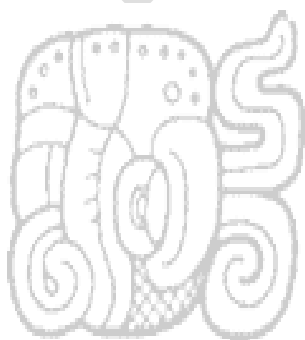


Initial Report on ...

**2008 SEQ LIVING LANDSCAPES FORUM
REGIONAL LANDSCAPE AND OPEN SPACE COMMITTEE
BOONAH CULTURAL CENTRE, HIGH STREET BOONAH
10-12 SEPTEMBER 2008**

**P D Mackay
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A. BACKGROUND

The Regional Landscape and Open Space Committee (the Committee) is an independent advisory body to the Hon. Paul Lucas, Minister for Infrastructure and Planning in the Queensland Government. The Committee advises on the provision and management of open space, regional landscape, environment, natural resource and rural production issues in the South East Queensland Regional Plan.

The Committee organised the 2008 SEQ Living Landscapes Forum, in association with the Department of Infrastructure and Planning and the Council of Mayors South East Queensland, with supporting sponsorship from Powerlink, SEQ Catchments and the Scenic Rim Regional Council. Coordination of the Forum was by the Boonah Organisation for a Sustainable Shire.

The objectives of the Forum were to raise the profile of key regional landscape issues, to examine their policy position within State and Local Governments in Queensland, and to disseminate the SEQ experience of managing the regional landscape and rural production areas to a wider audience.

Since the initial proposal was made, the outcomes of the Forum received greater urgency as the review of the SEQ Regional Plan was advanced, and outcomes from the Forum would be available for input into the plan revision.

A1 Format of the Forum

The Forum convened over three days from 10-12 September, 2008, with 120 participants drawn from government, professional, academic, business, and community groups, with local, regional, intra-State and interstate representation. The Forum was timed to coincide with the Boonah Spar Arts Festival.

The Keynote Address was given by Dr John Williams, Commissioner, New South Wales Natural Resources Commission. The central component of the Forum was four thematic sessions, with an introductory speaker, after which the group split into four targeted discussions related to the theme, reporting back with proposals in relation to information needs, issues to be addressed and ideas that could be developed by the Committee in its future operations. The Chair of the Committee, Associate Professor Darryl Low Choy, summarised the outcomes that he saw from the discussions, before closing the Forum.

A2 Format of this report

This report will commence with a summary of the key aspects raised by the Forum, followed by an analysis of the focus of each of the thematic sessions, with summary comments in relation to the information needs, issues and ideas for development from the groups in the appendices. It will conclude with a summary of the actions recommended by those completing the evaluation form.

B. MAIN POINTS

The Forum had a range of suggestions for action, the key elements of which are set out in the Appendices. From these, several key aspects can be identified as requiring further action. At this stage, the evaluation reports have not been analysed, and these may alter or increase the points to be included in this summary. Consequently, this list is provisional at this stage.

The main points for the attention of the Committee are as follows:

1. This Forum drew over one hundred and twenty delegates to a relatively isolated location for three workdays, and sustained attendance throughout. A high level of commitment and involvement across a diverse range of groups was shown. By comparison, the Terms of Reference for the review of the Regional Plan, addressing a much wider range of issues, drew only four times this number, many of whom were part of general petitions.

It was expressed as a concern that there was a lack of alternative vehicles for public involvement in the regional planning process, both in terms of access to information and as a mechanism for dissent or criticism. The Committee had a website in the past, but this has been discontinued. This decision should be reviewed, in the light of alternative sources of public access. The prospect of more forum-type activities should also be explored.

