

PE2 - Outcomes of Poultry Industry Forum

PE2

Outcomes of Poultry Industry Forum

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- In response to recent representations from the local poultry industry Council passed a resolution at its Ordinary Meeting held 7 April 2016 that:
 1. It be noted that it is Council's long standing position to suspend enforcement action for non-compliance with a Development Consent upon lodgement of a modified application to amend the consent requirements.
 2. A program of consultation be arranged with representatives from the local poultry growers group to inform Council of the challenges facing the industry.
 3. A program of consultation be arranged with the broader community to inform Council of their concerns relating to poultry farm operations.
 4. A report be prepared for a future Council meeting regarding this issue and the outcomes of the consultation initiatives.
- Two community forums were held on 8th and 9th June 2016 with the poultry industry and residents at the Bargo Sports Club. These workshops were facilitated by an independent consultant.
- Council has also met with industry representatives, most recently at a workshop on 27 June 2016.
- It is recommended that:
 - Council note the contents of the report on the Poultry Industry Forum and that the new term of Council further consider its policy and conditions on this matter.
 - Council engage with poultry industry leaders, relevant State Agencies and community representatives to discuss compliance issues and develop a Good Neighbour Policy for rural co-existence.
 - Council engage with representatives of NSW Department of Primary Industries, Environmental Protection Authority and poultry meat industry to discuss fair and reasonable noise mitigation requirements to replace night time curfews.
 - the issue facing the local poultry industry be referred to the Sydney PeriUrban Network of Councils for further discussion and strategy development across PeriUrban areas in Sydney.
 - Council continue to seek funding opportunities from the State Government to undertake a Rural Land Study to identify agricultural clusters and consider measures to reduce land use conflicts associated with carrying out an agricultural enterprise.
 - the definition of "rural living – room to grow" be further explored and workshopped separately with the community in the upcoming review of the Community Strategic Plan.

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REPORT

1.1 BACKGROUND

On 20 May 2016, Council met with representatives of the local poultry industry. Issues such as economic viability, bird welfare, night time curfews and recent enforcement action instigated by Council were discussed. The local poultry farmers were particularly concerned about the ongoing viability of their business operations given the contractual obligations being sought from the processing companies such as Baida, Inghams, Cordina Chicken, Red Lea and Pepes Ducks. A number of poultry farmers have lodged Modified Applications to their Development Consent, with Council to address the economic viability / contractual obligation issue.

Development Applications currently being considered by Council include:

- DD09/827 s96 - 430 Arina Road Bargo - seeking consent to modify the development consent for additional poultry (chicken) shed
- DD15/292 - 325 Scroggies Road Lakesland - seeking consent to construct six additional poultry (turkey) sheds and extend two existing poultry (turkey) sheds
- DD15/292 s96- 325 Scroggies Road Lakesland - seeking consent to modify the development consent to remove the restriction on night-time pickup of poultry (turkey) and the restriction on external storage of manure
- DD15/ 6016 - 115 Kelsalls Road Lakesland - seeking consent to construct two additional poultry (chicken) sheds and extend three existing poultry (chicken) sheds
- DD05/800 s96AB - 1846 Glendiver Road the Oaks - seeking consent to modify the development consent to remove the restriction on night-time pickup of poultry (turkey)
- DD12/125/4 - 440 Cawdor Road Cawdor - seeking consent to construct four poultry (chicken) sheds
- DD15/72 S96AB - 50 Mockingbird Road Pheasants Nest - seeking consent to construct two additional poultry (chicken) sheds and extend three existing poultry (chicken) sheds and to remove the restriction on night-time pickup of poultry

The assessment for a number of these applications has been completed. Determination of those applications by Council has been postponed to permit the consultation initiated by the April 2016 Council resolution.

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1.2 CONSULTATION METHODS AND OUTCOMES

A number of engagement methods were used by Council to consult key stakeholders. The engagement methods sought to ensure a wide range of key stakeholders were aware of the consultation being undertaken, to enable stakeholders to be informed about the issues surrounding the Poultry Farming Industry and provide opportunities for stakeholders to give feedback and have their say.

For further information about the engagement methods please see Attachment 1: Poultry Farming Industry in Wollondilly - Consultation Report.

▪ **Poultry Industry Forum**

The Poultry Farm Forums involved both the community and the poultry industry and was facilitated by KJA Engaging Solutions.

The Forums, held on consecutive evenings (8 June and 9 June 2016) at Bargo Sports Club, were attended by 195 stakeholders across both evenings. Unfortunately the record of attendance is not accurate enough to determine the exact breakdown of industry and resident attendees. Approximately 12 attendees representing the poultry industry attended the Forums on both evenings

At the Forum participants were given the opportunity to have their say about the challenges and benefits associated with the Poultry Industry in Wollondilly. Based on the discussions held, stakeholders were then asked to participate in a dot democracy exercise, which allowed them to identify their top three challenges with red dots, and top three benefits with green dots on butcher's paper displayed around the room. Councillors should be mindful that some participants may have voted twice when reviewing the results of the dot democracy.

Participants were also given the opportunity to stay and continue their discussions at tables with a facilitator. A small number of stakeholders remained to continue their discussions in groups.

The outcomes of the Poultry Forum are detailed in Attachment 2: KJA Engaging Solutions Poultry Farm Forum Report.

▪ **Engage.Wollondilly**

Using Council's online community engagement portal, those stakeholders who could not attend the Poultry Forums were able to provide feedback either electronically or in writing. Council received feedback from 37 stakeholders via Engage. Wollondilly and direct correspondence.

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Please see Attachment 1: Poultry Farming Industry in Wollondilly - Consultation Report for the main issues identified from the direct feedback to Council.

1.3 KEY ISSUES

The following issues were identified by Forum participants as being the key benefits for poultry farming:

- Local employment
- Local food
- Economic investment

The following issues were identified by Forum participants as being the key challenges for poultry farming:

- Zoning and planning
- Council and Compliance (i.e. odour, traffic, noise, dust and water)
- Animal welfare

A number of issues, which did not necessarily result in a high score in the dot democracy but nevertheless generated good discussion, related to:

- Community consultation and engagement
- Suitability of super farms
- Good neighbours
- Tolerance
- Rural Living

Further detail on the benefits and challenges raised in the workshop is provided at pages 6-10 of Attachment 2.

1.4 MOVING FORWARD

The feedback provided as a result of the consultation initiative will require careful consideration, particularly in relation to the determination of Development Applications, formulation of the South Western Sydney District Plan and finalisation of the Draft Growth Management Strategy 2014.

The following initial comments, strategies and recommendations are provided in response to the issues raised by the community.

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▪ **Growth and Strategic Planning**

The most recent detailed and comprehensive strategic work undertaken by the Council and the Department of Planning relates to the Greater Macarthur Land Release Investigation. The land Use Analysis identified a significant Poultry Cluster stretching north of Appin to Menangle. In recognition of its resource value, the land (including a buffer zone) was classified as encumbered land unsuitable for urban development.

Wollondilly also has significant agricultural clusters in Pheasants Nest, Thirlmere and Lakesland (poultry farms) and at Bents Basin Road (market gardens). A map showing the poultry clusters is provided as Attachment 3 to this report.

It is recognised that further strategic work is required to identify possible strategies to preserve these clusters. The Greater Sydney Commission has commissioned a Rural Land Study to assist with drafting of the District Plan. However this is likely to be a high level study involving a desk top review of the existing information held by Council and various State Agencies.

A more detailed examination of the issue could be incorporated into the Draft Growth Management Strategy 2014 which requires further review following finalisation of the District Plan. The Wollondilly Rural Lands Study 1995 is well and truly out of date. Council has previously resolved to seek funding to carry out a further Rural Lands Study. Unfortunately a funding opportunity has not arisen.

