement strategies that will increase the awareness of the quality and benefit of local education at secondary and vocational levels.

Explanatory notes

Education and training are essential building blocks for a sustainable community. They allow people to increase their work and life skills, provide individual fulfilment, assist people to gain employment, support those who are isolated from their communities, provide for economic growth and facilitate capacity building.

Social and economic development of the region is dependent on the provision of skill development by both community and business.

Local education opportunities need to embrace delivery models that suit all learning styles, not simply concentrate on online or distance education models. Developing methods that recognise the prior experience and learning of residents will benefit the Central West. Support at the local and regional level is essential. For example, the development of a new tourism school (an initiative of the Department of Education and Training, Remote Area Planning and Development Board, the Australian Agricultural College and the tourism industry) allows students to gain new skills locally.

5.10 Energy and mineral resource development

Developing resources in the Galilee Basin—like gas, mineral and shale oil—is anticipated to be a primary driver of economic and social change in the Central West in the future.

These projects are contingent on national and global factors, such as economic activity levels and the policy positions of the state and Australian governments.

Extracting coal seam gas also produces water as a by-product. This could potentially produce 60 000 mega litres of water per year, at varying levels of quality. Potentially, an alternative energy resource based on the conversion of coal to liquid fuels could be developed in the Galilee Basin. To date, trial plants and operations have only focused on sites in the Dalby Regional Council area.

Acting on this opportunity in the Galilee Basin will increase demand on the region's infrastructure. Issues to consider and address include:

- road and rail weight and traffic capacity
- skill shortages and training options
- changes to social structure
- demand on the region's water, housing and electricity supply
- alignment with state and national targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

It is therefore important for the resources sector to effectively engage communities and governments to maximise the economic and social benefits of development, and address community concerns of potential impacts.

Objective

To actively pursue the opportunity to develop gas, mineral and shale oil extraction industries in local communities, for the benefit of the region.

Land use policies

5.10.1 Locate development appropriately, to avoid impacts on, or from, existing and future mineral, energy and extractive resource development and associated infrastructure.

5.10.2 Ensure planning instruments and agencies respond in a timely fashion to:

- tenure changes associated with mining approvals granted under legislation, other than the Integrated Planning Act 1997
- protection of important extractive resource sites from incompatible development
- identified areas with potential for future mineral, energy and extractive resources development.

Aligned strategies

5.10.A Encourage collaborative responses by government, resource companies and the community to the social, economic and environmental pressures associated with large-scale mining and energy resource projects.

5.10.B Maximise regional economic benefit from mining by encouraging regional and local businesses to provide services to the mining sector.

5.10.C Facilitate infrastructure provision to support new development through timely advice and collaborative partnerships between developers, infrastructure providers and all levels of government.

5.10.D Promote mineral, energy and extractive resource development as a key component of the economic development of Central West Queensland.

5.10.E Support the Land Access Working Group[12] in the development of a single code of conduct, standard compensation agreement, and exploration of rehabilitation obligations.

Explanatory notes

Land use policies aim to avoid inappropriate urban development close to resources, by defining resource and urban boundaries, separation zones and haul routes.

State Planning Policy 2/07 identifies the extractive resources of state or regional significance, where development of the extractive industry is appropriate. The policy aims to protect these resources from developments that might prevent or severely constrain current or future extraction, when the need for the resource arises.

The Queensland Government is working to get the balance right between:

- meeting the state's increasing energy demands
- the world's increased demand for minerals and food
- the Queensland Government's priority to build sustainable communities.

The Department of Environment and Resource Management has established the Land Access Working Group to facilitate better communication and improved relationships between the rural and resource sectors. The purpose of the group is to provide an open forum for relevant state government agencies and peak resource and rural industry bodies, to collaborate on issues concerning exploration activity on rural land.

The Department of Infrastructure and Planning is the lead agency of the group, with representatives from AgForce, Queensland Farmers Federation, Australian Petroleum Production and Exploration Association, Queensland Resources Council, Association of Mining and Exploration Companies, Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation, Department of Environment and Resource Management and Department of Premier and Cabinet.

The working group is currently developing a single code of conduct for land access, and a standard compensation agreement. The group is also reviewing, in detail, obligations to rehabilitate land after exploration has occurred.

12 The land access working group has been established by the Department of Environment and Resource Management.

6. Infrastructure

Desired regional outcome

Infrastructure leads and supports desired regional growth, and helps create sustainable rural communities and regional economic development.

Further development of the region's major agricultural and tourism industries is heavily dependent upon the provision of safe, reliable and cost-effective infrastructure.

Planning needs to be consistent with relevant land use and economic development strategies to ensure that infrastructure projects are developed to service industry and community demands in a timely, cost-effective and environmentally sustainable manner.

With the potential opening of the Galilee Basin, the establishment of strong links among regional representatives of mining industries, local and state government agencies, business and industry, and other stakeholders should be encouraged. This will ensure industry needs are met, and the associated economic and social benefits to the region are realised.

In particular, the infrastructure needs of local communities will need to be managed, in planning for growth in the resource sector. As reported at the 2008 resource summits[13], the benefits and opportunities that will be created by growth are recognised by local communities. Challenges, however, will also need to be addressed to ensure the current quality of regional lifestyle is maintained.

Road infrastructure, for example, will be impacted by increased traffic volumes in areas where mining exploration is undertaken. The provision of regional infrastructure, including the maintenance and funding of roads, will therefore require collaborative planning solutions that will need to be developed in consultation with all key stakeholders.

Greater communication between all levels of government and the local community will be achieved by working together to develop regional infrastructure solutions, through planning partnerships 'founded on shared ambitions, shared responsibility and shared action'[14].

13 Bowen Basin resource summit, 20 November 2008; Dalby resource summit, 21 November 2008; Mount Isa resource summit, 28 November 2008.

14 Queensland Government, *Toward Q2 Tomorrow's Queensland*, September 2008.

Built environment

The region is linked to the adjacent North West and South West regions by the Landsborough Highway, which is part of the national highway network from Brisbane to Darwin. The Capricorn Highway links the region to the fast-growing Central Queensland region. A number of air services link the major centres in the east of the region (Longreach, Blackall, Barcaldine and Winton) with Brisbane and Townsville.

The smaller centres in the south and west (Bedourie, Birdsville and Windorah) are linked to Mount Isa and Brisbane by twice-weekly air services. The twice-weekly Spirit of the Outback rail service links Longreach to Rockhampton and Brisbane.

The south-east of the region has traditionally been culturally linked to centres in the south (Charleville, Roma and Toowoomba), rather than the closer coastal centre of Rockhampton. This has reflected the divide between the areas suitable for sheep or cattle, and areas suited to cultivation or horticulture. Also, the Capricorn Highway was developed and sealed much later than the Matilda (Landsborough) Highway. Air services link Brisbane to the region, but not Rockhampton.

Centres in the west of the region are aligned to Townsville (Winton) and Mount Isa (Boulia and Bedourie). The far south-west centre of Birdsville retains transport and cultural links with South Australia, as Adelaide is closer than Brisbane.

The last 10 years have seen a great improvement to town accessibility through road developments, consistent power supply and telecommunication improvements. People living in the Central West have adapted and changed with time and circumstance, to cope with the distance and environmental influences of the area.

6.1 Infrastructure planning and coordination

The challenges to regional infrastructure in the Central West are:

- managing the impact of heavy transport (road trains) on the region's roads
- continually improving the quality and safety of the road network
- accommodating an increasingly mobile workforce and economy
- ensuring the continuation of freight and passenger rail services
- ensuring that remote communities have adequate services
- establishing the correct balance between funding new infrastructure and maintaining existing assets
- encouraging active transport opportunities such as walking and cycling as viable transport models in local communities
- improving telecommunications for rural and remote communities
- maintaining and improving accessibility of air transport into the region
- ensuring parity in power supply to all residents.

To address these challenges, government at all levels and private service providers need to identify and implement infrastructure strategies that will meet the region's needs.

Any new critical infrastructure development in the region needs to take into account the possible risks from climate change during its lifetime, particularly risks from increased heat and flooding impacts.

Objective

To provide physical and social infrastructure that supports sustainable economic growth, and effectively meets the future needs of the community in a timely, cost-effective and coordinated manner.

Land use policies

6.1.1 Identify and facilitate growth of strategic sites and areas for economic development and infrastructure.

6.1.2 Ensure that accommodation requirements for major projects are addressed in development applications and planning schemes.