2. The existence of structural arrangements allowing relatively comprehensive planning for the regional and rural landscape was clearly identified, and should be managed in input to other related regional and local planning. This calls for clear priorities to be established and made statutory through the SEQ Regional Plan and for a program of work to address the main lacunae identified. These were identified as –
 - the lack of inclusion of environmental infrastructure in the regional infrastructure plan and program, despite the scale of operation involved in addressing issues
 - the lack of effective means to assess priorities among conflicting alternative land uses, where decisions cross institutional boundaries or operate on different timeframes, often associated with lack of recognition of the relevance of natural resource planning and priorities for agencies and bodies not involved in their administration
 - the lack of inclusion of clearly established natural resource management guidelines, such as use of the precautionary principle, delegation of decision authority to the lowest appropriate level and practical adaptive management processes as well as unclear status for endorsed natural resource plans, decision bodies and programs

3. The regional and rural landscape of South East Queensland was clearly identified as not fully rural and not urban. The current term for such areas is *peri-urban* and at present it is clear that there is limited information held on the impact of the changes being felt across the community, under the conditions of risk society, climate change and peak oil, with most work focussed on the issues affecting major urban areas and sectorally in selected rural industries, such as agriculture and mining. Much is based on reasonable assessment, such as the likely transport implications for residents of such areas.

There is a clear need to separately identify these areas in the region and to assess and plan for the implications for their future development of the major structural changes under way.

4. The Forum identified with the range of mechanisms currently in use or being developed for use in planning for the regional and rural landscape. However, the sessions also came back to a range of spiritual values that were emphasised - persistence, resilience, localisation, community identification – that one group identified as “spiritual amenity”. This concept has resonances with indigenous cultural values and rural and small town mores across the region, separate from those in the major urban and newer coastal centres. Given the likely different development of areas in the peri-urban zone from those in major urban centres, it is likely that this concept warrants exploration, as part of the rural strategy development in the region.
5. The recent changes to the structure of local government in the region identified problems of scale in their future operation. The role of communities operating at the sub-Local Government level was discussed, with the need expressed for a review of the interaction mechanisms, especially in terms of initiation and funding of local action, and clarification of roles of State, Local Government and community groups.

C. THEME 1: URBAN AND REGIONAL DEPENDENCIES

This theme was addressed by Mr G White, Deputy Director General, Department of Infrastructure and Planning. The group then broke up to discuss four subsidiary topics –

- *Enhancing liveability – how does the regional and rural landscape contribute to our quality of life and what can we do to enhance this contribution?*
- *Making tracks and building bridges – what opportunities are there to strengthen mutual benefits and bridge the urban/rural divide?*
- *What is so good about the regional and rural landscape – how do we best communicate the benefits of the regional and rural landscape in the face of increasing pressures?*
- *Losing the backyard – what are the open space needs of rural and urban dwellers?*

Details of the suggestions are given in Appendix 1. In this section, comments are confined to the results of the content analysis of the suggestions, together with aspects that had greatest potential for carrying forward in the work of the Committee.

The main aspects highlighted by the groups related to -

- **values,**
- **regional,**
- **ecosystem,**
- **infrastructure,**
- **targets,**
- **monitoring, and**
- **services.**

This differs sharply from the distribution of mentions in the other thematic sessions, emphasising that these matters are viewed as of a different order to the other matters considered, requiring a different focus. Overall, this emphasis is on planning.

Key phrases and concepts of value from this session were “externalise the backyard”, recognition of the risk averse basis of society, (at a time of increasing awareness of the concepts of the risk society) and the lack of systematic planning for environmental infrastructure as is occurring for other forms of infrastructure.

The session emphasised that there is a developed framework which can directly benefit planning for the regional landscape and open space – values, targets, an integrated infrastructure planning and programming mechanism, state of the region monitoring, evaluation and reporting. Some need work to improve but they provide a basis.

D. THEME 2: MANAGING MULTIPLE VALUES

This theme was addressed by Mr S Warner, Chief Executive Officer, SEQ Catchments. The group then broke up to discuss four subsidiary topics –

- *A new planning approach – how can we achieve our vision for the regional and rural landscape?*
- *Too many values and nowhere to put them – how do we best resolve conflicts between multiple values at regional and sub-regional scales?*
- *How do we maintain economically viable, socially vibrant communities connected to the regional and rural landscape?*
- *How do we achieve public benefit from private land?*

Details of the suggestions are given in Appendix 2. In this section, comments are confined to the results of the content analysis of the suggestions, together with aspects that had greatest potential for carrying forward in the work of the Committee.

