How Green Was My City Region: The relevance of past open space planning experiences to contemporary planning for the Brisbane metropolitan region

Darryl Low Choy
School of Environmental Planning
Griffith University
Email: d.lowchoy@griffith.edu.au

ABSTRACT

A region can be distinguished by the diversity of landscapes that make-up that region, its degree of liveability and the elements that contribute to its liveability. These positive attributes of open space within a region can only be realised through the coherent and integrated form of a regional landscape framework. There have been a number of attempts to achieve a consolidated landscape framework in the past for the Brisbane City metropolitan region as well as for the South East Queensland region. On all occasions these regional scale initiatives were in response to rapidly changing growth pressures but most met with limited success or failed. Hence, it would be informative to establish if the lessons from these past initiatives had any relevance for the recent SEQ Regional Planning initiatives of the Queensland State Government and the region's local governments.

This paper has reviewed the principal attempts to address regional landscape and open space initiatives for the City and region in the past. The history of these attempts strongly demonstrates that community engagement through collaborative planning is the only feasible landscape management paradigm capable of successfully addressing the urban growth challenges facing South East Queensland and safeguarding its regional landscape values in their entirety. It has also been clearly demonstrated that it will be imperative to relate and address the regional landscape elements and values in the holistic context of a landscape framework. Additionally, this framework should be supported by collaborative institutional mechanisms in order to ensure the coordinated implementation of the concepts, policies and proposals.

Whilst it appears that the new *SEQ Regional Plan 2005-2026* and its implementation processes may provide a foundation for this to occur it is still by no means sure if the recently conferred statutory nature of the new Regional Plan will result in different outcomes to previous planning endeavours and whether these outcomes can take advantage of the lessons from the past.

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary views hold that open space within a region is the custodian of a wide range of community values that contribute to the liveability of that region and sustain its regional communities. The open space that constitutes the regional landscape includes land and water assets displaying regional landscape values of high biodiversity, high scenic amenity, good quality agricultural land, sustainable nature based recreation opportunities and important cultural heritage of recognised community significance.

A region can be defined by its special qualities and by its environmental and landscape attributes - many unique to that region. It is these special landscape qualities that contribute significantly to a region's character and its 'sense of place' and distinguish it from other regions. To a large extent, these landscape qualities are dominated by the region's open space elements. They play a significant role in determining the quality of life that the region's residents enjoy. The cumulative effect of these influences on a regional community's quality of life (QoL) is to promote a notion of liveability, real or imagined, in the minds of the community. The influence of the landscape on a region's QoL and the relationship between regional open space and liveability will become increasingly important issues as communities seek to maintain their QoL in the face of rapid population growth and change.

However open space can only safeguard these community values and contribute to a region's QoL and liveability if it exists in some coherent and integrated form – a regional landscape framework (McHarg, 1992; Yaro & Hiss, 1996; Simonds, 1998; Calthorpe & Fulton, 2001; Randolph, 2004)

This paper explores the relevance of these principles to the ongoing implementation of policies associated with the recently released SEQ Regional Plan, its evolving notions of a regional landscape framework and the Plan's intentions to protect these regionally significant open spaces from future urbanisation. It draws on lessons from past attempts at establishing a regional open space system for Brisbane City and for the South East Queensland (SEQ) region and ascertains if they have relevance for the current regional planning initiative for SEQ. It seeks to understand the rationale behind these past proposals, the forces acting against them and why initiatives failed or were of limited success.

IMPORTANCE OF OPEN SPACE TO THE REGION

The Roles of Open Space in the Regional Landscape

Contemporary society places significant demands on the limited and dwindling open space that constitutes our regional landscape, particularly in regions experiencing rapid changes as a result of population growth and urbanisation. These demands can include: biodiversity protection, urban development, agricultural production, scenic amenity, use as a planning tool (eg urban buffers), protection of cultural values, contribution to lifestyles, residential use and outdoor recreation.

In examining the roles of the regional landscape, Low Choy (2004: 12), identified that regional landscape areas support urban metropolitan areas through the provision of a number of key functions and activities and ecosystem services , including:

- water catchments that safeguard urban water supplies;
- outdoor recreational 'playgrounds' for the urban population and tourists;
- infrastructure corridors that facilitate the movement of energy and water to the urban areas;
- natural resources that urban areas rely on for building and construction purposes;
- open space that provides scenic amenity and landscape frames that contribute to regional identity;
- farming lands that supply produce for urban populations; and
- rural residential locations.

All these functions and activities come together in a region and co-exist as working, protective and recreational landscapes. This highlight the importance for a healthy, stable and sustainable region to be composed of an integrated network of open space with integral connections between the region's urban areas and these regional landscape functions and areas.

Open Space Contributions to Regional Quality of Life and Liveability

The positive landscape attributes and values of regional open space make a significant contribution to defining regional identity and its unique sense of place. The uniqueness of a place is characterised by its degree of liveability, the elements that contribute to its liveability and the diversity of landscapes that make-up that region. One of the main contributing elements to liveability is the Quality of Life (QoL) enjoyed by the region's residents. A region's QoL can be significantly influenced by the quality of the regional open space, the values of its attributes and the functions that they perform.

Low Choy (2004: 13) has summarised this relationship between the regional open space and Liveability and QoL as "the community places value on landscape attributes such as scenery (or nature conservation or outdoor recreation opportunities) that are derived from the open space that constitutes the regional landscape. These values determine the QoL that residents enjoy which in turn contributes to the achievement of liveability objectives that the community seeks for the region".

A Landscape Framework

Contemporary planning for rapidly growing regions has attempted to safeguard a region's environmental assets through the incorporation of an established landscape (open space) framework that can support the urban areas and is not violated through inappropriate developments (Low Choy, 1994; Yaro and Hiss, 1996; Simonds, 1998; Leccese and McCormick, 2000; Heid, 2004). A landscape framework clearly has to embrace the previously noted values of open space and incorporate the full range of the key functions and activities that the regional landscape performs. Selman (2000: 108/109) argues that "landscape … (*is*) an important integrating framework for sustainable development … (*and that it*) must be integrated into the drivers of regional and national change rather than treated as a sectoral activity". This requires that the essential policy framework in which landscapes are managed should comprise liveability, biodiversity and prosperity policies and initiatives.