For many years the Shire has identified rural living as its “Vision”. Typically these words are seen in narrow terms, often ignoring the broader aspects of life in a rural area including community spirit, working agriculture, rural vistas and a deep sense of place.

The concept of rural living is often put forward as justification in debates about development issues. By understanding the characteristics of rural living and the development of a shared definition, we are better able to appreciate the vision of rural living. Rural Living is not just about development issues, but about a wider set of values that reflects the community’s desire to maintain rural character and vistas, together with the sense of belonging to a caring community.

Rural Living is a complex term and can mean different things to different stakeholders. It is recognised this has been raised as an issue in the current Wollondilly Community Strategic Plan 2033. It is recommended that the definition of “rural living – room to grow” be further explored and workshopped separately with the community in the upcoming review of the Community Strategic Plan. An agreed community definition may also assist in providing a framework and a point of reference in the future for all stakeholders.

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The issue of land use conflict and best practice conditions of consent will also be referred to the next Sydney PeriUrban Network meeting for further discussion and strategy development across PeriUrban areas in Sydney.

▪ **Compliance**

The anecdotal evidence suggests that only 25% of the farms in the Shire regularly attract complaints from adjoining residents. Approximately 95% of those complaints relate to odour.

The local poultry farmers have suggested that their industry is already heavily regulated. Their farms are regularly scrutinised by the meat processing company, Department of Primary Industries, RSPCA etc.

It is Council's long standing position to suspend enforcement action for non-compliance with a Development Consent upon lodgement of a modified application to amend the consent requirements. Council has separately resolved not to pursue enforcement action against agricultural enterprises where the activity resulting in amenity disturbance is reasonably required for the purposes of carrying out that enterprise.

Notwithstanding these resolutions of Council, enforcement action against poultry operators is often instigated to address non-compliance issues relating to noise, operating hours etc. In recent times this enforcement action has resulted in farmers lodging Modified Applications with Council seeking amended conditions to bring their Development Consent in line with what operators consider to be reasonable operating arrangements.

In such a heavily regulated industry, Council could take a zero tolerance approach to its enforcement approach but this would be inconsistent with previous directions from Council.

Interestingly at the Poultry Forum there was considerable discussion regarding the need for industry leadership, tolerance and a good neighbour approach to address amenity impacts. In this regard, Council could initiate further consultation with industry leaders and community representatives to develop a Good Neighbour Policy. The Policy could outline:

- the community and Council's expectations
- an industry commitment to adopt and implement best practice in terms of farm management
- mechanisms to resolve land use conflicts between adjoining properties

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▪ **Development Assessment**

The Poultry Forum highlighted the frustration felt by some residents regarding the farm practices employed by certain operators. In particular concern was raised regarding the clean out of sheds in terms of the way and times these activities are carried out. Many of the residents struggle to understand why shed clean outs and deliveries can't occur during normal daylight hours. This does not seem to be an unreasonable expectation.

Similarly, concern was raised about the size of some farming enterprises and questioned the merits of converting to 'super farms' given the relative land size, lack of separation to adjoining properties and the condition of local roads. The incremental increase in farm size was generally accepted as necessary for business efficiency and competition reasons. However the proposals to significant increase carrying capacities (i.e. beyond 40%) was raised as a point of objection.

Good discussion was also held regarding night-time pickups for birds. It was generally accepted that the pickups during the night are necessary in terms of bird welfare. The objection raised by residents related to the noise generated by the activity causing sleep disturbance.

In view of the above Council could apply consent conditions which have an Industrial Noise Policy compliance approach rather than a compliance approach based around time limiting curfews.

In this regard a workshop with representatives of NSW Department of Primary Industries, Environmental Protection Authority and poultry meat industry has been planned in early July 2016 to:

1. Gain a shared understanding of noise legislation in NSW and in particular the current and proposed Industrial Noise Guideline
2. Discuss potential solutions for fair and reasonable noise mitigation measures
3. Discuss potential solutions for improved environmental performance and community engagement.

2.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Community consultation process, including the advertising, mail outs and conducting the two forums (including staffing costs, venue hire and engaging an independent professional facilitator) cost approximately \$20,000. These costs have been funded from operational savings identified within the Development Assessment function.

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The cost of commissioning a Rural Land Study is approximately \$150,000. Alternatively Council could consider allocation of an additional resource in the Growth and Strategic Planning Team for the work to be undertaken internally. Neither of these options are funded in the current Operational Plan.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Poultry Farming Industry in Wollondilly - Consultation Report
2. KJA Engaging Solutions Poultry Farm Forum Report
3. Map of Poultry Farm clusters in the Wollondilly Shire

RECOMMENDATION

1. That Council note the contents of the report on the Poultry Industry Forum and that the new term of Council further consider its policy and conditions on this matter.
2. That Council engage with poultry industry leaders, relevant State Agencies and community representatives to discuss compliance issues and develop a Good Neighbour Policy for rural co-existence.
3. That Council engage with representatives of NSW Department of Primary Industries, Environmental Protection Authority and poultry meat industry to discuss fair and reasonable noise mitigation requirements to replace night time curfews.
4. That the issue facing the local poultry industry be referred to the Sydney PeriUrban Network of Councils for further discussion and strategy development across PeriUrban areas in Sydney.
5. That Council continue to seek funding opportunities from the State Government to undertake a Rural Land Study to identify agricultural clusters and consider measures to reduce land use conflicts associated with carrying out an agricultural enterprise.
6. That the definition of “rural living – room to grow” be further explored and workshopped separately with the community in the upcoming review of the Community Strategic Plan.

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**Poultry Farming Industry in Wollondilly:
Consultation Report**

At the Ordinary Meeting of Council on the 7 April 2016, Council put forward a Notice of Motion involving the following in regards to the local poultry industry:

- It be noted that it is Council's long standing position to suspend enforcement action for non-compliance with a Development Consent upon lodgement of a Modified Application to amend the consent requirements.
- A program of consultation be arranged with representatives from the local poultry growers group to inform Council of the challenges facing the industry.
- A program of consultation be arranged with the broader community to inform Council of their concerns relating to poultry farm operations.
- A report be prepared for a future Council meeting regarding this issue and the outcomes of the consultation initiatives.

As a result, Council commenced a program of consultation with key stakeholders from 20 May to 20 June 2016.

The purpose of the consultation was for:

- Council to create an opportunity to hear and better understand the concerns of industry and the community in relation to poultry farms
- Each side (industry and the community) to hear each other's perspective on the issues
- Council to investigate ways to improve policy responses to poultry farming issues and concerns

Community Engagement:

Council employed a number of engagement methods to consult key stakeholders around the Poultry Farming Industry in Wollondilly. The engagement methods employed were used to ensure that a wide range of key stakeholders were aware of the consultation being undertaken, to enable stakeholders to be informed about the issues surrounding the Poultry Farming Industry in Wollondilly; and provide opportunities for stakeholders to give feedback and have their say. The engagement methods used included:

Detailed information on Engage.Wollondilly:

Engage.Wollondilly is Council's online community engagement portal. Relevant information about the Poultry Farming Industry in Wollondilly, as well as information about why Council was consulting and how stakeholders could provide feedback was made available on the website.

The use of Engage.Wollondilly in the consultation process was also to ensure that any stakeholders who couldn't physically participate in the forums or did not receive the direct

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mail out could still source all the same information and provide their feedback directly to Council. Council received 8 submissions via Engage.Wollondilly and received direct correspondence about the Poultry Farming Industry and associated consultation from 29 people.

Development of an overview paper:

An overview paper on the Poultry Industry was developed by Council. This document detailed key facts about the Industry and common issues that Council is aware of. The information was compiled from industry information and research, feedback from the Department of Primary Industries, submissions received in response to development applications, as well as, complaints and other matters previously raised by the community, industry and residents. The overview paper was sent out with the direct mail out and made available on Engage.Wollondilly.