6.1.3 Assess infrastructure projects of regional and state importance, based on relevant economic, environmental and social factors, ensuring developments are consistent with regional character and structure.

Aligned strategies

6.1.A Establish protocols and lines of communication among industry, government and communities, to improving coordination, planning and delivery of regional and subregional infrastructure, to reflect the region's priorities.

6.1.B Improve the efficiency of community infrastructure by investigating options to redevelop, augment or share facilities of similar services or organisations.

Explanatory notes

Any population growth in the region should be centred on existing communities, in order to maintain the stability and ecological integrity of the region and improve service efficiencies and the viability of communities. Provision of future infrastructure for mining activities within the Central West will be dependent on its commercial viability. Isolated development should be discouraged.

Mining and other industries need to work with and assist government and local communities to address accommodation and transport issues created by development.

6.2 Water supply and management

Water infrastructure is critical to support community growth and maintain sustainability. Water demand management will extend the operational life of existing infrastructure. Any development of new storage and distribution infrastructure must be within the region's sustainable limits.

Effective, affordable and environmentally sustainable wastewater disposal systems are needed to service communities and isolated tourism and industry nodes. Upgrading of existing, poorly performing systems needs to proceed on a priority basis, and water reuse must be investigated to deliver more sustainable outcomes.

Objectives

- To provide future water infrastructure in a cost-efficient, timely and environmentally, culturally and socially acceptable manner, to meet industry and community needs.
- To meet the needs of the community, industry, agriculture and environment on an equitable and sustainable basis, while also addressing climate change impacts.

Land use policies

6.2.1 Identify land requirements for water infrastructure development in planning schemes.

6.2.2 Adopt demand management principles in the planning, designing and constructing of water cycle infrastructure, including water supply, sewerage and drainage.

6.2.3 Identify existing and future priority water demand areas and locations in the planning scheme for water infrastructure upgrades, including water storage and supply treatment plants required within the next 10 to 20 years.

6.2.4 Incorporate industry best practice and water saving methods and technology in all new development in the region.

Aligned strategies

6.2.A Use asset audits to identify capital, maintenance, operational and environmental performance issues affecting water-use efficiencies, and identify operating costs to maximise environmental outcomes and meet consumer needs.

6.2.B Use reviews and feasibility analyses of opportunities to expand water infrastructure and potentially alternative sources of water.

6.2.C Encourage the sustainable and diverse use of the region's water supplies, to enhance the liveability and productive capacity of communities.

Explanatory notes

Provision of adequate water infrastructure is critical to supporting and sustaining development within the region's communities and for industry. Encouraging the use of water for activities such as recreational fishing and other water sports will improve the liveability of regional communities.

6.3 Waste management

Cooperative, integrated approaches to coordinating domestic, industrial and regulated waste management across the region can contribute to rationalisation and improvements in current waste management practices, with environmental and financial benefits to the communities.

Objective

To develop an integrated approach to waste management, recycling and reuse within the region to meet desired community health and environmental outcomes.

Land use policies

6.3.1 Identify sites for integrated waste disposal, including recycling and reuse, and incorporate regionally specific, best-practice waste management that is applicable to sparsely populated, low density communities which are separated by substantial distances.

6.3.2 Ensure point source wastewater discharge of pollutants into water is avoided where practicable, and is otherwise handled in accordance with best-practice environmental management to protect or enhance environmental values and meet water quality objectives of receiving waters.

Aligned strategies

6.3.A Coordinate integrated waste management infrastructure and types of waste management at a regional level.

6.3.B Develop an integrated approach to waste minimisation and management that uses best practice models that meet realistic and commercially achievable targets.

6.3.C Avoid waste generation in the first instance, if possible. Where waste generation cannot be avoided, education and promoting programs best practice models that address waste reuse, composting, recycling, waste to energy and safe disposal are supported.

6.3.D Develop a regional hazardous waste management strategy which is safe and cost-effective and focuses on agricultural industrial waste.

6.3.E Support local governments to upgrade sewerage treatment operations in urban locations, as appropriately determined by need and available funds.

6.3.F Investigate cost-effective and environmentally sustainable sewerage treatment systems that are suitable for recreational areas and isolated tourist nodes.

6.3.G Investigate opportunities for water reuse, particularly for agriculture and industry purposes.

Explanatory notes

Urban waste disposal is a major issue in the region. Local governments are slowly improving their waste management in larger centres like Longreach. This approach still has challenges in terms of the volume of waste disposed to landfill.

A regional approach to recycling materials like cardboard (estimated at more than 30 per cent of the waste stream), tyres and plastics is required, along with other end-of-life products such as oil, batteries, aluminium and other packaging materials. A major challenge is the high freight cost to recycling plants on the coast, compared to the value of the recovered material.

Historically, there has been widespread use of chemicals in common farming practices. Residual chemicals persist in soils and buildings and on specific sites such as dips and stockyards, with potential risk to people, animals and the environment. Several programs offer safe collection and recycling of cleaned chemical containers and the collection of unwanted rural, agricultural and veterinary chemicals. The ChemClear[15] program provides for the collection of agricultural and veterinary chemical containers while drumMUSTER[16] has also been set up for the collection and recycling of certain chemical containers. Management strategies are required to address issues regarding contamination.

Sewerage treatment plants and operations have the capability to release pollutants to waterways. These pollutants flow downstream and have adverse impacts on the natural environment and water quality, and can be harmful to human health. Wastewater discharged from sewerage systems and treatment plants can be beneficially reused or recycled. The preferred outcome is that material is not discharged to waterways, to ensure that environmental values and water quality objectives are achieved.

6.4 Energy, information and technology

Access to reliable, affordable power supply is necessary to support existing and future growth. The development of alternative energy options will help buffer the region against supply disruptions and pricing volatility.

Telecommunications services within the region are inconsistent and require an upgrade or new installations of network coverage. Improvements to internet access and speed are also required to support business demand and meet community expectations. Improving regional awareness and access to improved technology will benefit all sectors of the community.

Objective

To meet the region's energy and telecommunications requirements in a sustainable and timely manner.

Land use policy

6.4.1 Plan mobile phone, broadband and UHF repeater station services to align with other infrastructure corridors and centres.

Aligned strategies

6.4.A Facilitate the provision of power to the region to meet existing and future community and industry needs. Ensure that it is commercially viable and environmentally sustainable.

6.4.B Investigate the use of decentralised power generation such as solar, solar thermal and geothermal energy.

6.4.C Continue to develop telecommunication services such as high-speed internet access in the region, including rural and remote areas[17].

6.4.D Identify telecommunication opportunities in education and training, healthcare, natural resources and agricultural management, governance and other social issues to overcome remoteness.

Explanatory notes

There is a proposal to construct a high-voltage, direct-current transmission line to connect Queensland's North West Minerals Province to the competitive national electricity market. If this project is undertaken, the transmission line will also have the potential to be extended to serve key economic centres of the Central West region as well as the Northern Territory.

6.5 Transport networks

Transport infrastructure is fundamentally important to the social and economic function of all western Queensland regions. The Central West's main transport infrastructure[18] consists of road, rail and air. Ensuring the efficient functioning and high quality of this infrastructure is vitally important to remote and vast regions like the Central West.

The stock route network may play an increasingly important role in future responses to peak oil and rising fuel costs, as well as climate change. The stock route network will need to be well managed to protect its inherent values and to ensure it is available to serve its intended purpose.

15 ChemClear program (see Agsafe at www.checlear.com.au)

16 drumMUSTER program (see Agsafe at www.drummuster.com.au)

17 Broadband and mobile services are private sector businesses under Federal Government policies. This policy is to encourage and facilitate a cooperative approach with all stakeholders in this field.

18 Refer to Map 4—Transport

The major centres in the region have basic public transport (taxis) while smaller centres are serviced by organisations such as Home and Community Care. A safe and efficient public transport system is also required to meet the existing and future needs of people living in rural and isolated areas.

Objectives

- To provide integrated transport services and facilities to meet the economic, social, health and environmental needs of the region.
- To improve the services, safety, efficiency and patronage of public transport systems.

Land use policies

6.5.1 Protect existing and identify future transport corridors from inappropriate development and land use conflicts that may compromise the corridor's existing or intended transportation purpose.

6.5.2 Ensure integration of transport modes in the planning and construction of local and regional transport networks.

Aligned strategies

6.5.A A strategic transport network that meets current and projected community and industry needs including links to rural and remote areas using best practice approaches and technologies.