Some sections of the contemporary US literature refer to traditional open space systems and regional landscapes as "green infrastructure" (Yaro and Hiss, 1996; Eugster, 2000; Benedict and McMahon 2002; Williamson, 2003; Heid, 2004; Randolph, 2004). However, to Benedict and McMahon (2002: 8), "green infrastructure is a new term, but it is not a new idea". They explain that the concept has its origins in planning and conservations efforts of 150 years ago which involved "(1) linking parks and other green spaces for the benefit of people and (2) preserving and linking natural areas to benefit biodiversity and counter habitat fragmentation".

There has to be an institutional mechanism to bring a regional landscape framework into effect and for managing it through the implementation phase. Likewise there needs to be an institutional process for monitoring the outcomes and achievements that can lead to a learning process and eventually affect an adaptive management process. Simonds, (1998: 371) sums it up thus: "perhaps the most important task of regional planners is to define and help bring into being a spacious, interconnecting, and permanent open-space preserve as the framework for ongoing development".

SEQ - A REGION UNDER PRESSURE

Recent Growth Pains

During the last two decades, the South East Queensland (SEQ) region has experienced unprecedented growth making it the fastest growing metropolitan region in Australia. For example, during the ten year period (1991 to 2000), the region's population grew by 25% and the current projection has the region's 2001 population of 2.5m growing to 3.5m by 2021 – a further increase of 37% (Queensland Government and SEQROC, 2003a). The favourable perceptions of SEQs high QoL and liveability including its positive open space and landscape attributes have been a dominant "pull" migration factors that has attracted interstate migrants, the largest component of this growth.

The additional housing demands created by this population growth has largely been accommodated in greenfield developments in the form of a low density "urban tidal wave" moving outwards into the region from it's major urban centres. This form of urban development has resulted in a significant loss of open space with reported land clearances resulting in the loss of approximately 7,500 ha of bushland and agricultural land each year. This situation is further compounded by the projected population increases where it has been estimated that some 575,000 new dwellings will be required by 2026 (Queensland Government and SEQROC, 2005).

Significant pressures from this growth came to the fore in 1990 and since that time it has shown all of the hallmarks of a 'region under pressure' putting at risk the very essence of the region, its environmental and landscape attributes and its identity. However history shows that this was not a unique experience for this region and there were previous attempts to protect the City's and the region's unique character and open space. Brisbane City has faced these growth spurts previously, especially when external factors dominated, such as the national initiative to rebuild, rehouse and re-educate an entire nation at the end of World War 2.

The SEQ Regional Plan 2005-2026

The most recent regional planning response from the State and local governments to the continued population growth has been the release of the *SEQ Regional Plan 2005*-2026 in June 2005. Unlike previous regional planning initiatives, the new Regional Plan is a statutory instrument. It is the pre-eminent plan for the SEQ region and takes precedence over all other State and Local government planning instruments (Queensland Government and SEQROC, 2005). \One of the Plans principal initiatives has been the designation of a 'Regional Landscape and Rural Production Area' that accounts for 83% of the region. Its stated intent is to protect the regional landscape, rural production and other non-urban values from "encroachment by inappropriate development, particularly urban and rural residential development" (Queensland Government and SEQROC, 2005: 15).

The Plan has designated land displaying a range of values to be incorporated into the 'Regional Landscape and Rural Production' Area, including state or regional nature conservation significance; endangered or concerned regional ecosystems; national parks, conservation parks resource reserves or other conservation areas; koala conservation areas; good quality agricultural land and other productive rural areas; natural economic resources including extractive resources and forestry plantations; water catchments, water storages and groundwater resources; native forests; coastal wetlands; and land forming strategic and regionally significant inter-urban breaks (Queensland Government and SEQROC, 2005).

A range of principles and policies support the regional landscape's Desired Regional Outcome (DRO) which seeks to ensure that "key environmental, economic, social and cultural resources of the regional landscape are identified and secured to meet community needs and achieve ecological sustainability" (Queensland Government and SEQROC, 2005: 36). These policy areas include the 'Regional Landscape and Rural Production' Area; scenic amenity; landscape heritage; outdoor recreation; and regional open space. A number of selected significant policies cover proposals to:

- collaboratively define, plan and manage the Regional Landscape and Rural Production Area and a regional open space network;
- develop a regional landscape planning framework;
- develop rural precinct plans;
- promote the adoption of a common methodology for assessing scenic amenity; and
- develop an outdoor recreation strategy.

The SEQ Regional Planning process acknowledges a role for the Regional Landscape and Open Space Advisory Committee, with a broad base stakeholder membership, in the monitoring of the implementation of the Plan.

In the light of the provisions and proposals contained in this new plan, it will be informative to ascertain if these current initiatives to protect the regional landscape values of SEQ can take advantage of lessons from the past?

PAST OPEN SPACE PLANNING INITIATIVES

This section examines the background to, and achievements of, various past initiatives to protect and manage open space in the Brisbane metropolitan and South East Queensland region. It considers the genesis and development of the initiative, internal and external influences and the nature of the achieved outcomes, including their success or failure.

Early Influences and Initiatives

Pioneer city administrators and a number of influential overseas sources have played a significant role in establishing the original concepts for open space at city-metropolitan and regional scale in the Brisbane metropolitan region. Early in 1914, the Queensland Town Planning Association had been formed after the series of public lectures by Mr W.R. Davidge, an English Town Planner under the sponsorship of the Garden Cities and Town Planning Association of London. This Association assumed the role of a major protagonist for the Greater Brisbane concept - the amalgamation of twenty smaller local authorities in the Brisbane area.

