



# Hawkesbury Harvest Incorporated

**Submission to the Metropolitan Strategy Subregional Plans  
For the North and South West**

**March 2008**

**On behalf of the Board of Hawkesbury Harvest Inc.  
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## **Hawkesbury Harvest and the Plans for Sydney**

This document is Hawkesbury Harvest's response to the call for submissions on the draft North West and South West Subregional Plans for Sydney. Hawkesbury Harvest's interest in the planning for Sydney relates to the role of viable farming in the outer Sydney rural crescent and peri-urban zones, and the related social, cultural and environmental values that this creates for people who live in and visit the Sydney basin.

Hawkesbury Harvest Incorporated is a community-based association established in 2000 with a mission to improve the economic viability and sustainability of agriculture in the Hawkesbury region. It has been developing agri-industry and agri-tourism initiatives in the NW and more recently in the SW regions for the last 7 years and continues to be active in developing alternative market channels for growers, value-adders and end-users of produce and products from the farming communities of Western Sydney.

Hawkesbury Harvest has been recognised as playing a role in the effective re-alignment of rural resource lands for tourism and amenity on page 117 of the NW Subregional Plan and it has been an innovator building initiatives consistent with Action A2: Increase Innovation and Skills Development through the agri-industry projects it has implemented. Hawkesbury Harvest has done this with the assistance and funding support of the region's LGAs, State and Regional Development through the Greater Western Sydney Economic Development Board, and the Federal Government through the Regional Assistance Program. Hawkesbury Harvest also has strong linkages and gained substantive in-kind support in this work from the NSW Department of Primary Industry and the University of Western Sydney. More recently new relationships have been formed with Lend Lease/GPT.

This innovation has resulted in alternative market mechanisms for farmers, tourism and other value-adders of the NW through the Farm Gate Trail, Farmers Markets, Open Farms, Special Events and a provedoring Service. These initiatives are now being extended to the south with new projects in the Penrith and Wollondilly Shires. It is important to Hawkesbury Harvest that these economic mechanisms continue to be supported, and preferably encouraged by the sub-regional plans. To this end Hawkesbury Harvest submits that the following commentary be considered and that appropriate changes be made to the sub-regional plans to accommodate the points raised in this submission.

This submission recognises that the NW and SW Subregional Plans exhibit structural and directional consistency, and so, many of the comments provided below should be read in relation to both Plans. There are differences however, and the last part of this submission focuses on the NW Subregional Plan because it is this plan that raises both core/common and some specific issues for Hawkesbury Harvest with planning for the NW subregion. Hawkesbury Harvest also acknowledges that many of the issues raised in this submission might well be implied as being addressed under the Plan's Actions, but we believe the issues and principles raised here need to be more explicitly articulated and incorporated in the written plans and the subsequent planning documents and tools that will be developed.

Hawkesbury Harvest seeks to be included in the stakeholder groups who are invited to participate in working groups under the planning process that will generate the documents and tools referred to above.

## **Hawkesbury Harvest's View of the Key Planning Issues**

There is an opportunity at this planning stage to re-conceptualise and re-imagine the role of the Hawkesbury and Hills (and also the other peri-urban rural zones around the Sydney basin crescent) as part of an integrated city plan that specifically includes and articulates a role for agriculture as part of the planning picture. This would be a major departure from all other planning models since the Cumberland Plan which have been city and housing centric in their intent and effect, with the occasional integration of 'environment' as reference to green zones. We note that there is a departure from this in the SW Regional Plan where farm lands are recognised for their production and wider cultural values, but we lament the fact that this view of the peri-urban zones of the North West does not extend to the Hawkesbury and adjoining rural areas.

The world has and is changing, ever more so because of global warming, in ways that now raise the importance of secure food systems, environmental and human health, quality of life and the industries that support these things as key planning foci for sustainable cities and liveable communities. The Hawkesbury and wider region has asset values that are not appropriately recognised in the current plans in the strategic context precipitated by this change. Indeed, the absence of a recognition of the nation's foundation farming heritage as it was created by Governor Macquarie is not afforded the same protections as have been proposed in the SW Regional Plan for farm lands, other than as artefact heritage. Despite hosting the State's First Agricultural College (now UWS) and having contributed to the nation-building that the Macquarie Towns and the College made possible, the plan ignores the emerging production, technological, environmental and human capital potentials that could be realised if this heritage and the assets therein were given recognition in the Plan.