6.5.B Ensure integration and improved coordination of transport modes, new transport infrastructure and timetables in the planning, construction and operation of networks to transport people and freight.

6.5.C Ensure that all strategic, transport infrastructure construction and upgrades are based on sound economic, environmental and social feasibility.

6.5.D Consider and, where appropriate, facilitate access to reliable and safe, inter- and intra-regional public transport services suitable to the needs of communities in rural and remote towns and special needs groups, such as the elderly and disabled.

Explanatory notes

Transport infrastructure is a vital component of the region's economy and social structure. To accommodate future regional transport infrastructure development and links within the region, attention must focus on the achievement of environmental, social and economic goals, while accommodating future growth. A regional integrated transport plan to coordinate future redevelopment and the integration of regional transport systems may be appropriate for the region. Any such plan should integrate rural and remote area access, accessibility for agricultural and other industry needs, and links to other regions for specific services, facilities and functions such as economic markets.

Increased attention needs to be directed to managing transport issues through developing and implementing an integrated transport system. This system should use a range of transport modes including road, rail, air, public transport and community bus services. This system will meet community and industry needs in an efficient manner through:

- identification and promotion of transport service centres
- increased flexibility in moving people, goods and services via different modes
- better coordination of services
- increased use of public transport including walkways, cycling paths and parklands within communities.

6.6 Roads and highways

Roads are currently the primary means of movement in the region. These roads carry a higher than average proportion of commercial heavy vehicles and tourists in caravans and campervans[19]. Some major routes like the Outback Way (Winton and Boulia Shires), Aramac/Torrens creek (Barcaldine Regional Council) and the Tanbar/South Galway Road (Barcoo Shire) are experiencing significant traffic increases, particularly heavy vehicles.

Road-based transport will continue to be the main component of the region's transport network with implications for regional industry and the safety and convenience of communities.

Objective

To ensure the region's road network meets the needs of residents and visitors and the transportation of goods, products and services.

Aligned strategy

6.6.A Undertake transport planning and infrastructure delivery in a coordinated manner between state and federal government service providers and local governments to meet anticipated industry and community needs.

Explanatory notes

The Queensland Government undertakes regional planning to determine works projects for particular roads in the region. Local authorities also have roles regarding planning and maintenance of road networks.

Investigating and prioritising future construction programs including upgrading strategic road links would assist in delivering coordinated and timely responses to road maintenance needs. The economic, social and environmental impacts of major road construction programs need to be fully assessed to determine the cost and benefits of various options.

19 Road train stock movement in the South West of the Barcoo Shire—the cause and effect, May 2005. Winton Shire Council, Outback Way 2008–09 Budget Submission.

6.7 Railways

Rail still plays a vital role in the transportation of livestock and goods from the region to coastal centres.

Objective

To make rail available for inter-regional and intra-regional freight and livestock movement, where appropriate.

Aligned strategies

6.7.A Ensure that the region's rail network maintains a safe and efficient service.

6.7.B Encourage and facilitate the transport of bulk commodities and heavy and hazardous goods, to be carried by rail where appropriate.

6.7.C Investigate options to make greater use of the rail line between the Central Coast and the Central West.

Explanatory notes

Rail use still plays a role in transporting freight, particularly livestock, to major centres. The quality of rail infrastructure and freight charges are both challenges to the viability of the rail network. The mechanisms used to deliver these services in the future may not necessarily reflect current models.

Retention of the region's rail links and services strongly depends on usage. It is feasible that future rail use will rise, given predictions of increased fuel costs and the potential for new mining in the Galilee Basin. Retaining rail corridors to meet future demand for infrastructure, and encouraging the use of rail transport, are therefire vital initiatives for promoting efficient transport systems.

6.8 Airports and air services

Air passenger and freight volumes have increased and are expected to grow further. Daily scheduled passenger services currently operate between Brisbane and Longreach. Barcaldine and Blackall have three scheduled flights per week. There are services between Mount Isa and Bedourie, Birdsville and Boulia. Other services operate between Brisbane and Windorah, Townsville and Winton. Demand for the Brisbane–Longreach service has shown significant growth.

Air transport plays an important part in the region's economic development, particularly tourism and the high return fly-drive market, by providing a fast and reliable link to major centres. With the increase in the fly-in and fly-out workforce, and an increasing demand for fly-drive tourism products, air transport will play a major part in the region's economic development.

Objective

To optimise the use and safety of existing and future airports in the region for freight and passenger movement.

Aligned strategies

6.8.A Airport infrastructure meets the requirements of passenger, freight, defence, health and emergency services.

6.8.B Maintain airport facilities and infrastructure at an appropriate level to cater for demand.

Explanatory notes

Delivery of health services is a key priority in the Central West and is essential to ensuring safe, healthy and sustainable communities. Without services like the fly-in and fly-out medical specialists, the Central West will not be able to meet its regional vision. Good airport infrastructure is required to provide adequate health services to the region.

Regional airlink strategies are required to maximise freight and tourist passenger yield throughout the region. Planning needs to consider the future expansion of regional airports to maximise operational safety and efficiency, and minimise adverse impacts on the amenity of adjacent communities. With the anticipated reduction in accessibility to health services in the region, the maintenance of air transport options is becoming more crucial.

PART F—Implementation, monitoring and review

The *Central West Regional Plan* establishes a basis for better planning, management and development in the Central West. The value of the plan will be largely determined by the extent to which it is supported and implemented by government and the community.

Effective implementation of the regional plan will require cooperation by community stakeholders and coordination of state and local government activities and plans, as well as a review of a range of infrastructure and services.

The monitoring and review elements are critical to charting the progress of land use planning achievements and are essential to a performance-based approach. Monitoring and review provide a feedback loop to allow adaptive management as a response to changing circumstances and new information. If land use plans are to achieve their goals and objectives, the planning process (figure 7) must be designed to be cyclical and should not begin or end at a distinct point in time. Instead, the process should always be structured to include monitoring, evaluation and feedback in recognition of the need to learn and adapt over time[20].

Figure 7. The adaptive management planning process

Plan making

The regional plan is a statutory instrument under the *Statutory Instrument Act 1992* with effects of the regional plan established under section 2.5A of the *Integrated Planning Act 1997*. Relevant provisions of the Act include:

- establishing a Regional Coordination Committee to advise the planning Minister on regional issues
- ensuring local government planning schemes reflect the regional plan
- ensuring state and local governments take account of the regional plan when preparing or amending a plan, policy or code that may affect a matter covered by the regional plan
- ensuring development assessment processes (including referral agency obligations for development applications) address matters covered in the regional plan
- allowing the planning Minister to exercise 'call-in' powers—the Minister's ability to call in development applications that are outside the scope of planning schemes
- establishing processes for amending the regional plan.

Implementation

Implementation requires the cooperation and involvement of all three tiers of government, non-government organisations, the private sector and the community. Implementation mechanisms will include:

- incorporating regional planning outcomes into capital works, service programs and policy making processes of state and local government
- incorporating regional planning outcomes into local government policies, development assessment processes and local government planning schemes.

20 Low Choy DC, Worrall RH, Gleeson J, McKay P and Robinson J (2002) in *Environmental Planning Project: Volume 1-Management Frameworks, Tools and Cooperative Mechanisms. CRC for Coastal Zone Estuary and Waterway Management, Technical Report 4.*

In order to facilitate effective implementation of the regional plan, an efficient coordination system to guide, monitor and assist implementation activities is required. In addition, the implementation process should, wherever possible, make use of existing administrative structures and frameworks and avoid duplication of processes.

Primary implementation responsibilities for elements of the regional plan will generally be designated either to state government agencies, based on portfolio responsibilities, or to local government in the region. Lead agencies will be responsible for coordinating the actions of any other agencies that have a role in the implementation of strategies.

A five-year action plan will be prepared, in consultation with the Regional Coordination Committee[15], to outline the key priorities to implement the regional plan within this time frame. The action plan will identify the projects, the actions required and the lead agencies.

The implementation process also requires the preparation of detailed action plans, work programs, budget estimates and resource requirements. Nominated government agencies will coordinate this work. Long-term planning for infrastructure will also be guided by the policies of the regional plan.

Roles and responsibilities

The Regional Coordination Committee advises the Queensland Government, through the planning Minister, on the development and implementation of the regional plan.