The Second Australian Planning and Housing Conference was held in Brisbane in 1918. The Garden City concept featured amongst the various papers presented. It was claimed that this conference "had a tremendous and long lasting impact … (its) published proceedings were regarded as the Town Planning bible" Johnston, (1992: 4).

The City of Greater Brisbane's first mayor, William Jolly, acknowledged as part of his election platform, the need for the provision of adequate parks and public reserves – what he called 'breathing spaces for the city' (Greenwood and Laverty, 1959). Consequently, when the City of Greater Brisbane was created in 1925, making it Australia's largest local authorities by area, comprising some 1,220 square kilometres, important open space areas such as Mount Coot-tha, Simpson Range, Taylor's Range, Mount Gravatt, White's Hill, Eildon Hill and Bartley's Hill were acquired by the early city administration.

The new City of Greater Brisbane became the first Australian local authority to establish a Town Planning Department when it appointed W. A. Earle on 6th October 1925 to prepare a civic survey of the City which would eventually form the basis for a subsequent Town Plan.

William Earle, a qualified engineer, had studied garden city designs in England and on the continent prior to migrating to Australia in 1911, (Freestone, 1989). In July 1928, Earle submitted a plan to Council defining the Brisbane Metropolitan Area into residential, industrial and agricultural zones. Freestone (1989) notes that Earle's plan was characterised by agricultural belts surrounding the metropolis - a distinctive garden city trademark. Unfortunately the plan was conceived in the absence of a civic survey or the means for implementation and was considered conceptual. It was developed at a time when the prime concern of the city administrators was on the planning for the sudden surge in the popularity of the motor vehicle, the improvement of the road network and communications across the city, especially the cross river links. Unfortunately by 1931, during the height of the depression, the town plan was shelved, the civic survey was discontinued and Earle's Town Planning Department had been disbanded.

W. A. Earle, Brisbane's first City Planner, can be credited with embedding the original ideas for a green belt into the formal planning process of the City of Brisbane – a legacy that would persist to this very day.

The 1944 Green Belt Proposal

Earle's original proposal was developed by R. A. McInnis who was appointed city planner in 1935. He completed a civic survey of the city in 1939 but the commencement of the Second World War temporarily halted its further development. In March 1944, a draft town planning scheme prepared by McInnis was placed on public exhibition. The zoning ordinances of this scheme included a one mile (1.6 km) deep Green Belt around the peripheries of the city - the first for a metropolitan town planning scheme in Australia. McInnis had accepted Earle's metropolitan structural divisions but reproposed part of his rural zone to function as a green belt. This plan embraced a number of planning initiatives consistent with town planning practice of that time from Europe, North America and interstate (Low Choy and Gleeson, 1998).

McInnis (1944) had convinced the Council of the need for planning controls on anticipated post-war growth which if unchecked would see "(*the loss of*) good farming land(,) low and unsuitable for residence is sacrificed, open spaces disappear, and costly mains providing the public utilities have to be enlarged or duplicated". He proposed that "the only possible solution of these problems is to limit the spread of the city, as a homogeneous mass, and to guide further growth into separate satellite towns and suburbs, divided from the main city and each other by continuous open spaces known as Green Belts". McInnis (1944) argued that Brisbane had "a unique opportunity … to obtain a Green Belt round the city … with a minimum of expenditure… (*compared to*) London (*which*) is spending millions in an attempt to obtain".

Unfortunately the plan ran headlong into opposition from strong interest groups. Significant opposition came from the city's architects, who in a public campaign in the newspapers, claimed that "the growth of the city should be controlled, but not confined to the inner areas, the green areas being more in the form of tongues of parklands radiating from the centre of the city, thus allowing indefinite building expansion with ample breathing space surrounding each neighbourhood" (*Courier Mail*, 17 May 1944).

F. G. Costello followed McInnis in the city planner's appointment from 1945 and took up the challenges with gusto. A revealing insight into the rationale and vision for this Green Belt comes from a number of early documents of Costello, (1950 a & b). He defined the Green Belt as a tract of land, part of the rural zone and immediately adjacent to the urban areas, and forming a permanent belt of open space around the perimeter of the suburban areas. Its prime purpose was "to safeguard the urban areas from further outward sprawl, and to ensure an area of open country in reasonably close proximity to the suburban areas" Costello (1950a: 7). This 16,800 ha Green Belt was to comprise publicly owned National Parks and Council controlled parks, aerodromes, military training ranges as well as privately owned recreation areas, (eg golf courses). It comprised: 13.5% Council controlled parkland; 3.7% Crown land; 4.6% private permanent open space; and 78.2% other private land.

Costello highlighted the universal use of the green belt concept throughout the world, citing the early works of Sir Raymond Unwin, who first introduce this term, and the work of Abercrombie and Forshaw in their County of London Plan (Costello, 1950b). However he went further than McInnis' proposal by incorporating private and public lands. Despite little opposition to a rural designation on the same land, under Earle's proposal, public opposition for Costello's green belt was feverish. Groups such as the 'anti green belt' East Brisbane, criticised the Lord Major for supporting the proposal arguing "… the Council suggests the individual does not count … the minority would suffer unduly for this principle … In a great number of cases they (the Council) will force people off their properties and obtain the land for nothing in lieu of rates" (*Courier Mail*, 2nd May 1950). Costello, (1950b: 3), was uncompromising stating "the Green Belt must be regarded as one of the most fixed elements of the City plan. Any development of the City beyond the main

urban area must be made in the form of outer urban communities beyond the Green Belt. Under no consideration should the Green Belt be altered to accommodate such development".

The city planners reacted to the public concerns by calling on their interstate counterparts for support. The Adelaide plan and implementation notes were supplied as were extracts and ideas of the Draft County of Cumberland Plans from New South Wales. Abercrombie himself visited Brisbane while on a lecture tour to discuss the concept. However, despite local and international contributions of expertise and support, the plan was not saved in the short term.