Direct mail out to residents:

A direct mail out was sent to 779 residents. Council recognised that it could not send the mail out to every resident in the Shire, as a result the mail out was sent primarily to residents living in properties adjoining/neighbouring poultry farms in Wollondilly.

Newspaper advertising:

The Poultry Farm Forum was advertised in Council's Bush Telegraph which is distributed through the Wollondilly Advertiser and District Reporter.

Social media post:

Council made a post on Facebook regarding the Poultry Industry consultation, which resulted in 6 'likes', 6 'comments', 7 'shares', 288 'post clicks' and the post 'reached' 2077 people.

Email to key stakeholders:

A direct email was sent to additional key stakeholders to ensure they were aware of the consultation and forum.

Media coverage:

The local media (Macarthur Chronicle and Wollondilly Advertiser) ran stories about the Poultry Industry consultation and forum.

2 x Poultry Farm Forum:

Council held two evening Poultry Farm Forums (8 and 9 June 2016) at Bargo Sports Club, which were facilitated by an independent consultant. Initially, Council only intended to hold one forum, however due to an overwhelming response from stakeholders, Council held an additional forum to ensure there was ample opportunity for people to participate and have their say. 202 key stakeholders registered to attend the forums and a total of 195 people attended over both evenings (116 participants on 8 June 2016 and 79 participants on 9 June

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2016). The purpose of the forums was to provide an opportunity for Council to hear and understand the concerns of all stakeholders (both community and the poultry industry); as well as for the community and poultry industry to hear and understand each other's perspectives on the issues.

Outcomes:

The Poultry Farm Forum was attended by 195 stakeholders across both evenings and was facilitated by KJA Engaging Solutions. Over the course of both evenings participants were given the opportunity to have their say about the challenges and benefits associated with the Poultry Industry in Wollondilly. Based on the discussions held, stakeholders were then asked to participate in a dot democracy exercise, which allowed them to identify their top three challenges with red dots, and top three benefits with green dots on butcher's paper displayed around the room. This exercise allowed everyone present to clearly see what the key challenges and benefits were for the stakeholders who participated in the forums.

Participants were also given the opportunity to stay and continue their discussions at small round tables. However, the large proportion of participants opted to leave the forum after the dot democracy exercise. A small number of stakeholders remained to continue their discussions on small group tables. These discussions were documented by the table facilitator and provided to KJA Engaging Solutions to form part of their report regarding the forums (See Attachment 2).

For further information about the Poultry Farm Forums and associated outcomes please see Attachment 2.

Feedback via Engage.Wollondilly and Submitted Directly to Council

Council received correspondence from 37 stakeholders regarding the Poultry Farming Industry consultation. 8 submissions were received via Engage.Wollondilly and 29 people sent correspondence directly to Council.

The main points raised from the submissions via Engage.Wollondilly include:

- Poultry farming should be moved to larger mixed farming areas.
- The poultry industry is one of the largest contributors of jobs and economic benefits within Wollondilly.
- A number of poultry farms in Wollondilly smell. Unless there is more Federal and State funding, investment in the industry to raise standards, a best practice approach to operation and active Council, State and EPA monitoring and enforcement of standards then the poultry industry will not grow and will not have a future in the Sydney region.
- Agriculture is an important part of Wollondilly and provides a livelihood for many families in the Shire. New residents in Wollondilly are changing the character of the Shire by turning some of the rural properties into residential neighbourhoods and it would be a shame to see this happen.
- Living near a poultry processing plant for over 20 years has never caused any issues for complaint.

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- Living near a poultry farm if there has ever been an issue it has been raised directly with the farm and dealt with.
- Living next to a small poultry farm that has tripled in size over the last 17 years has had a huge impact on quality of life due to odour, noise and dust. Council has passed these increases without any regard for the neighbours. While it is understandable for the current farming size, any future growth to the farm is opposed due to the further impacts on quality of life.
- Council should plan for the future where very little poultry farming is carried out in the Shire due to industry operating changes.

The main points raised by correspondence with Council include:

- No matter where people live there will be the good and the bad. Farm life is a thankless job that requires long hours, hard work and money is always tight. The smell that people spoke of at the forum is part of rural living. Suburbia is slowly creeping into Wollondilly, however we need to protect our green belt and rural charm. Part of this is having working, profitable farms. If this doesn't happen people will have to start purchasing goods overseas.
- The poultry industry is important as it provides many opportunities for work and career paths and education, especially for the younger generations.
- Never experienced issues with odour when visiting a farm and it is a shame that people are complaining about poultry farms. Wollondilly is lucky that their poultry farmers are able to grow and supply Australians with healthy poultry meat all year round.
- Poultry farmers deal with a lot of pressure to manage their farms to the high standards that are expected within their industry; and shouldn't have to deal with the added stress of neighbours complaining. Particularly when the poultry farm has been there longer than the neighbours have.
- Live 2 kilometres from a Turkey Farm and have never had any issues with trucks, odour or health related issues. No concerns about the expansion of the farm as it create more employment in the Shire. Understand the reasoning for the night-time pick up's is to look after the welfare of the bird.
- Curfew restrictions are becoming unworkable and out of the farmers control.
- Council needs to enforce conditions imposed on farms.
- Farms can sometimes be a little smelly and noisy, however, this is part of rural living.
- Without the poultry industry a lot of people will lose their jobs.
- The expansion and extension of poultry sheds will bring in more jobs and economic growth to the community.
- RU1 zoning is for farming; so let the farms expand and continue farming.
- People are moving from the city to buy acreages in Wollondilly because they love the ambience, but they do not want to deal with the noises and smell associated with rural living. They need to realise that farms are vital to food production and it would be a sad loss to the community if farming was reduced or stopped in Wollondilly.
- Council needs to support the poultry farming industry to grow.
- Council has a specific committee that is supposed to advise Council on rural matters; however, Council does not seem to listen to them. Why have the committee?
- When applications for residential developments in Rural Zones are presented to Council, the applicants should be made aware of what living in a Rural Zone means.

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- Why does Council rezone an area for housing knowing that a poultry farm is at the end of the road? With the only access to the farm through the housing? With the right planning a resolution can be found.
- Any DAs within the drinking water catchment need to be forwarded to WaterNSW before any consent can be issued. Additionally, Council should consult WaterNSW on all planning proposals for rezoning and development proposals adjacent to WaterNSW's Upper Canal corridor.
- Primary production promotes sustainable living and money being spent locally.
- With the increase in poultry farms to become integrated factory farms, this actually reduces employment opportunities as the production process is consolidated.
- A viable and sustainable alternative to the poultry industry would be the development of plant-based food production.
- Animal-based agriculture is known to be damaging to the land, waterways and local ecosystems.
- Animal agriculture is intensive and known for its widespread and systematic abuse and maltreatment of animals.
- Poultry farming impacts on the social amenity for neighbouring properties.
- The introduction of the Poultry Industry Overview document does not correctly convey the Council Notice of Motion.
- Urban sprawl will affect the poultry industry's ability to expand into the future in the Sydney Basin.
- Shed expansions in Wollondilly will not meet the demand and the farmers will continue to want to expand. It is not sustainable to allow any further sheds in Wollondilly along with managing urban sprawl.
- Opposed to turkey farms converting to chicken farming.
- Council needs to consider the billions of dollars the NSW and Federal Government are directing towards South Western Sydney's transport infrastructure in order to support residential growth. This is a great opportunity for Wollondilly.
- Opposed to farms stockpiling unlimited amounts of manure and to remove all existing truck and transport pickup and delivery to farms in Wollondilly.
- Oppose the expansion of farms to become 'Super Farms.'
- Roads continue to deteriorate from trucks and many collisions or near misses have taken place on the roads due to poultry farming trucks.
- Did Council discuss with Poultry Growers removing all transport restrictions and allowing 24 hour operations? This will have a huge impact on residents living near poultry farms in Wollondilly.
- Research on poultry farms overseas has shown that ammonia concentrations higher than 25ppm in the farmhouse environment can have detrimental effects on the health of farm workers, broiler health, broiler weight gain rates and overall profit. To achieve ammonia levels below this, careful litter management and improved infrastructure is required. Further research in Australia is needed to better understand the impacts of poultry farming systems on the community, animals and environment. (Please Note: A research paper is available for further information.)