The rights and responsibilities of individual agencies, authorities and bodies are to be respected and retained, including the responsibility for development, resourcing and funding of programs within their portfolio interests.

Monitoring and reporting

Regional planning is a dynamic process and will not end with the completion of the regional plan. There is a clear need to establish mechanisms to:

- monitor progress and changes in the region
- identify new and emerging issues
- monitor implementation of the outcomes and strategies of the regional plan
- periodically review the status of the region, and initiate changes to regional strategies and priorities where required.

Implementation will also involve a wide range of community and industry groups and individuals, particularly at the subregional and local levels. The regional plan sets out the need to involve all levels of government, industry and the community in the planning, development and management of the region.

Review process

The review process guides further policy development and assists in setting future priority projects and actions.

The regional plan will be reviewed formally at least every 10 years, in accordance with section 2.5A of the *Integrated Planning Act 1997*. In addition, the planning Minister may amend, replace or approve minor revisions of the regional plan at any time, if required.

Any review will include input from government and the community. It will provide an open and accountable process that will involve and inform the community of the outcome of any regional monitoring program.

Community involvement in implementation

The regional plan sets out the need to involve all levels of government, industry and the community in the planning, development and management of the region.

When implementing the regional plan, appropriate consultation and negotiations will be undertaken with the community and relevant stakeholders in the implementation of specific strategies and actions arising from the plan. The extent, level and timing of consultation will depend on the particular strategy or action. The responsibility to ensure that appropriate community and stakeholder consultation is undertaken will primarily rest with the individual lead agency.

Members of the community and specific interest groups can also provide input into the implementation process through the Regional Coordination Committee.

21 Formerly the Central West Regional Planning Advisory Committee (CWRPAC).

Appendix 1

Mapping methodology for areas of ecological significance

The Department of Environment and Resource Management has prepared mapping showing areas of ecological significance. The maps have been prepared from high-quality data sets of terrestrial vegetation, key threatened species habitats and wetlands. The accuracy of mapping is considered reliable for planning purposes.

To prepare maps, the Department of Environment and Resource Management takes data for specific ecological resources and, using geographic information system methodologies, identifies areas of relative significance. More information is available from the Department of Environment and Resource Management website.

Areas of high ecological significance

The Department of Environment and Resource Management used the following data and ecological significance assessment methods to map areas of high ecological significance:

Conservation estate: These areas include Department of Environment and Resource Management-managed areas such as national parks and conservation parks—excluding forest reserves, state forests and timber reserves.

Wetlands areas: In the catchment of the Queensland Lake Eyre Basin, wetland mapping prepared under the Queensland wetlands program was used as a base. The Department of Environment and Resource Management tool AquaBAMM is being used for Aquatic Conservation Assessments throughout Queensland Lake Eyre Basin and, where completed, high ecological significance areas can be identified from sites assessed as being of "very high" or "high" significance under the this system. Included in wetlands areas are specific wetlands decisions that have "state" significance from the Desert Uplands, Copper Creek and Georgina Catchments biological planning assessments and have been designated as areas of high ecological significance. Specifically areas of artesian springs have been identified and designated high ecological significance through the biological planning assessment process.

Terrestrial areas: Essential habitats were outlined as high ecological significance by either having a habitat suitability map or EVR[22] points that have been buffered by double the precision of the point data. The following are assigned a high ecological significance value:

- biodiversity planning assessment B1 status = 'high' or 'very high'
- nature refuges
- criterion B2 very high regional ecosystem value = 'very high'
- biodiversity planning assessment special areas—state significance that have terrestrial values.

Corridors: Terrestrial corridors that are a part of the State Corridor Network (used within biodiversity planning assessments and some outside of biodiversity planning assessments) are used as a centre line. Remnant vegetation that has 30 per cent of its total area within the corridor buffer is selected as high ecological significance. Corridor buffer outlines indicate areas of non-remnant high ecological significance. Riparian corridors are based on major rivers that have been identified with the biodiversity planning assessment process. Again, remnant vegetation that has 30 per cent of its total area within the buffer of the riparian corridor is high ecological significance, as is a 100m buffer of any non-remnant areas.

Threshold ecosystems: Regional ecosystems that are at risk of the remnant extent falling below 30 per cent of its pre-clearing extent, or having a remnant extent of less than 10 000 hectares.

Assessable[23] non-remnant or regrowth endangered and of concern regional ecosystems.

Further information about the Department of Environment and Resource Management's biodiversity mapping methodology can be found on the agency's website.

For wetland areas: see www.epa.qld.gov.au/wetlandinfo/site/SupportTools/AssessmentMethods/AquaBAMM

For terrestrial areas: see www.epa.qld.gov.au/publications?id=471

Areas of general ecological significance

The Department of Environment and Resource Management used the following data and ecological significance assessment methods to map areas of general ecological significance:

Wetland areas: The following are assigned a general ecological significance value:

- wetland biodiversity planning assessment special areas that have regional significance
- Queensland wetland mapping—where approved
- topographic lakes layer taken from GEODATA Australia 1:250K map where Queensland Wetlands Program is not approved.

Terrestrial areas: The following are assigned a general ecological significance value:

- biodiversity planning assessment fauna/flora habitat models
- biodiversity planning assessment B1 status—not of concern in subregions with less then 30 per cent of remaining vegetation
- biodiversity planning assessment special areas that have regional significance
- essential habitats—models of high mobility vulnerable or rare species.

Mapped remnant vegetation: including not of concern regional ecosystems.

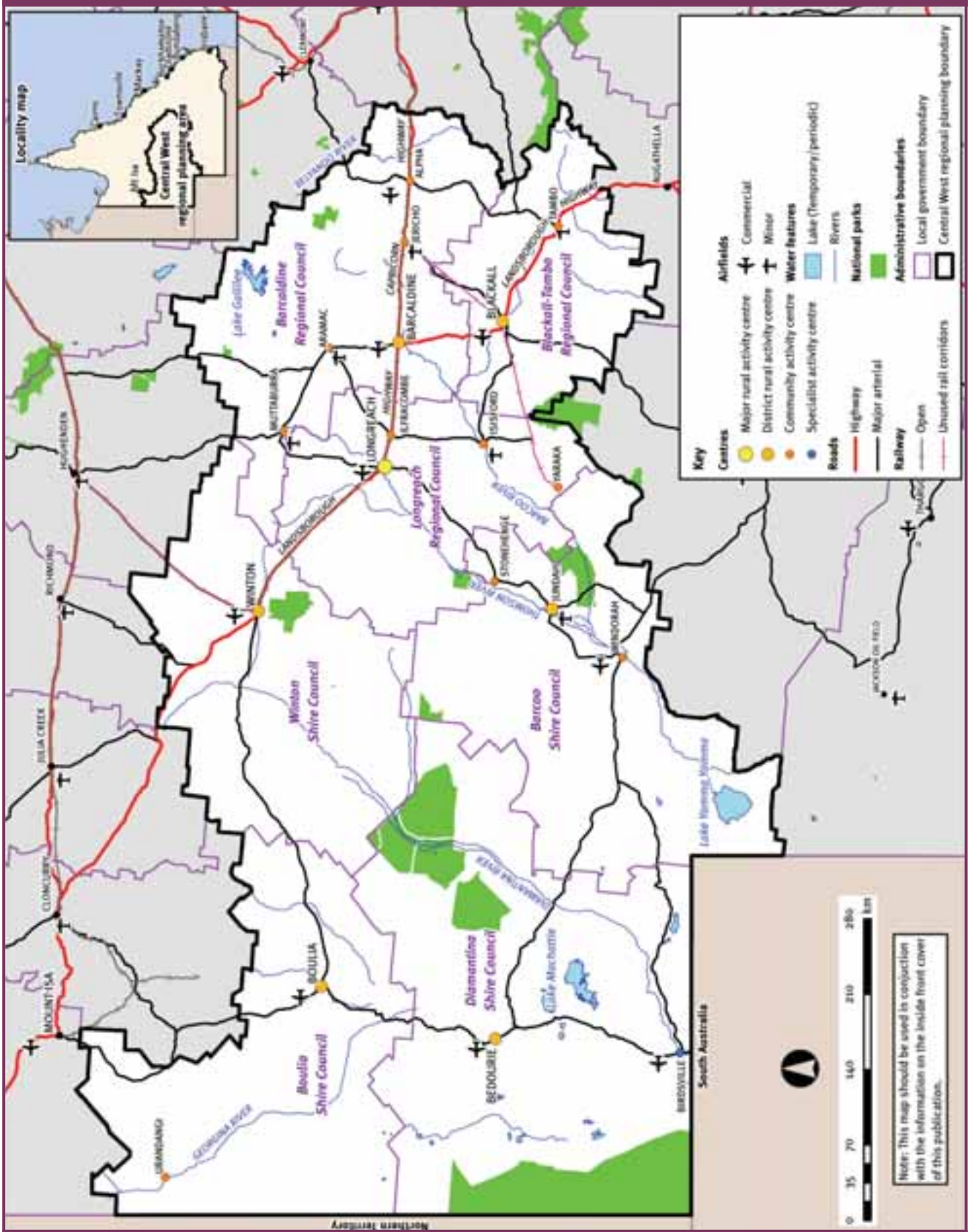
Assessable non–remnant or regrowth not of concern regional ecosystems.