Unfortunately, a post-war climate of housing led growth, national, state and local political changes and legalistic implementation problems in transferring the 1944 proposals into law led to watered-down versions of the earlier grander vision in subsequent draft plans. Whilst a Green Belt was retained and incorporated into the Council's 1952 draft plan, it was not finalised largely due to the continued controversial nature of the Green Belt concept and the servicing aspects related to the satellite settlements beyond the Green Belt. The State government showed no support to the Council for these planning endeavours (Low Choy and Gleeson, 1998).

City of Brisbane's First Town Plan

Brisbane City Council did not formally adopt its first statutory town planning scheme until December 1965, some 41 years after the original declaration of the city and 20 years after the abortive 1944 draft scheme. Not surprisingly, the Green Belt proposal had now disappeared entirely from the city plan. Low Choy and Gleeson (1998) have noted that the preliminary 1961 planning report had identified the strategic objectives for the plan as:

- the provision of an overall plan for orderly development;
- the safeguarding of the proper use and development of land allowing for a proper relationship between various uses;
- the recognition of a population level which is consistent with the economic circumstances of the time; and
- a suitable road and communication system.

Clearly, the focus had shifted entirely from the protection of the open space assets including the valuable farm lands and conservation areas, their retention in an integrated framework and from the use of open space as a framing and guiding tool to shape the form of the city and new urban developments.

Wilber Smith

In the same year as Brisbane's First Town Plan was gazetted, Wilber Smith and Associates, transportation engineering consultants from the USA, produced their Brisbane transportation study report for the Queensland Main Roads Department and the Brisbane City Council (Wilber Smith, 1965). In 1970, Wilber Smith and Associates finalised a second study report, this time into the public transport needs of the Brisbane region up to the Year 2000.

Whilst these studies were focussed on future transport matters for Brisbane City and its metropolitan region, the consultants were required to envision the future – some twenty years in the case of the 1965 study and thirty years in the case of the latter study. In order to complete these exercises, and in the absence of any strategic city-wide or regional scale plan that could provide guidance on future land use patterns, the consultants were forced to develop their own plans of a future metropolitan Brisbane region. Of interest to this paper is the designation of two land use categories that were included in both studies. In the case of the 1965 study, it included an 'open space' category (public reserves, parks and recreation areas) and a 'non-urban' category (land not subjected to urban development in which rural pursuits are carried out) (Wilber Smith, 1965: 118). The 2000 anticipated land use map demarcated a 'parks, forest and water resources' classification

(including public and private lands) and a 'non-urban' classification which represented "land used for agriculture purposes ,occupied by scattered isolated homes or lying idle … (*including*) a substantial amount of land which is not feasible for development" (Wilber Smith, 1970: 40).

A comparison between the 1960 and 1981 plans for the whole city clearly shows an expected loss of open space areas and a reduction overall of open space within the existing built-up areas, However, the consultants claimed that open space will increase during this time frame, from representing 5.1% of the city in 1960 to 7.1% in 1981. They expected that this 42% expansion of open space "…will occur in districts where new communities are being developed" (Wilber Smith, 1965: 119). By contrast, the non-urban areas declined by 25% but still represented some 49% of the city in 1981. It was mainly distributed around the peripheries of the built up area and reinforced the concentric form of the city. The 1970 study's map of Brisbane and region for the Year 2000 reinforced this spatial image of a central city core radiating outwards particularly in three strong corridors (north, south and west).

Whilst there was not a continuous belt of open space around the city edge, it would have served to limit the outwards growth of the city core and provide shape and identity to separate urban communities within the metropolitan region beyond the Brisbane City boundary. The plan also illustrated corridors of open space, mainly along major waterways which tended to break up the continuous urban areas. However there was no sense of an integrated system of open space and most areas of open space existed in isolation in an unconnected landscape. Whilst reflecting attitudes of that time, these maps were 'academic' exercise developed for the purposes of generating trip origin data for transport engineers and they held no official status.

Moreton Region Growth Strategy Investigations

In 1976 the Queensland State government and the Commonwealth government's Cities Commission produces a series of joint regional planning reports for growth management for the Moreton Region (now SEQ). One of the principal themes and reports addressed the region's non-urban area. Task 5 examined the non-urban land use and physical constraints "expected to impose limitations on future urban development" (COG & Cities Commission, 1976a: 3 & 1976b).

The assessment of regional issues did not directly identify the regional landscape, open space or any issues associated to these themes. It did however devote considerable effort to outdoor recreation issues including wilderness and nature based recreation, potential impacts and access requirements. In fact it included an exhaustive inventory of outdoor recreation sites in the region (COG & Cities Commission, 1976d).

The investigation's non-urban strategy included objectives to:

- safeguard water resources;
- minimise intrusion of urban development into areas highly suited for agriculture, forestry and other primary industries;
- provide adequate and accessible regional scale recreational areas in the form of parks, State Forests and similar tracts so as to allow for all types of active an passive recreation;
- minimise disruption of flora and fauna communities by development and preserve areas with rare habitats or species from incompatible land use or human intrusion;
- encourage and plan for urban and non-urban uses in locations with suitable slope and soil characteristics; and
- prevent sterilisation or alienation of workable deposits of minerals, extractive materials or other natural resources (COG & Cities Commission, 1976a).

The principal components of the non-urban strategy were identified as water resources; rural production areas; outdoor recreation; conservation areas; and minerals and extractive materials.

Consideration and policies for open space and the broader concept of a regional landscape were totally absent. In fact the only reference to open space in all ten report volumes appears to be restricted to a description of the future form of urbanisation in the region when it was stated that "the metropolitan sub-regional centres are to be clearly defined and articulated by the distribution of open space which wraps around them and separates them from the metropolitan core" (COG & Cities Commission, 1976c: 6.2). However, no where is the open space mapped. Interestingly the study did "not aim to produce a master plan, nor to illustrate an end-state which can be adopted and developed over the next generation. It attempts, instead, to arrive at a preferred configuration suitable for adoption as a broad framework or strategic plan for future action" (COG & Cities Commission, 1976d: 1.2). However, strategic plans were not introduced for local government until 1980, hence there was a hiatus in the follow-on cascading planning process to the statutory level of planning at the local government level.