The asset values that still exist in the Hawkesbury are about food, fibre and other production, landscape, cultural heritage and the tourism and amenity values that a productive and accessible rural zone on the peri-urban edge of Sydney can provide. Loss of these lands in their current form and under current uses in agri-culture and related industries would result in the loss of an asset that many cities of the world would jealously admire – we have world heritage values in the NW sector that at present are not understood, identified or exploited in ways that could build the Sydney brand and provide greater amenity and recreational opportunity for Sydney-siders. We have the assets for retaining Sydney's virtuous circle of attractiveness, but there remains a serious risk that we will lose them if the planning system fails to recognise and protect them for current and future generations. This doesn't mean that we have to abandon existing plans, but we do need to broaden the brief in ways that ensures we capture these potentials as exploitable opportunities, especially because of the global changes heading our way with markets, climate and human movement.

In addition to the re-thinking required by the above, Hawkesbury Harvest has identified that city planning needs to accommodate the following. While some Directions and Action points could imply these things, we believe they need better and more explicit recognition and codification in the subregional plans. Doing this means that the standard templates for LEPs will need to be flexible enough, especially in the rural subregions, to allow for the following.

- Incorporate food system resilience and integrity – planning controls need to consider the emerging role of alternative market channels, specialty production, food security and localized food systems for Sydney. While the Plan recognizes the production base for fresh food, it does not consider the strategic importance of this in feeding the city or the potentials of this in terms of future economic activity. Indeed, while the plan

does talk about Climate Change, it does not anticipate that the Sydney basin, like other coastal areas east of the Range, will be better positioned to exploit the global warming effects on food production and markets. It also does not anticipate the changes to economic structures that the increasing national and international trend to more direct forms of food distribution and marketing will bring and the need for a more diverse set of land use and activity definitions that could accommodate grower-end user direct channels. Such planning tools would increase food system resilience through facilitating diversity and increase integrity by increasing access and equity in our existing food system.

- Diversity of opportunity and use in land economy – planning controls need to ensure that LEPs do not future-proof land use in a detrimental way that will prohibit productive exploitation of the land for future generations. While there is little argument that traditional agricultural practices and technologies have made production on the smaller land holdings common to the Sydney region less viable, there is no doubt that emerging technologies and alternative market approaches are options that are addressing the decline in farm viability, where the farmer is innovative enough to look at different ways of doing things. The issue is not land utility but land owner imagination and innovation encouraged and supported by legislation/regulation.
- Retention of cultural and natural (including man-made) heritage – planning directions and the subsequent controls need to recognize that the ‘natural’ landscapes of the Sydney basin are the result of significant human re-writing, both indigenous and European. These heritages have given us the landscapes that form our rural and wilderness vistas and form core assets for recreational amenity and tourism. The Plan refers to cultural and natural heritages as vestige artefacts – Hawkesbury Harvest believes this understanding of them denies the rich living heritage they hold for us and the future role they have to play in maintaining Sydney’s liveability, world class attractiveness as a place to live and do business, and its cultural heritage vested in Macquarie’s “bread basket”, what is now commonly called Sydney’s food bowl.
- Support for decentralised, micro-business, community-supported agriculture – planning controls, especially LEP templates, need to ensure that use definitions do not inadvertently limit the potential diversity and capacity of economic activities and market mechanisms that are emerging as important opportunities for land-holders.

When we translate the principles outlined above for city planning into the subregional plan, Hawkesbury Harvest believes the plan should do the following.

- Properly identify and protect productive lands including those zoned rural residential/lifestyle against planned sterilization or quarantining which would remove future production opportunities, especially micro-climate, micro-intensive and closed-system agriculture – this relates to Direction G: Planning and Governance and specifically to the LEP templates that are intended under the Plan. Many important and strategic issues of development and community character are linked to what the LEPs will allow LGAs to do in relation to the issues raised in this submission. Hawkesbury Harvest wants to see that the planning system does not inadvertently obliterate the capacity for rural peri-urban LGAs to modify their planning actions in ways that support community aspirations, sense of place and economic opportunity founded in rural character, whether it is through production or exploiting the asset base for tourism or other service industries.