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- Research has found in Europe that there is a higher incidence of allergic type respiratory illnesses by those living in close proximity to large animal units. (Please Note: A research paper is available for further information.)
- Clarity about strategic planning and Council's strategic direction into the future is important.
- Opportunities for a strategic environmental, social and health assessment to be conducted on the Poultry Industry in Wollondilly.
- Any expansion of production at existing poultry farms should be required to fully comply with current planning requirements.
- The poultry industry contributes significantly to economic development in Wollondilly. Many services are reliant on the poultry industry such as electricians, associated service industries, gas suppliers, feed etc.
- The approval of dwellings close to existing poultry farms has resulted in land use conflict and complaints to Council.
- Night time pick-ups at poultry farms are international best practice.
- Night time curfews make it impossible for poultry processing companies to schedule pickups which could potentially compromise biosecurity.
- Night time curfews compromise the operational capacity of the poultry industry in Wollondilly and could result in the industry relocating to other parts of NSW or interstate.
- The best way to avoid conflict along property boundaries is through separation/landscaping.
- Strong leadership in managing rural zones for their primary purpose is needed.
- New residents need to be informed of what to expect when purchasing near a poultry farm.
- Planning proposals or developments not compatible with farming should undertake a 'Land Use Conflict Risk Assessment' or noise impact assessment.

Report of Planning and Economy to the Ordinary Meeting of Council held on Monday 18 July 2016

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Wollondilly Shire Council

KJA Engaging Solutions Poultry Farm Forum Report

23 June 2016

Report of Planning and Economy to the Ordinary Meeting of Council held on Monday 18 July 2016

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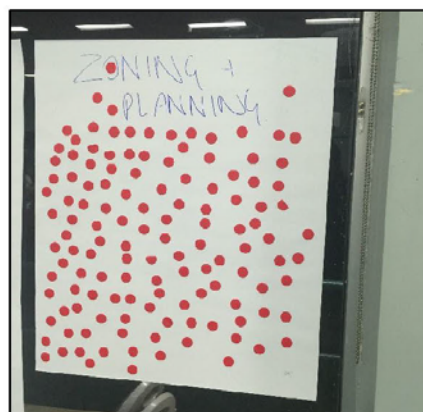
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1. Facilitated Workshops

From 5pm to 8.30pm on the 8th and 9th June 2016, Wollondilly Shire Council held two workshops at Bargo Sports Club to create an opportunity for the community to openly discuss and understand concerns regarding the Shire’s poultry farming industry. Combined, approximately 195 community members attended the workshops, which were facilitated by staff from independent communications consultancy KJA, along with Council representatives. These workshops will help inform the Council’s responses to poultry farming issues in the area.

The workshop began with a brief introduction by Council, followed by an opportunity for community members to stand up one-by-one and address the room. In the second stage of the evening, large sheets of paper were stuck along one wall, each labelled with a key benefit/opportunity or challenge identified before (from submissions to Council) or during the workshop. Attendees were then asked to place three green dots next to the three benefits of greatest interest to them and to place three red dots next to the opportunities that were of greatest interest to them. They were then invited to participate in small group discussions to provide further input on key themes. At the end of this session, the pages looked like those depicted below.



The number of dots placed next to each theme are outlined in the table on the next page. The remainder of the report captures the comments made by community members by placing them under the relevant themes. Some comments will appear under more than one theme. The structure of these notes does not necessarily flow in the order in which issues were raised, rather it provides a grouping of consistent themes that were discussed by the group. It is not intended to provide a verbatim record of questions and comments.

Report of Planning and Economy to the Ordinary Meeting of Council held on Monday 18 July 2016

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Theme	Dot Count
Zoning and planning	244
Local employment	156
Local food	85
Economic investment	63
Rural area	60
Council and compliance	56
Animal welfare	39
Odour	34
Traffic	30
Training	18
Noise	17
Good neighbours	14
Productive	11
Community consultation and engagement	11
Dust	7
Tolerance	5
General	5
Highly regulated	5
Health	4
Environmental	4
Specific industry challenges	4
Water	4
Construction	2
Industry leader	2
History	1
Character	1

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2. Introduction

“Rural Living – Room to Grow”

- *Wollondilly Shire Council Motto*

Wollondilly’s Shire’s ‘Rural Living – Room to Grow’ motto perfectly describes the dilemma discussed at the two recent forums. All participants – farmers and other residents – had decided to invest in Wollondilly because of the attractions of a rural landscape with room to grow.

Tensions have occurred because more intensive farming practices are altering Wollondilly Shire, bringing the trappings of industry – bigger roads, more trucks and other noisy vehicles, larger more noticeable sheds and various other impacts – and altering the character of the place.

The community sees itself at a crossroads. Even a high level of understanding about the requirements of farming by non-residents and strong and long term personal relationships between farmers and their neighbours has not been enough to settle the situation.

There was a strong sense in the meeting of the need for long-term strategic decision-making by council, working with farmers and other residents, to develop and implement planning codes that protected the interests and lifestyles of all investors and residents, farming and non-farming.

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3. Main Themes

Zoning and planning

Zoning and planning received the most votes at both forum sessions, suggesting that it is the most prominent area of interest for attendees. The following discussion centred on zoning and planning issues and considerations, particularly around the close proximity of farmers and non-farming residents in the area.

Finding a balance for the future

“It’s about trying to find a balance,” one resident suggested. Another resident didn’t believe that balance currently exists, “I feel we are looked at as second fiddle to the farmers”. Numerous attendees acknowledged that Wollondilly Shire will see many people looking for housing as Sydney grows in the years ahead. It was suggested that this needs to be taken into account when planning for the future development of the poultry farming industry in the Shire. One attendee expressed the opinion that Council’s current zoning of land was pushing more and more people to the Shire. Another person suggested that the poultry farming industry must be sustained to provide jobs to those people moving into the area.

“Urban sprawl is a problem that we can’t really stop”

It was suggested by some that, to address this conflict, Council should:

- Put a buffer around the poultry farming industry
- Take action to ensure farms do not expand
- Prioritise farming activities in RU1 and RU2 zones
- Ensure non-farming residents understand the significance of RU1 and RU2 zoning

A farmer argued that farming land has already been set aside, in RU1 zones, which are designed to sustain agriculture. He suggested that farming must expand if it is to be sustained, so that should be possible within the RU1 zones. A second farmer suggested that residents who move into these zones should be aware that the land is designed for agricultural use. It was pointed out, though, that farmers cannot operate in residential zones in the same way that residents can move to agricultural zones. An attendee also believed some RU1 land may not be suitable for agricultural production.

“We need zoning that makes sense”

A government representative suggested that, just as in heavy industrial areas, strong decision making is required to determine appropriate usage of zoned land around the Shire’s intensive agricultural areas. Attendees appeared to agree that a strong policy is required to resolve the existing conflict.

The Wollondilly Shire motto

The Council motto for Wollondilly Shire, ‘Rural Living – Room to Grow’, appeared to be interpreted differently by different forum attendees. On the one hand, it was suggested that prospective residents should be made acutely aware that the area is rural, providing room for farmers to produce food. On the other hand, a non-farming resident described buying 25 acres in the area as a place for her family to live and grow.