22 E-endangered, V-vulnerable and R-rare—designations of abundance for native species scheduled under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*.

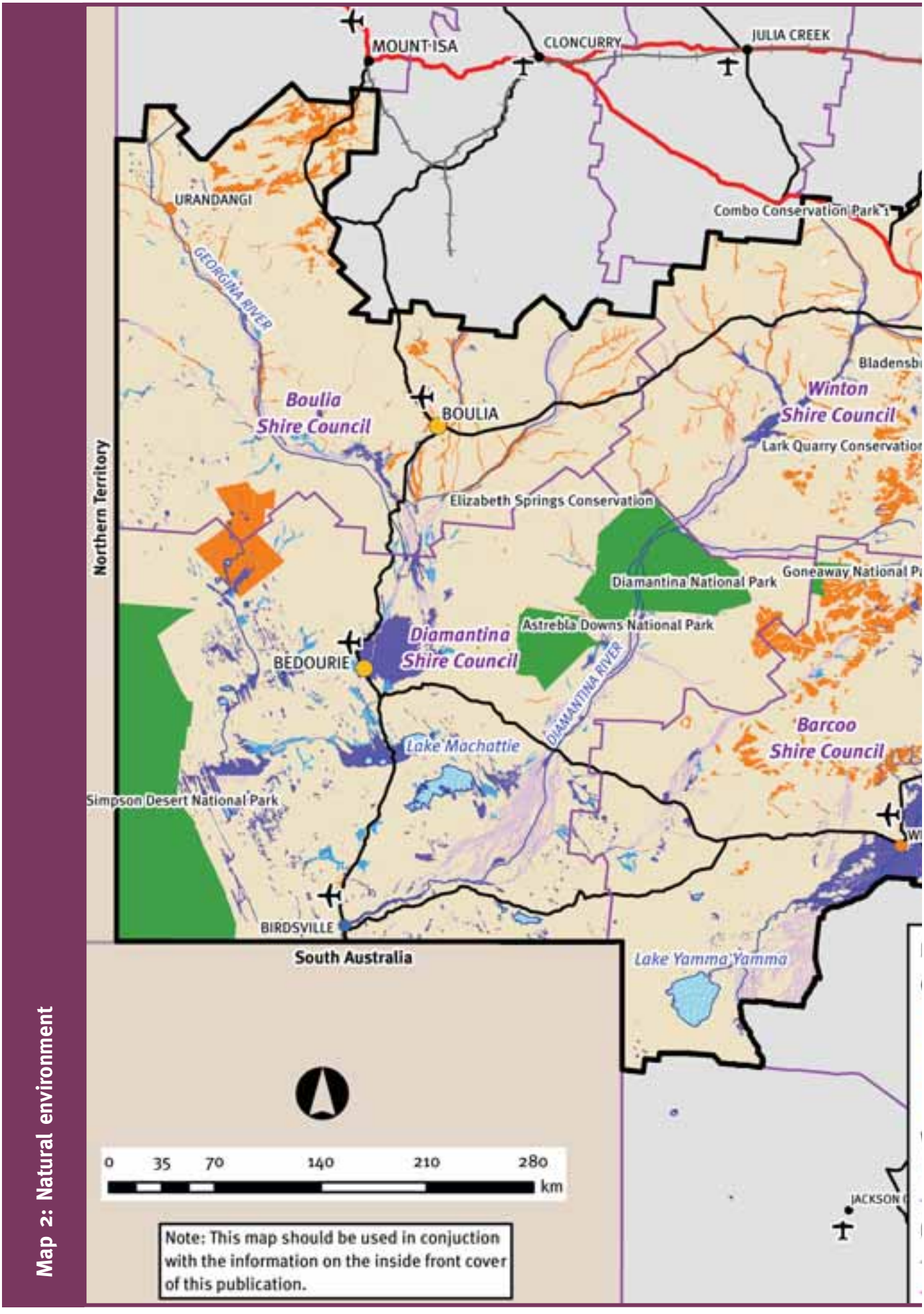
23 Requiring an approval under the *Vegetation Management Act 1999* for clearing.

Appendix 2

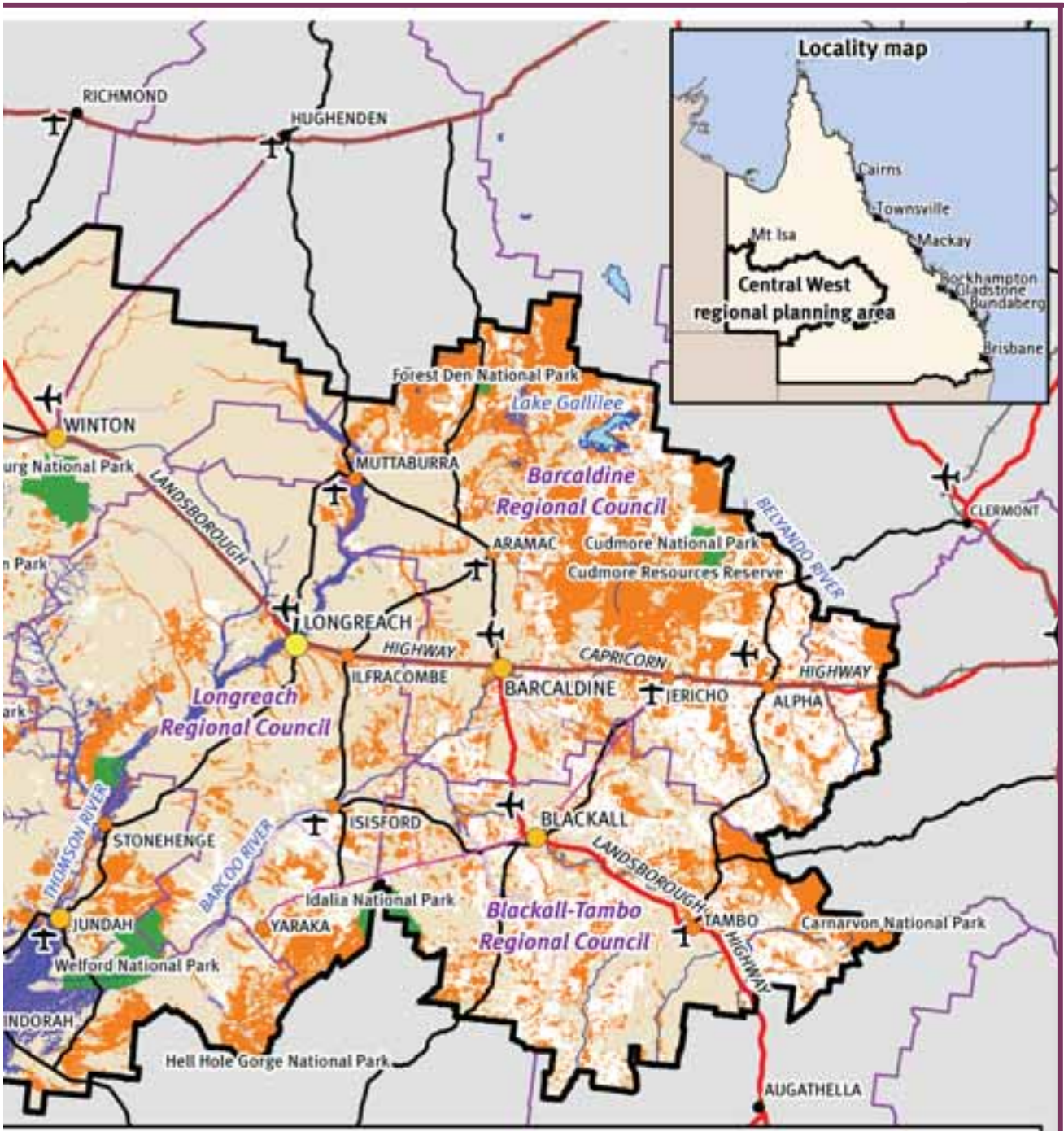
Map 1: Regional activity centres



Disclaimer: The information on this map should be treated as indicative only and subject to ongoing refinement. Based on or contains data provided by the State of Queensland (Department of Environment and Resource Management) 2008. In consideration of the state permitting use of this data you acknowledge and agree that the state gives no warranty in relation to the data (including accuracy, reliability, completeness, currency or suitability) and accepts no liability (including without limitation, liability in negligence) for any loss, damage or costs (including consequential damage) relating to any use of the data. Data must not be used for direct marketing or be used in breach of the privacy laws. Data source: Department of Environment and Resource Management and Department of Infrastructure and Planning.