In the end, the State government did not endorse the outcomes from this investigation. However, it is interesting to speculate if this unofficial study and its strategy did have any influence on subsequent developments in the region.

1975 Brisbane Town Plan

This initiative represented the City's first formal structure plan. It was undertaken in response to the Moreton Region Growth Strategy Investigations which the Council basically endorsed (BCC, 1976). The plan sought to promote consolidation, redevelopment and repopulation of inner city areas and the development of regional business centres in the outer suburbs. One of the Structure Plan's seven principal concepts proposed a "comprehensive metropolitan open space system" (BCC, 1976: 45). The concept embraced the broad functions of open space such as visual amenity, environmental diversity and outdoor recreation.

It was about this time in Brisbane's strategic planning history that planners attempted to reintroduce the planning concept and mechanisms of a "Non Urban" (buffer?) zone designation to control spontaneous outwards growth and sprawl and to provide some structural form and identity to the City. The spatial representation of the metropolitan scale open space bore a close resemblance to that portrayed in the 1970 Wilber Smith plan of Brisbane 2000. The metropolitan open space system concept was to be implemented through "encouragement and facilitating:

- provision of a peripheral buffer area to retain the City's identity, to contain urban sprawl and to provide breathing space for the City;
- preservation of the character of other significant physical features such as Mt Coot-tha and Mt Gravatt;
- implementation of open space schemes along suburban watercourses such as Bulimba Creek;
- provision of playing fields, parks, rests areas, walking trails, picnic and barbeque facilities and children's adventure play equipment" (BCC, 1976: 46).

More recent planning initiatives such as the "Brisbane 2011 Plan" demonstrate attempts by contemporary administrations to reassemble a metropolitan-scale Open Space System for the City. However, Brisbane City can't go it alone. Minnery and Low Choy (2005) have noted that all of the Brisbane City initiatives, including the 1944 draft Brisbane Plan, have clearly demonstrated that even a local authority of the scale of the Brisbane City Council could not undertake regional planning on its own. Regional planning is an inter-governmental activity. It involves both State and local governments.

SEQ 2001 and the ROSS

The significant pressures from the previously noted unprecedented and rapid population growth of the late 1980-early 1990s led the State government to commission a growth management process -

the SEQ 2001 Regional Framework for Growth Management (RFGM). One of its major initiatives was the Regional Open Space System (ROSS). It was also a response to a number of serious deficiencies and shortcomings in the regional planning and management arrangements for regional open space and outdoor recreation issues (RPAG, 1993; Low Choy, 1994). Of particular concern was the fact that:

- the SEQ region was the only metropolitan region in Australia that did not have an integrated and coordinated regional open space system, nor a strategy of the management for its open space assets;
- the responsibilities for the management of open space and outdoor recreation were ill-defined, diffused and spanned across a number of state government agencies and between local government;
- there was no central focus and point of reference for strategic policy development, monitoring and championing of the open space and outdoor recreation causes within government and in the wider community;
- there was an immature understanding and lack of consensus on the role and functions of regional open space, especially how it could compliment and be integrated into other areas of regional management;
- open space at the regional level was not being employed as a positive growth management tool.

The ROSS was an attempt to address these deficiencies as well as establish a means to provide the region with a workable open space solution. To do this it had to work within the existing land tenure and ownership pattern, the existing legislative framework, and the existing institutional and administrative arrangements. It also had to attempt to satisfy the requirements of a diverse range of stakeholder interests, or at the very least, achieve consensus on a way ahead for the provision and management of regional open space and outdoor recreation opportunities (Low Choy, 1994).

Under the ROSS program, regional open space was acknowledged as serving the principal functions of recreation, conservation, regional framework, landscape quality and economic production. Its major proposals and recommendations were framed under the overarching principle:

> "The advanced recognition and provision of an accessible strategic open space network would provide recreational, ecological, cultural, social and economic benefits that would contribute to the healthy functioning of the region and its urban communities. Such a network would have regional and metropolitan significance for public use, outdoor recreation, conservation and landscape setting. The open space system represents the greatest single tourist and recreation asset of the region" (RPAG, 1993: 41)

The ROSS was to comprise:

- Regional and Sub-regional Frames – physical features that framed and gave definition to the region and its sub-regions;
- Core Areas – areas of the public estate (eg national parks) that contributed to the functions of open space due to their conservation, recreation, amenity or production values;
- Linkages and Corridors – terrestrial and aquatic links between the core areas recognised for their conservation, recreation, amenity or production values; and
- Resource Production Areas – farmland and commercial forests.

Although the SEQ2001 working group that oversaw the development of the ROSS and its associated policies comprised a broad based membership including rural interests, the attempts to implement the ROSS with its associated $35m (including a $4million pa land acquisition program) funding commitment from the State coffers, ran headlong into severe opposition from rural interests. While the ROSS was based upon broad strategic principles and started with well-intentioned objectives, it lacked the necessary follow-on detailed rigor of a thorough regional

planning process to adequately define the specific aspects of the proposed regional open space system. The ROSS program that was implemented was seen as being focused too heavily upon an ambitious program of purchasing open space lands and well before the critical open space land parcels were identified. Consequently, rural concerns and suspicions led to a concerted political campaign to halt the program. Eventually the ROSS initiative was derailed by conflicts, failure to fully consult with stakeholders and finally by the publication of a map showing private rural lands as being within the region's open space system.

In 1996, the program was halted for a State Government review in conjunction with the South East Queensland Regional Organisation of Councils (SEQROC). Despite the expectations of many, the review strongly recommended implementation of an 'equitable' program to identify and protect the regionally significant open space in SEQ. The 'equitable' approach was to ensure that open space policies did not unfairly impact on rural landholders while developing mechanisms that would reconcile opportunities and responsibilities flowing from the growth of the region (Low Choy & MacDonald, 2002).