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Numerous attendees suggested that those who had been setup in the Shire for the longest had the greatest right to be there. However, some farmers spoke of newly arrived residents who quickly began complaining about existing farms. The majority of non-farming residents attending the forum appeared to be generally supportive of the poultry industry with some saying they were happy to be part of a rural community and were supportive of farming in Australia. Some attendees suggested that prospective residents should look for rural land that is not near farming if they don't like farms. One farmer explained his thinking with a metaphor, "You can't drive past the airport and complain about the planes".

"We need to meet in the middle"

A farmer spoke with empathy for his neighbour, who thought he had moved to Utopia but who soon discovered the trucks travelling past and the pumps that started up at night. A neighbour, who had not had any issues with the neighbouring turkey farm over the 4 years he had lived in the Shire, suggested that those who did not know what they were moving into might have a problem once they settle. Existing non-farming residents expressed the desire to enjoy the property that they have bought or developed.

Issues for non-farmers

A key issue appeared to be the growth of existing farms, which could include expansion to the point of close proximity with residential neighbours. One resident said that they wanted to see their neighbours remain turkey farmers but they opposed the expansion of their farmland. Another resident believed that Council should not allow shed modifications on properties that did not include these in their original approvals. She suggested that farms should not be expanded if the site is unsuitable and, if new sheds are constructed, they should be placed in an appropriate location on the property (i.e. not on a hill).

Another relevant issue raised was the perceived lack of consultation with residents in the lead up to farm expansions. A resident described receiving a notification of expansion with only a week to submit a response. One farmer detailed his commitment to engaging neighbours prior to lodging a development application (DA) but said that did not stop nearby residents complaining once the DA was exhibited.

Some residents spoke about the insufficient consideration by Council – when evaluating development applications – of the impact farming expansions have on the devaluation of nearby land. One lady had just received approval to build on her land and was recently notified that a nearby farm would be expanding. She questioned who would compensate residents if they had to sell their house or land at a loss. The resident believed that "Council should not have DA-approved homes near farms that could be expanded". Another attendee suggested that the needs of residents, who are a growing group in the community, need to be better represented in these instances.

"We have to stop this conflict happening"

The state of the local roads appeared to be part of this conversation around the impact of farming on residents. One resident felt that large trucks were impacting on their nearby rural roads and that their neighbouring farmers were not doing anything to make these roads safer. Another attendee offered a different perspective, stating that her farming parents paid \$200,000 to fix and widen the nearby Council-owned road. A third attendee suggested that Council should invest in road infrastructure or take steps to limit the size of the trucks operating on the roads.

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Expanding to survive

Attendees explained that farmers “need to expand to survive”. A flower farmer attending the forum saw parallels with his industry. “We’re price takers not setters” he said. “We take what we can get”. A poultry farmer helped quantify it, “Today, you can’t raise a family with 60,000 birds”.

“Nobody wants to stop someone from having a living”

It was suggested that it is difficult for farmers to start new farms in order to expand. One long-time resident, a town planner, mentioned plans for a new farm that he has been working on since 2005. The farm still hasn’t been built because of concerns around zones, community titles, subdivisions, and so on. Another attendee understood that it was 18 years since Council had passed a new farm, which meant that the value of existing farms is progressively rising, making it increasingly difficult for farmers to expand by buying out nearby existing farms.

A younger member of the community spoke about potentially leaving the area to begin his farming career, since the close proximity of farms and residential properties in the Shire makes it very difficult to setup a new farm. He suggested that part of the reason farmers expand their existing farms is because “it’s so hard to build a new farm”.

Restricting industry growth

Attendees pointed out the potential for the entire poultry farming industry to grow if it isn’t overly restricted. As one farmer said, “If we continue being restrictive all we do is export jobs”. A resident pointed out that her parents were not restricted by noise or small restrictions when she was growing up on a farm. The government representative agreed that nearby residential dwellings make it difficult for farmers to expand because land is more expensive. He questioned where farms could operate with certainty, so that they could attract investment.

Relocating farms

One farmer pointed out that he can’t build on his own farm because there are restrictions around the construction of sheds within certain distances from neighbours. It was suggested that a system should be in place to compensate those farmers who have to move away because they can’t expand within the confines of their own land. These restrictions and perceived requirement for compensation would become increasingly necessary if the area became more residential and the conditions less workable for farmers.

“We built the farms but we live on them as well”

Many in the room pointed out that the relocation of farms would be difficult for a number of reasons. For instance, Wollondilly Shire is suitable for poultry farming partly because of its close proximity to the consumer market in Sydney, to local processing plants and to labour pools (i.e. communities from which they can source employees). This proximity is especially important because poultry products are best delivered fresh. A young farmer asked the room how they would be expected to relocate a farm that they had spent 30 years developing.

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Local employment

Of the perceived benefits of the poultry farming industry available for participants to vote on, 'local employment' was considered the most significant. It was explained that local farms, processing plants and product transport all provide jobs to those living in and around the Shire. One farming couple felt that their farm contributed to local job security.

Additional to the farm owners, a number of attendees revealed that they were employed – directly or indirectly – by the poultry farming industry in Wollondilly. These included farm hands, a bike salesperson, a handyman and the owner of a transport company. Another young person expressed his desire to start his own farm in the area, but suggested that he may have to begin in an area that more easily approves new farms.

A young member of the community believed that his last two years apprenticing on a farm had provided him with valuable skills for the future. Another young man, who has lived and worked next to a poultry farm for some time, appreciated having access to a job near where he lived.

An industry representative said that her company employs hundreds of people in the area. Another said they employ 270 people – 350 during the seasonal peak – and indirectly support 200 local jobs in associated businesses. He revealed that their annual operating cost was over \$20 million and that their contribution to the Shire was worth approximately \$100 million.

When conversation turned to future employment, one farmer suggested that Council-enforced restrictions on the industry were making it difficult for the local industry to compete, effectively exporting jobs. Another argued that the community needs to have jobs ready for the inevitable urban growth on the outskirts of Sydney.

Local food

Local food was identified by participants as the third most important concern in relation to poultry farming in Wollondilly. As previously outlined in this report, numerous attendees suggested that the Shire is suitable for poultry farming due to its close proximity to:

1. The consumer market in Sydney
2. Local processing plants
3. Labour pools

A farmer, who has also been studying poultry farming practices around the world, noted the importance of positioning such farms near their markets, especially since the produce is worth so much more fresh than it is frozen.

Multiple attendees suggested that the community should be considering the 'big picture'; how can the Shire help act as a food bowl for the Sydney region and how can local farms compete with imported products. Both farmers and non-farming residents were concerned that farms overseas would not be adhering to the same strict guidelines as Australian farms. A teacher explained that local students were aware of the 'farm to fork' process in their Shire.

"Where do you want your food to come from?"

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Government and industry representatives, along with local farmers, emphasised the economic benefits of poultry farming in the Shire, with suggestions that poultry products are the fifth largest commodity in NSW. An industry representative shared that they had recently closed down a plant in another state in order to invest more heavily in the Shire's poultry farming industry.

Economic investment

As previously described in this report, many attendees were concerned with the economic impact of the poultry farming industry on Wollondilly Shire.

Most attendees discussing economic investment pointed to the provision of local jobs. It was explained that local farms, processing plants and product transport all provide jobs to those living in and around the Shire. One farming couple felt that their farm contributed to local job security. Farm hands, a bike salesperson, a handyman and a transport company owner all acknowledged that their jobs were directly or indirectly linked to the local poultry farming industry.

An industry representative said that her company employs hundreds of people in the area. Another said they employ 270 people – 350 during the seasonal peak – and indirectly support 200 local jobs in associated businesses. He revealed that their annual operating cost was over \$20 million and that their contribution to the Shire was worth approximately \$100 million.