The main aspects highlighted by the groups related to -

- **community,**
- **values,**
- **natural resource management,**
- **needs,**
- **understanding,**
- **impacts, and**
- **systems.**

While the emphasis in Theme 1 was on outputs and controls, in this Theme participants were more oriented towards the recipients of planning, with focus words “values”, “needs”, “understanding” and “impacts”. Overall, the concerns are meeting community expectations and implications, backed by understanding the impacts on natural resource systems.

The session emphasised that natural resource management is very expensive to get wrong, and that it represented an area of market failure in our economy. A further core element is the lack of mechanisms for comparing priorities across widely varying time frames and a range of agents.

The need for community support was emphasised – without it, planning is just paper. The need to integrate effectively ecosystem services into planning schemes and development approval processes was also highlighted.

E. THEME 3: AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE

This theme was addressed by Dr Jago Dodson, from the Centre for Urban Research at Griffith University. The group then broke up to discuss four subsidiary topics –

- *What are the opportunities from climate change in the regional and rural area and how can we support these?*
- *Managing the landscape – what challenges will there be for environmental and natural resource management under climate change and increasing fuel costs and what options will we have to address these?*
- *What are our options to keep moving across the regional and rural landscape with increasing fuel costs?*
- *Living well with climate change and expensive oil – what special adaptation is required in the regional and rural landscapes?*

Details of the suggestions are given in Appendix 3. In this section, comments are confined to the results of the content analysis of the suggestions, together with aspects that had greatest potential for carrying forward in the work of the Committee.

The main aspects highlighted by the groups related to -

- **transport,**
- **local,**
- **community,**
- **needs,**
- **governments,**
- **social, and**
- **impact.**

This list highlights the localisation issue that arose in response to this area of concern, and differs markedly in focus from that in Theme 1. As the participants are basically the same group, it emphasises the need for different focal perspectives needed in addressing complex issues.

The reality of the world oil crisis was illustrated in terms of local impact, as Australia imports 40% of its fuel and as a small player on the world scene, cannot guarantee supply. While localisation and planning for little transport are evident likely requirements, there has been little work done on the implications of the changes for peri-urban areas and this is a poorly understood area. At the local level, the session emphasised the need for resilience and patience to be reemphasised in local communities, as well as the need to address spiritual amenity. The session also highlighted the structural change in roles which came with regional local governments.

F. THEME 4: WORKING TOGETHER

This theme was addressed by Ms R Nolan MLA, State member for Ipswich. The group then broke up to discuss four subsidiary topics –

- *Regional leadership – how do institutions with responsibilities at different spatial scales best interact for regional implementation?*
- *After the plan is printed – what are the successful implementation mechanisms that can get us off the ‘plan to plan’ merry-go-round?*
- *Beyond core business and silos – how do we manage issues that are noone’s core business but everyone’s responsibility?*
- *Show me the money – how do we share the costs of supplying public services to visitors?*

Details of the suggestions are given in Appendix 4. In this section, comments are confined to the results of the content analysis of the suggestions, together with aspects that had greatest potential for carrying forward in the work of the Committee.

The main aspects highlighted by the groups related to -

- **need,**
- **different,**
- **long term,**
- **strategies,**
- **personal,**
- **expressing**
- **language,**
- **groups, and**
- **disagreement.**

This list highlights the need to address different groups and their expectations in any planning process, including the capacity to allow expression of disagreement.

Key terms that were emphasised were localisation, persistence and accountability. The need for structured channels for expressing dissent in planning matters was going to be increasingly felt with the enlargement of local governments. This was accentuated in the need for more effective communication, through targeted community engagement. Residents expected involvement in decision-making through some form of community engagement processes.