The Regional Landscape Strategy

In mid 1997 SEQROC and the SEQ Regional Coordination Committee endorsed the recommendations of the Review Committee to establish a new open space program together with a stakeholder based advisory committee. Cabinet accepted the renamed initiative, the Regional Landscape Strategy (RLS), and approved its place in the 1998 version of the Regional Framework for Growth Management.

The RLS was envisioned as "an accessible, renowned network of parks, reserves, corridor, scenic landscapes, and other open space that are integrated with the pattern of settlement; generous to future generations; based on respect for traditional, cultural and historical links; managed sustainably in partnership with local government, community and industry; protecting the rural character and farming tradition; safeguarding regional bushland; and improving the livability of the region" (RLSAC, 2002: 6). It was to include "regionally significant open space that is contained within public land including national parks, state forests, state reserves and major Local Government reserves; private lands with the agreement of the land owner; land acquired for regional landscape purposes; and land appropriately designated in Local Government planning schemes" (RLSAC, 2002: 3).

In essence, the RLS was portrayed as a *philosophy*, a *product* and a *process* that served the three main objectives of conservation, outdoor recreation provision and scenic amenity protection. It functioned as a coordinating mechanism and a de facto lead agency for regional open space and outdoor recreation in the region (Queensland Government and SEQROC, 2003b).

The principal foci for the Regional Landscape Strategy (RLS) initiative became:

- Linkages established between stakeholders and managers of the regional landscape and the forging of partnerships for research, policy development and management related to the regional landscape of SEQ;
- Regional Landscape Strategy Advisory Committee (RLSAC) which provided advise to the Minister on issues of public interest in the implementation of the Regional Landscape Strategy in order to ensure the objective of the Strategy was being achieved;
- methods and approaches to encourage improved management of the regional landscape, including the development of a Land Trust and exercising a very minor land acquisition capability;
- a Communication & Promotion Strategy for the RLS and its associated initiatives;
- management of former ROSS acquired properties as trial regional parks; and
- the development of a RLS framework (Low Choy & MacDonald, 2002).

The SEQ2021 performance monitoring exercise undertaken in 2001 failed to reach a conclusion on the performance of the RLS due to insufficient quantitative monitoring data. It recommended that the program should be refocused onto the development of a series of regional trails and regional parks (similar to the Brisbane Forest Park) in accessible locations to the region's growing population concentrations (Queensland Government & SEQROC, 2002).

The newly elected third term Labor government came to power in early 2004 with an election commitment to establish a central agency to plan and manage the growth of the SEQ region. Consequently, the establishment of the new Office of Urban Management (OUM) and the new planning processes led to the development of the SEQ Regional Plan in June 2005. The RLS initiative was taken up in that process and it led to the recognition of the 'Regional Landscape and Rural Production' area in the new statutory plan (Queensland Government & SEQROC, 2005).

LESSONS LEARNT

This section summarises the various lessons learnt from past open space and regional landscape planning initiatives undertaken for the City of Brisbane and the SEQ region. They include the abortive Brisbane City's 1944 Green Belt Plan and other past initiatives and include those recognised by Low Choy and Gleeson (1998). The principal lessons of relevance include:

- The concept of a "green belt" as a planning mechanism was too technical and consequently too 'controversial' for the time, despite widespread support for the garden cities movement overseas. It required politicians to have an intimate understanding of the proposal in order to defend it.
- Planners should be prepared to spend a considerable amount of time and effort to explain the concept to the principal stakeholders and the public at large. This will involve a range of approaches.
- New or radical planning initiatives require total political support as well as the support of industry and the business community. The media should be engaged and managed to produce positive outcomes.
- Earle's original zoning plan's designation of 'rural' land drew little objection. The original green belt was to occupy the first mile of Earle's rural zone adjacent to the city. Although not wildly different from the rural zone in terms of preferred uses, the green belt drew huge opposition suggesting some psychological difficulties with the term. This support for 'rural' rather than 'green' designations has been part of the subsequent planning environment in SEQ eg. difficulties in implementing the ROSS, especially on private land compared to the broad support for the protection of agricultural land. This trend continues today ie support for agricultural lands not 'green' lands.
- The general vision, some objectives and principles of the original 1944 Green Belt Plan are still being sought in planning documents today. This legacy has distinct lessons some 60 years later and highlights some potential failings in the Queensland planning system including:
    - ♦ innovative processes and structures are needed to overcome the inherent weaknesses of many Queensland planning and management arrangements including a lack of vertical and horizontal integration between state and local governments;
    - ♦ innovative processes are required to address the difficulties in transferring planning concepts into planning outcome which cause implementation difficulties and delays in the release, or a lack, of planning guidance;
    - ♦ new major planning concept requires political support from the outset; and
    - ♦ the general public are largely ignorant of planning matters and require a concerted campaign to improve their awareness and understanding.

In a technical sense, Fletcher (1977) has argued that the 1944 draft plan's attempt to introduce the green belt concept as part of its zoning ordinances was highly problematic. He argued that in reality

it "…only constituted a series of policy statements related to the Council's own activities in retaining land it already owned and acquiring land already subdivided into small allotments and to Council's attitude towards future amendments to the proposed planning scheme to allow extension of the defined urban area. None of these were capable of being written into the Zoning Ordinances … there was, in reality, nothing in the exhibited ordinances or on the face of the planning scheme maps to give it legal force or effect" (Fletcher, 1977, Ch 3).

Fletcher (1977) has concluded that although the planning functions have remained with a single authority since the inception of the City of Greater Brisbane in 1926, that "… it would not be unreasonable to expect, other things being equal, that some elements of order and continuity could have emerged over that time and that a continuous process of evolution of thought and practice might have been discernible". He notes that "other things were not equal … (and) the most basic reasons have, for much of the period under review, been the results of external (non planning) influences" (Fletcher, 1977, Ch 11).