Government and industry representatives, along with local farmers, emphasised the economic benefits of poultry farming in the Shire, with suggestions that poultry products are the fifth largest commodity in NSW. An industry representative shared that they had recently closed down a plant in another state in order to invest more heavily in the Shire's poultry farming industry.

Some attendees suggested that the local industry would attract further investment if there was more certainty around Council-enforced farming restrictions and development applications. One person argued that the industry could play a part in having jobs ready for the inevitable urban growth on the outskirts of Sydney.

Rural area

As mentioned earlier in this report, the definition and sanctity of Wollondilly Shire's 'rurality' was subject to varying perspectives throughout both workshops. On the one hand, attendees were suggesting that farming activities should be prioritised in RU1 and RU2 zones, which are designed to sustain agriculture, and that this should be clearly explained to incoming residents. Some attendees suggested that prospective residents should look for rural land that is not near farming if they don't like farms.

On the other hand, non-farming attendees saw the value in the rural landscape as a desirable place to raise a family. It should be noted, though, that many residents attending the forum appeared to be generally supportive of the poultry industry with some saying they were happy to be part of a rural community and were supportive of farming in Australia.

A government representative suggested that, just as in heavy industrial areas, strong decision making is required to determine appropriate usage of zoned land around the Shire's intensive agricultural areas. Attendees appeared to agree that a strong policy is required to resolve the existing conflict.

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Council and compliance

Discussions relating to Council and compliance appeared to fall under two main categories; zoning and planning and the enforcement of restrictions.

Zoning and planning

There was a strong sense in the meeting of the need for long-term strategic decision-making by council, working with farmers and other residents, to develop and implement planning codes that protected the interests and lifestyles of all investors and residents, farming and non-farming. It was suggested that Council should:

- Put a buffer around the poultry farming industry
- Take action to ensure farms do not expand
- Prioritise farming activities in RU1 and RU2 zones
- Ensure non-farming residents understand the significance of RU1 and RU2 zoning

A number of attendees felt that Councils were not properly considering non-farming residents – a growing group in the area – when making decisions. For example, one resident felt that Council “should not have DA-approved homes near farms that could be expanded”. She felt that, as well as the impact this expansion has on living conditions, such expansion can devalue nearby residential land. It was suggested that this devaluation should be factored into assessment of farming development applications.

Many farmers felt that it was already too difficult to have development applications approved, especially for new farms. One long-time resident, a town planner, mentioned plans for a new farm that he has been working on since 2005. The farm still hasn’t been built because of concerns around zones, community titles, subdivisions, and so on. Another attendee understood that it was 18 years since Council had passed a new farm, which meant that the value of existing farms is progressively rising, making it increasingly difficult for farmers to expand by buying out nearby existing farms. A number of farmers recommended reviewing development application processes, especially for farm expansions, with the aim of reducing ‘red tape’.

Some in attendance suggested that Council restrictions on the industry were making it difficult for local farmers to compete, effectively discouraging investment and exporting jobs. It was put forward that, if conditions become so difficult and restrictive for a farmer that they need to move elsewhere, a Council-led system should be in place to compensate them for the relocation.

Road infrastructure was raised as another planning responsibility of Council. One attendee suggested that Council should invest in road infrastructure or take steps to limit the size of the trucks operating on the roads. Another attendee pointed out that her farming parents were required to pay \$200,000 to fix and widen what was a Council-owned road near their property. A non-farming resident believed that farmers should pay to upkeep the roads, since it is their pick-up trucks that are causing the damage. A representative of a local transport company suggested that the frequency of local trucks could be reduced with the use of higher quality vehicles with greater carrying capacities. He understood, though, that Council was concerned about having heavier vehicles on their roads.

Enforcing restrictions

In an introductory statement at each workshop, a member of Council pointed to statistics that suggested 75% of poultry farms in the Wollondilly Shire have not received complaints against them,

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while 25% have. A non-farming resident suggested it was Council’s fault that one in four farms had received complaints. One farmer – who questioned the validity of some complaints against his farm – suggested that some of the 25% of farms with complaints against them may still be compliant.

Numerous non-farming residents indicated that they would like to see increased efforts by Council to ensure that local farms are complying with noise and other restrictions. This might involve mediating conversations between farmers, contractors and non-farming residents. One resident did not believe Council should allow modification of sheds on properties where the site is unsuitable for such expansion or where the original approvals did not include mention of such modifications. Another attendee requested that Council provide earlier notification and consultation opportunities for residents when their neighbouring farmers have lodged development applications for expansions.

Members of the poultry farming industry, one of which operated over 11 local government areas, suggested that Wollondilly Shire council was the most strict when enforcing restrictions. They also indicated their desire for clear policy from Council in future and indicated their willingness to work with local government and non-farming residents to address complaints and encourage compliance. However, some felt that Council was enforcing restrictions without possessing a sufficient understanding of industry requirements and practice. During the meeting, for example, it became apparent that a development application had been approved for a farm that required that birds be picked up between the hours of 7am and 10pm. This is at odds with the wide-spread industry practice of transporting birds at night for animal welfare purposes. In summer, for instance, farmers would only have one hour after sunset to facilitate pick-ups.

Animal welfare

Animal welfare was identified as an area of concern for some non-farming residents and as a source of restrictions for farmers and industry representatives.

One resident stated that they refrain from eating turkey because they picture their faces when they travel in trucks past her house. Another questioned whether the community would feel comfortable consuming products that had been produced by overseas poultry farming industries, where such animal welfare restrictions do not apply.

A poultry farmer described the RSPCA regulations around stock densities and other farming practices as ‘tough’, involving regular audits and inspections. He suggested that reduced densities meant that a farmer must expand shedding to raise the same number of birds. Many of the noise complaints from non-farming resident were attributed to night time pickups, which occur after sundown because transporting stock during the day can cause high heat stress, which impacts meat quality and taste.

Odour

A number of residents attending the workshop described experiencing unpleasant, consistent and/or extreme odour from neighbouring farms. Attendees believed that the odour was detrimental to one or more of the following:

- Their experience living on their property
- The value of their property
- Their capacity to invite guests to visit their property
- Their health or the health of their children

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Some felt that Council had not responded adequately to their complaints. As one non-farming resident put it, "I can't do anything more about. I can't bottle the odour and send it in the post". They understood that odour monitoring equipment existed and believed it should be used by Council in their response to complaints. On the other hand, a number of residents praised the management practices of their neighbours, stating that they rarely experienced unpleasant odours.

One farmer did not believe that all complaints were well-founded. He mentioned receiving complaints about his property when it had been empty for two weeks while another described receiving complaints when the smell was caused by manure placed on the roadside by Council workers. Attendees also flagged wind direction as a possible cause of intermittent experiences of unpleasant odours. Another farmer explained that the age and health of the birds could affect the odour produced and that Council should take this into consideration when assessing development applications for broiler farms.

Traffic

As previously noted, the impact of the poultry farming industry on local roads was of significant interest to attendees. Non-farming residents were concerned about:

- Wear and tear on the road caused by trucks
- Large trucks travelling down narrow roads
- Truck drivers exceeding speed limits

One resident felt that their neighbouring farmers were not doing anything to address this wear and tear or to make these roads safer. Another attendee offered a different perspective, stating that her farming parents paid \$200,000 to fix and widen the nearby Council-owned road. A third attendee suggested that Council should invest in road infrastructure or take steps to limit the size of the trucks operating on the roads.

A number of non-farming residents were concerned that more trucks would travel on local roads should farms be allowed to expand. Farmers and industry representatives explained, though, that more sheds would not necessarily mean more birds. They suggested that the size and weight of the birds, the management of pick-ups and the carrying capacities of the trucks would all affect the number of trips. A representative of a local transport company expanded on this, suggesting that the frequency of local trucks could be reduced with the use of higher quality vehicles with greater carrying capacities. He understood, though, that Council was concerned about having heavier vehicles on their roads.