Map 2: Natural environment



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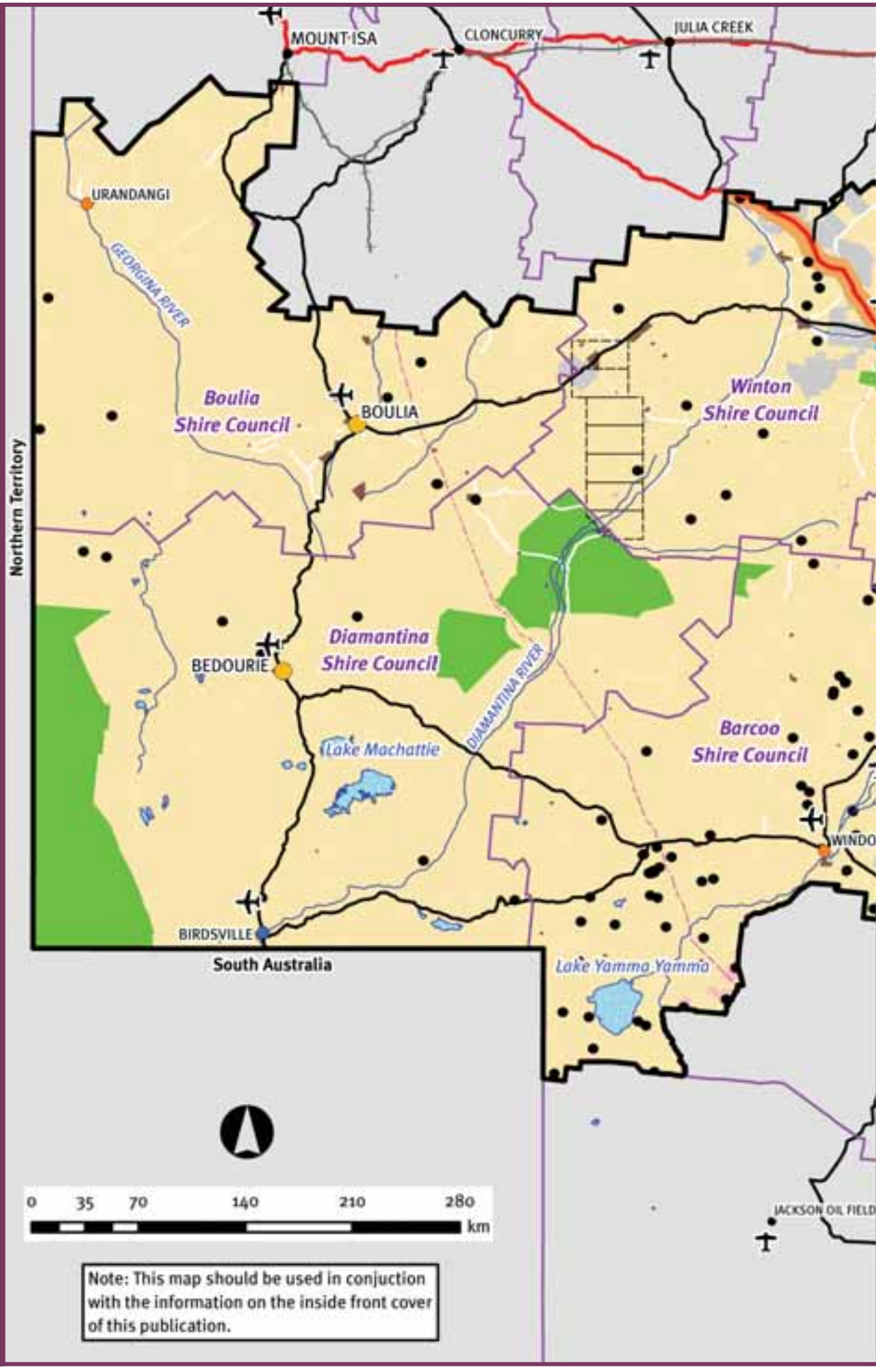
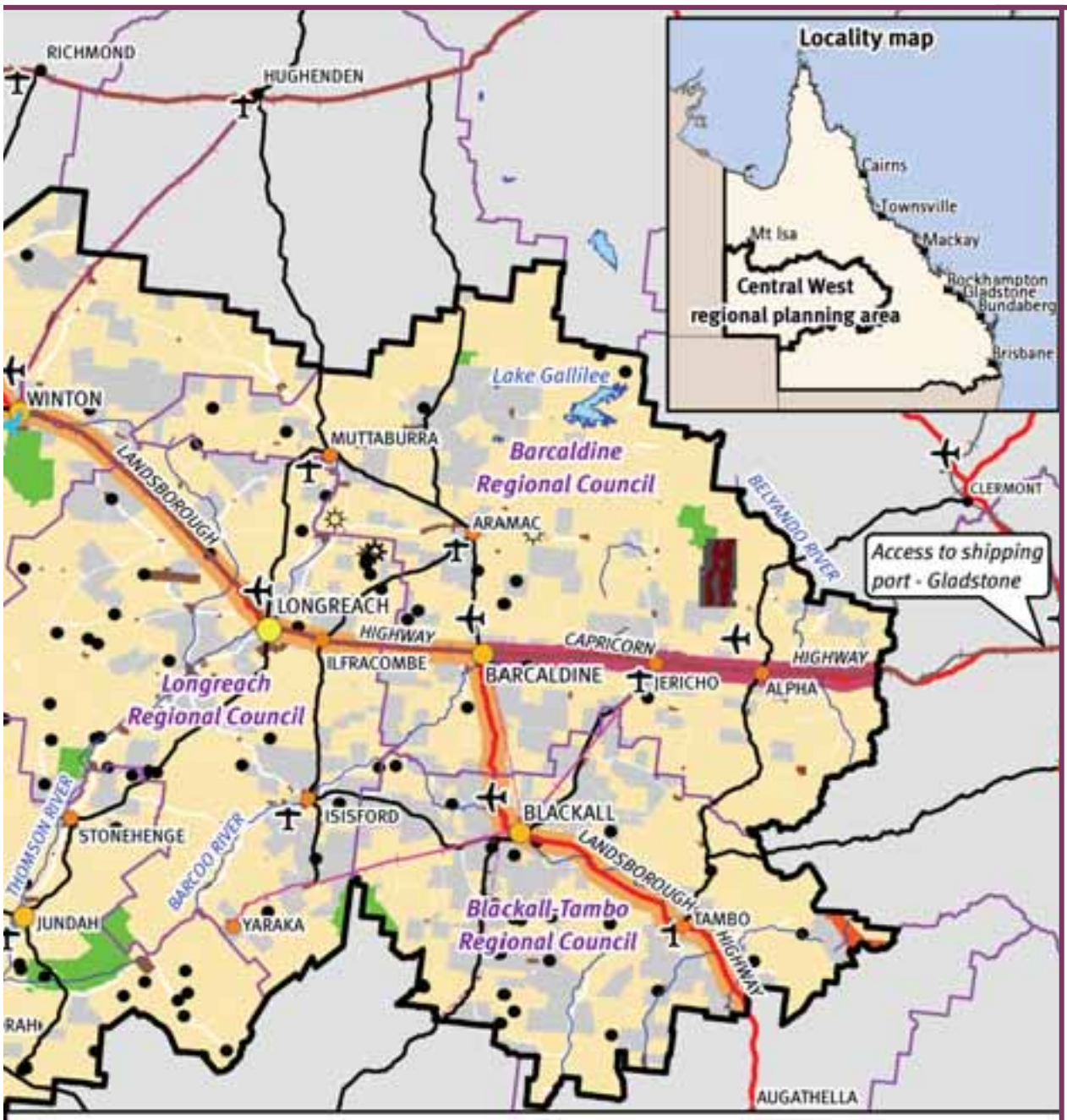
Map 3: Natural economic resources



Note: This map should be used in conjuction with the information on the inside front cover of this publication.