- Recognize not just the heritage values, but the world class heritage values that the region exhibits through pre-European indigenous, colonial and post-colonial landscapes. Recognize the agri-cultural heritages that exist in their current forms and the cultural landscapes that contribute to Sydney's capacity to feed itself and produce a vibrant food culture. Heritage in the current plan is about artefact landscapes, not evolving, living, productive ones. While acknowledging that there are heritage assets of State Significance in the Hawkesbury, the plan fails to recognize the wider cultural and heritage values of the remaining productive lands as an asset of equal importance. This has impacts in terms of quality of life, richness of offerings and tourism attraction.
- Articulate the important relationship between rural resource lands, the production thereon, and its role as a buffer between urban expansion zones and the Blue Mountains World Heritage area. Expand the definitions that plan for and control conservation corridors to include a role for private rural lands where habitat remnants exist or might be regenerated, to encourage best practice such as in the case of the boutique resort, Loxley on Bellbird Hill, and its remnant of Western Sydney Dry Rainforest.
- Recognize the agribusiness production in the basin as a key force for creating rural vistas and landforms, and in retaining the scenic and environmental qualities of the basin created by farming cultures – currently the key directions related to resource lands and environmental/scenic qualities arbitrarily separate these directions when in reality they are an integrated result of the historic and future farming activities on our rural resource lands.
- Ensure that planning regimes make it possible to improve access to open space via farm gate trail and farm gate initiatives that open up the vast private lands that make up the rural commons (open space) of the western subregions. This form of opening-up also facilitates economic activity, alternative food systems and addresses issues as diverse and inter-linked as farm survival and the carbon footprint of the food system understood en masse as the concept of food miles.

### **Commentary on Specific Action Points in the NW Subregional Plan**

Hawkesbury Harvest also wishes to make specific comment on some of the Directions and Action Points within the NW Subregional Plan as follows.

- Actions A 2.3, 2.4 and 2.5 – An opportunity exists to integrate the activities, assets and heritage of the NW farming communities to revitalize and re-activate the Hawkesbury campus of UWS (formerly Hawkesbury Agricultural College) as a agri-food research and development park with specialisation in urban-agriculture, sustainable cities food systems, closed system technologies, community supported agriculture, low food miles, specialty production, heritage, rural and gastronomic tourism. This would re-invigorate the magnet infrastructure and distribute the wealth generation potentials into the Macquarie Towns region in a way that would assist retention of its landscape and cultural heritage values, continue the legacy of Macquarie and the Hawkesbury Agricultural College, and activate a new direction and development focus for agri-industry development and education. This then addresses aspects of Action A3: Improve Opportunities and Access to Jobs for Disadvantaged Communities and Direction F (Culture and Tourism) and creates another Specialist Centre in the NW sector

- NW E 3.5.1 – The brief should include natural and “man-made landscapes” – this would then capture the tourism and recreational values in our rural resource lands (the rural commons) as an asset worth protecting and managing via the Plan.
- NW E 3.5.2 – Similarly to above, the role and influence of farming activity along the river, the river banks and the heritage aspects of this, especially in those parts of the river(s) that were once navigable and where heritage navigation sites still exist (light houses, etc)
- NW E 4.1.1 – The mapping should not exclude rural residential/lifestyle zoned lands where some form of production is possible with consent – in the NW around 75% of the existing open space or rural land is already zoned in this way and excluding it seriously distorts the asset opportunities that might be realised now or in the future with new production technologies or market mechanisms. This provides options other than potential subdivision.
- NW E.4.1.2 – The underlying planning principle that should be applied here is that the planning regime should not remove, sterilize or quarantine a future generation’s opportunity to utilise the lands for productive purposes other than as urban development/housing. So this extends the current stance from rural lands not being thought about as ‘urban land in-waiting’ to include the potential of rural land as productive land once again, now or in the future, assuming appropriate technologies and/or constraints address land use conflict issues.
- NW.E 4.1.3 – Hawkesbury Harvest believe we have the credentials that, for both the private and public good, substantiates its claim to be included in the working group based on our activities in agri-tourism, agri-industry and community supported agriculture in the basin and the increasing role we are playing in work with Councils, State and Federal government, and the development industry on agri-industry development and place-making in the Sydney basin.
- Action E 4.2 (Protect Resource Lands) – Current definitions and technologies would exclude production activities on these lands, so the planning regime needs to allow for future developments and technological advances which will evolve to address the land use conflicts that LEP’s currently address through zoning – the system needs to anticipate that this will be a feature of future advancements and ensure that zoning and use definitions do not arbitrarily and permanently exclude productive uses. This then links to E 4.3 which is about finding ways to encourage appropriate development and technologies for resource lands, and the investment in these.
- Direction E 5 (Climate Change) – The role of rural lands in hydrological systems, micro-climate, flood mitigation, waste sequestration, waste recycling, nutrient cycles, carbon cycles, protected area buffering, air, water and general environmental quality requires identification and quantification.
- Direction E 6 (Cultural Heritage) – Ensure that the definitions include living cultural heritage including agri-culture and the farming communities of the NW sector as key landscape and cultural formation drivers of the past, present and future of the Sydney basin. Have the plan recognise that we have both artefact heritage and living productive heritage assets that require identification and protection.
- Action E 6.3 (Interpret and Promote Cultural Heritage) – Expand the definitions to include living heritage and the cultural landscapes that form the basis of rural tourism and Farm Gate Tourism and recreational opportunity in the NW.