Training

Training, which links in closely with the theme of local employment, was another key area of interest for workshop attendees. Industry representatives, farmers, and young farm hands themselves all suggested that the local poultry industry was providing jobs and upskilling opportunities for young people in the area.

A young member of the community believed that his last two years apprenticing on a farm had provided him with valuable skills for the future. As a first and second year apprentice, he had been introduced to work relations, PBS standards and the industry's broader transport and farming processes. One young farmer intended to apply his learnt skills to his own farm someday.

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Another young man, who has lived and worked next to a poultry farm for some time, appreciated having access to a job near to his home. A father suggested that the local poultry industry had provided his daughters with jobs to support them through their studies at university.

Noise

One attendee believed that noise from late night pick-ups was the main reason why it was necessary for Council to hold the community workshops. Both non-farming residents and farmers had a lot to say about noise across both workshops. The former described their experiences of noise and Council’s responses to complaints while the latter expressed their disapproval of late-night shed cleaning and pointed to industry regulations as the reason for overnight pick-ups.

A primary cause for noise complaints appeared to be late night pick-ups, with non-farming residents describing reversing beepers, the clunking of steel and low hums coming from neighbouring farms. A small number of workshop participants also suggested that they had heard nearby farms cleaning their sheds late at night or early in the morning. Another complained about the noise of semi-trailers passing by her house and asked if quieter trucks could be used. Some attendees called for the Council to improve their responses to complaints, for farmers to improve their management practices and for industry bodies to take action to help minimise noise.

An industry representative and a number of farmers made it clear that they have never cleaned sheds out at night and did not believe it was necessary. What was necessary, they pointed out, was overnight pick-ups, which are an industry requirement to avoid heat stress to the birds. A farmer described, in detail, their efforts to minimise noise by progressively upgrading to quieter trucks and equipment, disabling reverse beepers, using silencers on forklifts and training staff to drive slowly and avoid shouting at night. Another farmer revealed that they had paid to double insulate their neighbours’ windows. A farm owner pointed out that pick-ups only occur on 10-20% of nights each year and that Council and police do visit the property when they receive complaints. It was also suggested that industrial noise policies were a poor guide for assessing agricultural activities.

Good neighbours

Both farmers and non-farming residents voiced their commitment to supporting each other’s right to live and work in the Shire, with many articulating their vision of what makes a good neighbour.

The majority of residents attending the forum appeared to be generally supportive of the poultry industry with some saying they were happy to be part of a rural community and were supportive of farming in Australia. One resident, who expressed their opposition to the expansion of nearby farmland, still said that they wanted to see their neighbours remain turkey farmers. Some workshop attendees had come along to express their satisfaction with the management practices of neighbouring farms. Others asked that farmers take greater efforts to listen to neighbour complaints, to apologise and – where necessary – to take action to address their concerns.

“We don’t bury our heads in the sand”

“We need to co-exist”

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Similarly, a farmer spoke with empathy for his neighbour, who thought he had moved to Utopia but who soon discovered the trucks travelling past and the sounds at night. One farmer detailed his commitment to engaging neighbours prior to lodging a DA but said that it did not keep nearby residents from complaining once the DA was exhibited. As outlined under the previous theme, farmers also detailed their efforts to minimise the impact of noise on their neighbours. A farmer revealed that they had paid to put blinds on a neighbour’s windows to block truck headlight beams.



Productive

Community concerns around the use of land for poultry production is captured in this report under the more prominent ‘zoning and planning’ theme.

It was suggested by farmers at the workshop that the present RU1 zoning, which is designed to sustain agriculture, means that land has been set aside for food production. A farmer suggested that farming must expand if it is to be sustained, so that should be possible within the RU1 zones. A second farmer suggested that residents who move into these zones should be aware that the land is designed for agricultural use.

Also relevant to this theme is one resident’s belief that Council should not allow shed modifications on properties that did not include these in their original approvals. She suggested that farms should not be expanded if the site is unsuitable and, if new sheds are constructed, they should be placed in an appropriate location on the property (i.e. not on a hill).

Community consultation and engagement

At the commencement of each workshop, a representative from Council provided a summary of community interests gathered through submissions and other engagement around the local poultry farming industry. Participants also expressed their appreciation for Councils’ efforts in setting up the two workshops covered by this report.

However, a number of attendees – both farmers and non-farmers – suggested that opportunities existed for Council to provide earlier and more in-depth engagement around development applications for farming expansions and to take on a greater role as mediator during disputes between neighbours.

In addition to Council-led consultation, non-farming residents suggested that large industry bodies should take an active part in engaging communities and discussing solutions to widespread problems. An industry representative, present at both workshops, suggested that they are currently contactable but are also open to facilitating additional dialogue if necessary.

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Dust

A couple of non-farming residents voiced concerns about the dust caused by operations on neighbouring farms. One resident said that they had to have their water tank vacuumed, tested and a filter added due to concerns around dust. Another attendee raised concerns about respiratory issues resulting from dust. A government representative responded to this concern by making reference to a Queensland University report into pathogen risks and dust impacts on neighbours, which found that there was no discernible association between dust and illness.

Tolerance

Tolerance, which was identified by attendees at one of the workshops as an additional category worthy of discussion, has been mostly addressed in the 'good neighbours' section of this report. Concerns around zoning and planning are also relevant for this theme, given that numerous farmers attending the workshop recommended that incoming residents should be prepared for the conditions that can come with living in close proximity to farms.

Additionally, an ex-turkey farmer who has recently conducted world-wide studies into the industry, suggested that farmers and non-farming residents should learn to co-exist, as they have in other countries. He suggested that such tolerance could come from considering the positive benefits of the industry and the economic role it plays, as well as recognising that the practices of the poultry industry in Wollondilly are – as he described – world-class.

General

Farm expansion was the most prominent of those items identified by Council as falling in the 'general' category. The vast majority of attending non-farming residents opposed the expansion of neighbouring farms. One resident believed that the turkey industry defined a large farm as containing 4-5 sheds so suggested that their neighbours, who had 6 sheds on their properties, were already sufficiently equipped.

One attendee questioned why, when they needed to expand their operations, farmers couldn't buy more farming land rather than expanding to the point of close proximity with residential neighbours. It was suggested that it was very difficult to have the development application for a new farm approved in the Shire, which meant that purchasing additional farming land was too expensive an option when expanding. One man, hoping to one day open a farm of his own, put forward that it was easier to operate near neighbours who were already familiar with farming operations than to deal with new neighbours who had not previously had a farm next to their property.

A significant portion of workshop discussion was focused on bird pick-up timing and frequency, with the question raised of whether increasing the number of sheds on a property meant increasing the number of pick-ups. One farmer stated that the size and weight of the birds and the points at which the birds were 'thinned out' would affect the number of truck movements, since each truck has a specific carrying capacity. Another suggested that this was not the case and that, rather, increasing the number of birds on a farm would mean more birds were carted away during each pick-up. A third farmer explained that even if more trucks came to pick up birds, this wouldn't necessarily mean the number of pick-up nights would increase.

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Highly regulated

Farmers attending the workshops described the poultry industry’s strict regulations as world-class but pointed out that this meant their practices and procedures were heavily prescribed. They also described the steps they had taken to respond to Council-enforced restrictions, which minimised the impact of farming operations on their neighbours. Members of the poultry farming industry, one of which operated over 11 local government areas, suggested that Wollondilly Shire council was the most strict when enforcing restrictions.