Key

Centres
- Major rural activity centre
- District rural activity centre
- Community activity centre
- Specialist activity centre

Railway
- Open
- Unused rail corridors

Airfields
- Commercial
- Minor

Roads
- Highway
- Major arterial

Tourist routes
- Capricorn Highway
- Matilda Way

Land tenure
- Freehold
- Leasehold
- Reserve
- Timber reserve
- National parks

Key resource area
- Transport route
- Resources

Natural resources
- Coal seam gas wells
- Petroleum wells
- Mining leases
- Petroleum leases
- Mineral resource outline
- Coal measures - indicated resources outline
- Exploration permits geothermal
- Mineral development licences
- Petroleum pipeline licences

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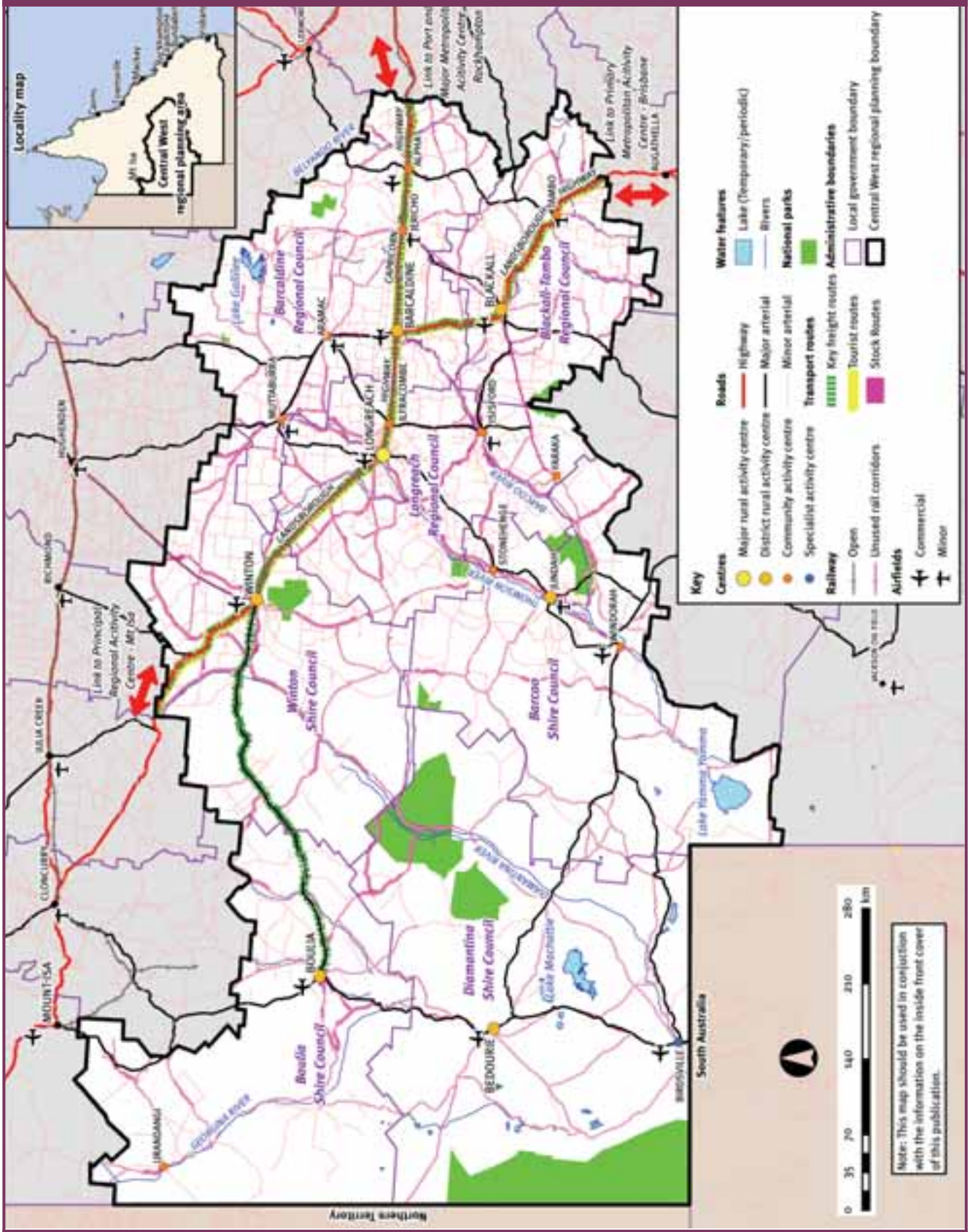
Map 4: Transport



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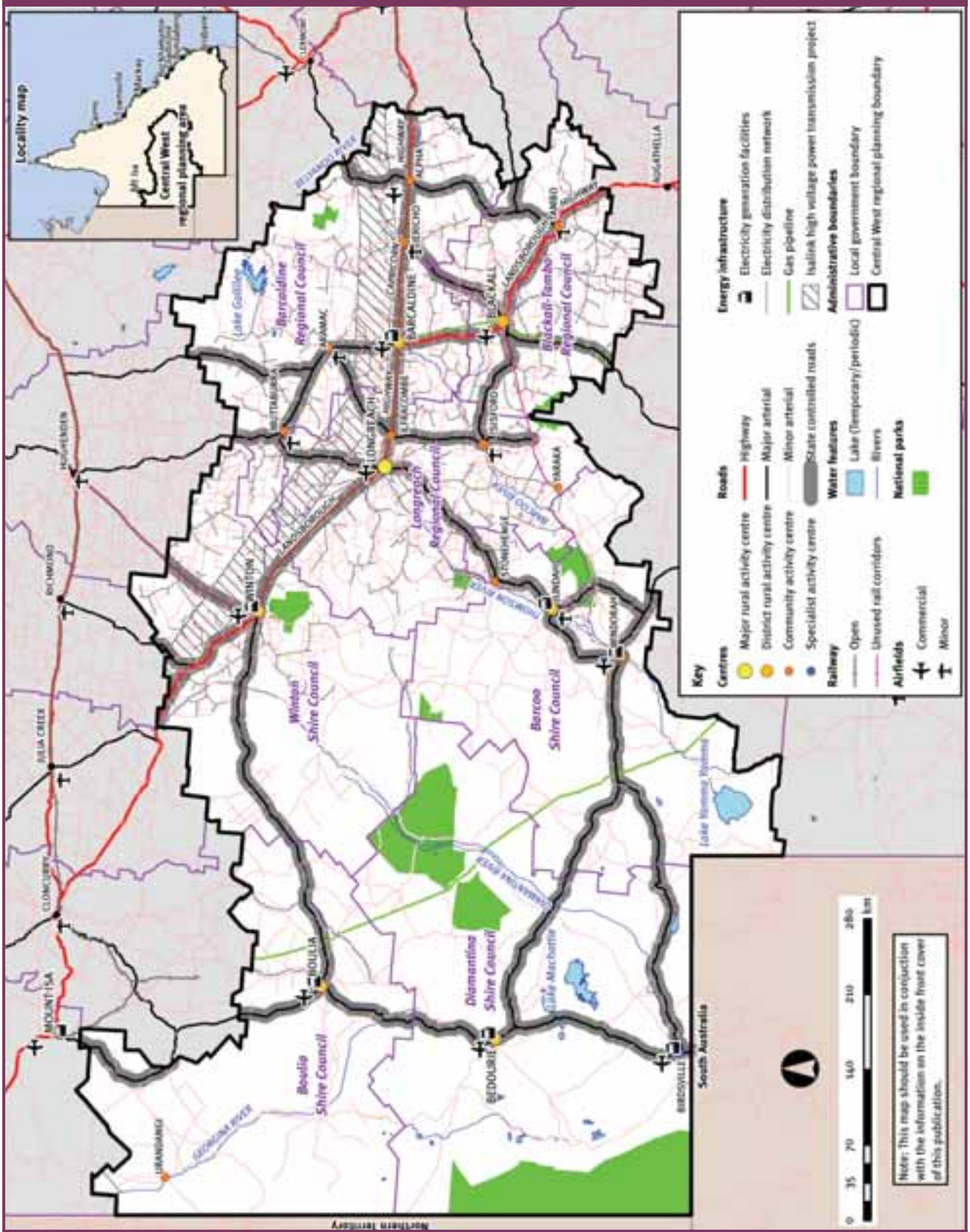
Map 5: Infrastructure



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Glossary

Agriculture: The production of food, fibre and timber, including grazing, cropping, horticulture and forestry.