These mistakes were unfortunately repeated in later initiatives. The ROSS initiative was derailed by stakeholder conflicts, failure to fully consult with stakeholders and finally by the publication of a conceptual map showing private rural lands as being within the region's open space system. Clearly communication of ideas and proposals is a crucial and necessary precursor of successful implementation. However, whilst maps can aid in this communication process, caution must be exercise in the use of conceptual maps where too much reliance is placed on the public, who may not have the necessary map interpretation skills, to comprehend the conceptual messages being portrayed. This is particularly the case where private property rights might be considered to be at stake, as demonstrated in the case of the ROSS implementation experience.

There is strong evidence from the 1928 Earle plan, the 1944 Green Belt proposal and the 1993 ROSS experiences that the public and ill-informed decision makers have great difficulty in comprehending new planning concepts and conceptual maps. Consequently they will go on the defensive and seek to have the conceptual proposals disendorsed and removed from the planning agenda. It is therefore crucial to move from conceptual proposals to specific planning proposals supported by the relevant guidance as quickly as possible, particularly where private interests are involved.

Low Choy & MacDonald (2002) reviewed the RLS towards the end of that program and identified the following principal lessons:

Stakeholder Trust: stakeholder expectations need to be cooperatively managed and nurtured to build sustainable community support for the regional management of their landscapes.
Long Timeframes: the RLS experience demonstrated that management changes involving the regional landscape are long-term and well beyond the conventional planning approaches, political time horizons and community perceptions of landscape management. This requires a strategic and an adaptable management approach.
Diversity: open space land has a diverse range of multiple use opportunities, (including water production, separation of urban areas, biodiversity, outdoor recreation and flood mitigation) that result in range of multiple stakeholders, each with a varying degree of representation. Cooperative planning undertakings need to acknowledge this diverse range of stakeholder interests.
Complexity: many of the benefits of landscape protection and management are external to the individual landholder, do not have a market price and are managed, if at all, through legislation and planning schemes by agencies with differing clients and agendas.
Measuring Benefits: given the diverse range of landscape users, and the extended time horizons needed to test sustainability, it is not surprising to find that the benefits of the landscape have yet to be assessed in a comprehensive manner. There are many other values such as outdoor recreation

and cultural heritage, as well as ecosystem services, which need to be adequately accounted for in a holistic and integrated manner.

Partnership and Collaboration: The RLSAC became the forum for key stakeholders to be involved in the planning and policy development for the protection of the regions open space. The Committee enjoyed strong local government and community support through its broad based membership which included state agencies, infrastructure agencies, local government, industry, community groups. The Committee built partnerships in non-threatening contexts and later extended their efforts to regional projects, e.g. development of local government guidelines for protection of regional landscape values.

Coordination: without a legislative basis, the RLS was dependent on the voluntary involvement and contribution of those who managed and used the landscape. The problems of fragmentation and ineffectual isolated activity needed to be harnessed into a coordinated effort and aligned to the collaborative agreed objectives for the RLS. The RLSAC played a critical role in identifying opportunities and leading the processes for coordination and cooperation.

Funding: this became a constant challenge as the responsibility for components of the RLS rested with a number of State agencies as well as local governments. Because it lacked a mature whole-of-government standing, the RLS was not easily accommodated in the State budgetary processes.

Beyond Statutory Planning: it was acknowledged that statutory planning schemes could only address a limited number of the desired outcomes for the RLS. The planning approach had to be supplemented by non-statutory initiatives such as incentives, facilitated by expert advice and supported by community activism.

The RLS embraced an open participatory planning and management approach at the regional level, within a series of collaborative working arrangements involving partnerships with the main stakeholder groups relevant to regional open space and outdoor recreation. These stakeholders ranged from farming organisations, conservation groups, indigenous groups, outdoor recreation groups, tourism interests, local government, state agencies and professional interests.

These initiatives of regional community engagement through collaborative planning had the effect of promoting regional identity and contributing to the generation of social capital that strengthens regional communities.

CHALLENGES FOR THE NEW APPROACH

There is an emergent perception that the recent introduction of a statutory plan will address all of the illusive implementation issues of previous initiatives - regional landscape and open space matters included. This, as history proves, is far from the case. Full community engagement with, ownership of, and commitment to, any new initiative will be crucial to its successful achievement, particularly in a sustainable sense in the long term. This can only be achieved through a voluntary collaborative process of community participation in the development and implementation of the initiative. As a new initiative, it will require a champion supported by a long term awareness raising and communication process. Communication of the regional landscape concepts and initiatives to the general community (particularly freehold landowners) must be kept simple and free from technical jargon. The initiative requires a comprehensive communication and implementation strategy. This should ensure that negative non-planning influences are minimised and managed and that they do not arise to distract and sabotage the main regional landscape agenda.

Particularly in the light of the history of past initiatives, it is strongly argued that community engagement through collaborative planning is the only feasible landscape management paradigm capable of successfully addressing the urban growth challenges facing South East Queensland and safeguarding the regional landscape values in their entirety. The new *SEQ Regional Plan 2005-2026* and its implementation processes provide a foundation for this to occur.

It will be imperative to see and relate the regional landscape as a whole system – a landscape framework. This framework will need to be supported by collaborative institutional mechanisms in order to ensure the coordinated implementation of the concepts, policies and proposals. A major consideration relates to whether the recently conferred statutory nature of the new Regional Plan will result in different outcomes to previous planning endeavours and whether these outcomes have any significant bearing on local authority planning for open space.

The implementation of this statutory plan needs to be cognisant of the rich past history of open space and regional landscape planning in the region. In the years ahead we may ask: **how green was my city region? The relevance of past open space planning experiences to contemporary planning for the Brisbane metropolitan region** will go a long way to explain.

REFERENCES

Benedict, M.A. and McMahon, E.T. (2002) *Green Infrastructure: Smart Conservation for the 21st Century*, The Conservation Fund, Washington DC.