A poultry farmer described the RSPCA regulations around stock densities and other farming practices as ‘tough’, involving regular audits and inspections. A truck driver revealed that he was required to sterilise his truck when entering and exiting some local farms. A farmer explained, in detail, their efforts to minimise noise by progressively upgrading to quieter trucks and equipment, disabling reverse beepers, using silencers on forklifts and training staff to drive slowly and avoid shouting at night. Another farmer revealed that they had paid to double insulate their neighbours’ windows.

However, some farmers and industry representatives felt that, at times, Council was enforcing restrictions without possessing a sufficient understanding of industry requirements and practice. During the meeting, for example, it became apparent that a development application had been approved for a farm that required that birds be picked up between the hours of 7am and 10pm, which is at odds with industry requirements. There was a concern among some that further restrictions, particular in terms of impact on residential neighbours, may force farmers to move operations elsewhere.

Health

Health-related discussion focused almost entirely on the experiences of non-farming residents and fell into one of the three categories previously outlined in this report; odour, noise and dust.

Odour

A number of residents attending the workshop described experiencing unpleasant, consistent and/or extreme odour from neighbouring farms that – at its worst – kept them and their children from having the windows open or venturing outside.

Noise

Some participants suggested that the noise generated by neighbouring farms, especially from late-night pick-ups, was affecting their ability to sleep. Non-farming residents described reversing beepers, the clunking of steel and low hums coming from neighbouring farms. A small number of workshop participants also suggested that they had heard nearby farms cleaning their sheds late at night or early in the morning. Another complained about the noise of semi-trailers passing by her house and asked if quieter trucks could be used.

Dust

A couple of non-farming residents voiced concerns about the dust caused by operations on neighbouring farms. One resident said that they had to have their water tank vacuumed, tested and a filter added due to concerns around dust. Another attendee raised concerns about respiratory issues resulting from dust. A government representative responded to this concern by making

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reference to a Queensland University report into pathogen risks and dust impacts on neighbours, which found that there was no discernible association between dust and illness.

Environmental

Workshop attendees did not voice concerns about the impact of poultry farming on the environment.

Specific industry challenges

The previous sections outline challenges farmers face around zoning and planning, council and industry regulations (including those specific to animal welfare) and complaints from neighbouring residents. In addition to this, one farmer suggested that the supermarket duopoly in NSW has put pressure on the poultry industry in much the same way it affected the dairy industry.

Water

One farmer challenged the inclusion of water as an issue related to poultry farming, suggesting that run off is unlikely because the chickens are contained in sheds, not outside.

Construction

One attendee asked that 'construction' be included as a theme for the workshop. She suggested that farms should not be expanded if the site is unsuitable and, if new sheds are constructed, they should be placed in an appropriate location on the property (i.e. not on a hill).

Industry leader

When introducing the workshop, a member of Council acknowledged that the poultry farming industry in the Wollondilly Shire was, in many ways, industry leading. While not addressing this directly, farmers and industry representatives went on to describe the strict regulations within their industry and their significant impact on employment and economic investment in the region.

History

Numerous attendees suggested that those who had been setup in the Shire for the longest had the greatest right to be there. Some non-farming residents revealed that they had established themselves before their now neighbouring farms existed, while one farmer questioned how they would be expected to relocate a farm that they had spent 30 years developing.

Report of Planning and Economy to the Ordinary Meeting of Council held on Monday 18 July 2016

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Character

Some farmers and non-farming residents had differing opinions about Wollondilly Shire’s character, with workshop attendees interpreting the Council motto – ‘Rural Living - Room to Grow’ – differently. On the one hand, it was suggested that prospective residents should be made acutely aware that the area is rural, providing room for farmers to produce food. On the other hand, a resident described buying 25 acres in the area as a place for her family to live and grow.

Report of Planning and Economy to the Ordinary Meeting of Council held on Monday 18 July 2016

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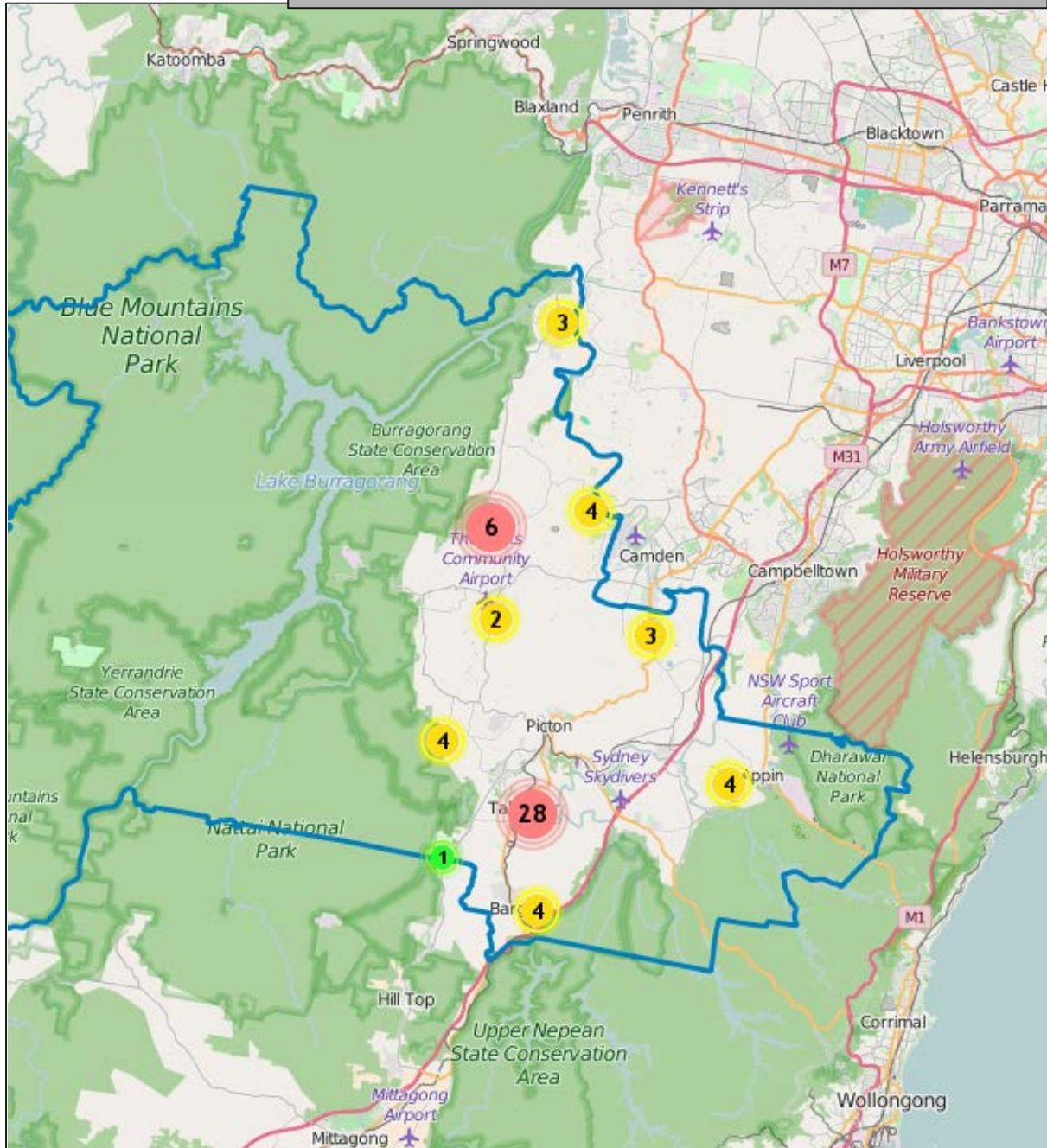
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Planning & Economy

Report of Planning and Economy to the Ordinary Meeting of Council held on Monday 18 July 2016

PE2 - Outcomes of Poultry Industry Forum

ATTACHMENT 3 – 1150 – 18 JULY 2016



Planning & Economy