Aligned strategies: Aligned strategies are statutory principles designed to achieve a desired regional outcome, generally through a collaborative and voluntary approach, and are aligned to other legislation, plans, processes and voluntary programs. They may be implemented by various stakeholders including local, state and federal government; non-government organisations such as community or natural resource management groups; and the private sector.

Biodiversity: The variety of all life forms including the different plants, animals and micro-organisms, the genes they contain and the ecosystems of which they form a part.

Bioregion: The primary level of land classification in Queensland based on regional geology and climate, as well as major biota.

Climate change: A change of climate attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere and is in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods.

Conservation: The protection and maintenance of nature while allowing for its ecologically sustainable use (section 9 of the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*).

Cultural heritage: A place or object that has aesthetic, architectural, historical, scientific, social or technological significance to the present, past or future generations.

Central West region: The seven local government areas within the Central West region—the councils of Barcaldine, Barcoo, Blackall-Tambo, Boulia, Diamantina, Longreach and Winton.

Desired regional outcome: A statement that addresses the desired regional growth for the life of the plan. Local government planning schemes must be consistent with the intent of the desired regional outcomes, objectives and policies.

Development: Carrying out building work, plumbing or drainage work; operational work; reconfiguring a lot; or making a material change of use to premises.

Ecological sustainability: A balance that integrates protection of ecological processes and natural systems at local, regional, state and wider levels; economic development; and maintenance of the cultural, economic, physical and social wellbeing of people and communities.

Ecosystem: A community of organisms interacting with one another and the environment in which they live.

Ecotourism: Nature-based tourism that involves education and interpretation of the natural environment and is managed to be ecologically sustainable.

Environmental offset: A mechanism to counterbalance unavoidable adverse environmental impacts of development by environmental gains, with the overall aim of achieving a net neutral or beneficial outcome.

Historical themes: Places or objects that have anthropological, archaeological, historical, scientific, spiritual, visual or sociological significance or value, including such significance or value under Aboriginal tradition or Torres Strait Islander custom.

Implementation action: An action that serves to implement part or parts of the regional plan.

Indigenous cultural heritage: Landscapes, places, objects, art and intangible aspects such as language, song and stories that hold significance for Indigenous peoples.

Indigenous Land Use Agreement: A voluntary agreement between a native title group and others about the use and management of land and waters.

Indigenous cultural heritage: Landscapes, places, objects, art and intangible aspects such as language, song and stories that hold significance for Indigenous people.

Landholder: A landowner, land manager, person or group of people with an interest in the planning area through special lease, mining claim, occupational licence, occupation permit, exploration permit, stock grazing permit, pastoral holding or permit to occupy, and trustees of land set aside for public purposes.

Land use policies: Policies that have a land use planning focus and can be delivered through a range of Integrated Planning Act planning tools for example, planning schemes, priority infrastructure plans, and the Integrated Development Assessment System.

Natural resources: soil, vegetation, plants, animals, minerals, air and water that are used for economic benefit and community wellbeing.

No net loss: Habitat losses are offset into areas with equal or higher biodiversity values.

Palaeotourism or fossil-based tourism provides experiences at several market levels. There are paleontological experiences and interpretation for the wider public including interpretive centre's, guided tours, self-discovery trails and exhibitions. Secondly there are niche market opportunities for providing specialised products such as participatory ecotourism and premium tours.

Pest species: Plant and animal species that have established in areas outside their naturally occurring distributions.

Planning Minister: The Minister administering section 2.5A of the *Integrated Planning Act 1997*.

Planning scheme: A planning scheme is an instrument made by a local government under division 3.8. See section 2.1.1 of the *Integrated Planning Act 1997*.

Precautionary principle: Where there are threats of serious or irreversible environmental damage, lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing measures to prevent environmental degradation (refer to the underlying principles in part E of the regional plan).

Population projection: A population prediction that is the most likely outcome over the 20-year time frame of the plan.

Glossary continued

Protected area: Protected areas including national parks, conservation parks, resources reserves, nature refuges, coordinated conservation areas, wilderness areas, world heritage management areas and international agreement areas, section 14 of the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*.

Regional activity centre: A centre or proposed centre identified in the Central West regional activity centres network. These centres support a concentration of activity, including higher density living, business, employment, research, education and other services.

Regional Coordination Committee: The committee established by the Planning Minister under section 2.5A.3 of the *Integrated Planning Act 1997* to advise the Queensland Government through the Planning Minister on the development and implementation of the regional plan.

Regional ecosystem: Vegetation communities that are consistently associated with a particular combination of geology, landform and soil.

Regional plan: The *Central West Regional Plan* developed in accordance with section 2.5A of the *Integrated Planning Act 1997* (the regional plan).

Regional Planning Advisory Committee: The committee established by the Planning Minister under section 2.5.2 of the *Integrated Planning Act 1997* to advise the Queensland Government through the Planning Minister on the development and implementation of the regional plan.

Residential development: Development for a residential purpose that is at a scale greater than a single dwelling on an existing lot.

Riparian: The banks of land next to a waterway or wetland that contribute to its ecological balance, preservation and continuation.

Scenic amenity: Landforms and seascapes creating the region's visual imagery including (but not limited to) mountain ranges, coastal escarpments, beaches, rivers, valleys, agricultural land, creeks, rainforests, wetlands, estuaries and islands.

Sensitive land uses: Residential areas, health, education and childcare facilities and areas of high ecological significance.

Solar-voltaic: These systems use cells to convert solar radiation into electricity. The photo-voltaic cell consists of one or two layers of a semi conducting material, usually silicon. When light shines on the cell, it creates an electric field across the layers, causing electricity to flow. The greater the intensity of the light, the greater the flow of electricity.

Traditional Owners: Members of an Indigenous group that has a particular connection with land under Indigenous tradition.

Urban purposes: Purposes for which land is used in cities and towns, including residential, industrial, sporting, recreation and commercial purposes, but not including environmental, conservation, rural, natural or wilderness area purposes.

Vision: The community's long-term aspirations for the region.

Water course: A river, creek, stream, watercourse or inlet of the sea.

Wetlands: Areas of land permanently or periodically inundated with static or fresh flowing water.

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- local governments
- state government
- Commonwealth Government.

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- Hon Paul Lucas MP (former chair), Deputy Premier and Minister for Health and former Minister for Infrastructure and Planning
- Cr Bruce Scott (Co-Chair) —Mayor, Barcoo Shire Council
- Cr Robert Chandler—Mayor, Barcaldine Regional Council
- Cr Jan Ross—Mayor, Blackall-Tambo Regional Council
- Cr Eric Britton—Mayor, Boulia Shire Council
- Cr Robert Dare—Mayor, Diamantina Shire Council
- Cr John Palmer—Mayor, Longreach Regional Council
- Cr Edward Warren—Mayor, Winton Shire Council
- Ms Tahna Jackson—Regional Manager, AgForce Queensland
- Ms Jill Koeneman—District Chief Executive Officer, Queensland Health
- Mr Eric Denham—Regional Manager, Department of Transport and Main Roads
- Mr David Arnold—Remote Area Planning and Development Board
- Mr Peter Douglas—Desert Channels Queensland
- Mrs Rowena Arthur—Executive Director, Department of Education and Training
- Mr Lew Markey—Central West Queensland Regional Managers' Coordination Network representative

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Queensland Government departments

- Department of the Premier and Cabinet
- Queensland Health
- Queensland Treasury
- Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation
- Department of Public Works
- Department of Environment and Resource Management
- Department of Education and Training
- Queensland Police
- Department of Community Safety
- Department of Transport and Main Roads
- Department of Infrastructure and Planning
- Department of Communities
- Department of Justice and Attorney-General

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