Brisbane City Council (BCC) (1976) *Statement of Intent: The Strategic Plan*, Part A, Brisbane City Council, Brisbane.

Calthorpe, P. and Fulton, W. (2001) *The Regional City: Planning for the end of sprawl*, Island Press, Washington DC.

Coordinator-General's Department (COG) and Cities Commission (1976a) *Moreton Region Growth Strategy*, Moreton Region Growth Strategy Investigations.

Coordinator-General's Department (COG) and Cities Commission (1976b) *Non Urban Land Use and Physical Constraints*, Task 5, Moreton Region Growth Strategy Investigations.

Coordinator-General's Department (COG) and Cities Commission (1976c) *Concept Generation and Evaluation*, Task 9, Moreton Region Growth Strategy Investigations.

Coordinator-General's Department (COG) and Cities Commission (1976d) *Regional Issues*, Task 8, Moreton Region Growth Strategy Investigations.

Costello, F.G. (1950a) *The City of Brisbane Green Belt Plan 1950*, unpublished manuscript, 10th August, 1950, 9p.

Costello, F.G. (1950b) 'The City of Brisbane Green Belt Plan 1950', in *Bulletin of the Town and Country Planning Institute*, 2(9), September, 1950, pp 1-4.

Eugster, G. (2000) 'Seven Principles of Green Infrastructure', Abstract for 2000 APA National Planning Conference, http://www.asu.edu/caed/proceedings00/EUGSTER/eugster.htm (site visited 20 May 2005).

Fletcher, P.G. (1977) *The Evolution of Brisbane's Town Plan 1926-1976*, unpublished dissertation for Diploma of Urban and Regional Planning, Queensland Institute of Technology, Brisbane.

Freestone, R. (1989) *Model Communities - The Garden City Movement in Australia*, Nelson.

Greenwood, G. and Laverty, J. (1959) *Brisbane 1859-1959: A History of Local Government*, The Council of the City of Brisbane.

Heid, J. (2004) *Greenfield Development Without Sprawl: The Role of Planned Communities*, ULI Working Paper on Land Use Policy and Practice, Urban Land Institute, Washington DC.

Johnston, B. (1992) *Johnston's Chronology-Brisbane Town Plan*, unpublished Development of Planning report, Brisbane City Council.

Leccese, M. and McCormick, K. (eds) (2000) *Charter of the New Urbanism*, McGraw Hill, New York.

Low Choy, D.C. (1994) 'How Green is My Region: Towards a regional open space system for South East Queensland', in *Queensland Economic Forecasts and Business Review*, 3(2), Sept 1994, QUT & ACSM, pp71-85.

Low Choy, D.C. and Gleeson, J. (1998) 'A Green Belt Too Far: *The Abortive Green Belt Proposals of the 1944 Brisbane Draft Town Plan*' paper presented to 8th International Planning History Conference, Sydney, Australia, 15-18 July 1998.

Low Choy, D.C. and MacDonald, S. (2002) *Protecting Regional Open Space in South East Queensland*, paper to Environmental Engineers conference, Brisbane.

Low Choy, D.C. (2004) 'The Regional Open Space Paradox', in *Queensland Planner*, 44(3), September 2004, pp12-15.

McHarg, I.L. (1992) *Design with Nature*, John Wiley, New York.

McInnis, R.A. (1944) *Recreation and Open Spaces - The Green Belt*, internal Council minute, Brisbane City Archives 460/52/4.

Minnery, J. and Low Choy, D.C. (2005) *Achieving Regional Planning Visions: The Role of Collaboration in Plan Implementation*, paper prepared for 2nd State of Australian Cities Conference, Brisbane.

Queensland Government in association with South East Regional Organisation of Councils (SEQROC) (2002) *South East Queensland Performance Monitoring Report 2001*, Information Paper 1, Regional Coordination Committee, Brisbane.

Queensland Government in association with South East Regional Organisation of Councils (SEQROC) (2003a) *SEQ2021 A Sustainable Future – South East Queensland's Regional Planning Challenges: Options for the Future*, Department of Local Government and Planning, Brisbane.

Queensland Government in association with South East Regional Organisation of Councils (SEQROC) (2003b) *Issues and Options for Regional Landscape*, Discussion Paper, Department of Local Government and Planning, Brisbane.

Queensland Government in association with South East Regional Organisation of Councils (SEQROC) (2005) *South East Queensland Regional Plan 2005-2026*, Office of Urban Management, Brisbane.

Randolph, J. (2004) *Environmental Land Use Planning and Management*, Island Press, Washington DC.

Regional Landscape Strategy Advisory Committee (RLSAC) (2002) *SEQ Regional Landscape Strategy Implementation: The Nature of the South East Queensland Regional Landscape Strategy and Progress in its Implementation*, January 2002, RLSAC and Environmental Protection Agency.

Regional Planning Advisory Group (RPAG) (1993) *Open Space and Recreation*, Policy Paper of SEQ2001 Project.

Selman, P. (2000) 'Landscape Sustainability at the National and Regional Scales', Ch 6 in Benson, J.F. and Roe, M.H. (eds) (2000) *Landscape and Sustainability*, Spoon Press, London.

Simonds, J.O. (1998) *Landscape Architecture: A Manual of Site Planning and Design*, 3rd ed, McGraw-Hill, New York.

Wilber Smith and Associates (1965) *Brisbane Transportation Study*, Vol 1, Queensland Main Roads Department and the Brisbane City Council.

Wilber Smith and Associates (1970) *South East Queensland – Brisbane Region Public Transport Study*, Queensland Minister for Transport.

Williamson, K.S. (2003) *Growing with Green Infrastructure*, Heritage Conservancy, Doylestown.

Yaro, R.D. and Hiss, T. (1996) *A Region at Risk: The Third Regional Plan for the New York-New Jersey-Connecticut Metropolitan Area*, Regional Plan Association, Island Press, Washington DC.

Newspapers:

Courier Mail, 17 May 1944

Courier Mail, 2nd May 1950