PART A—Introduction

Background and purpose

Maranoa–Balonne is located in southern Queensland, taking in rich cropping and grazing lands and significant reserves of coal seam gas, conventional gas and petroleum. The region includes a significant part of the Queensland Murray-Darling Basin, including the catchments of the Maranoa and Balonne-Culgoa river systems. The region's population is approximately 18,000. Modest growth is anticipated over the next 20 years, largely arising from developments in the energy sector.

The region comprises the local governments of Maranoa Regional Council and Balonne Shire Council.

Preparation of the Draft Maranoa and Districts Regional Plan was based on the former local government areas of Balonne, Bendemere, Boorilga, Bungil, Murilla, Roma, Tara and Warroo. The Maranoa and Districts region was designated for regional planning purposes under provisions of the Integrated Planning Regulation 1998 in September 2007. The region corresponded to the area encompassed by these former shires.

At the time of local government amalgamation in 2008, the Murilla and Tara Shires were incorporated into the Western Downs Regional Council. After its formation, the Western Downs Regional Council did not engage in preparation of the draft regional plan. As regional planning for Maranoa and Districts involved only two of the six shires amalgamated to form the Western Downs Regional Council, the Planning Minister resolved to use the plan's consultation phase to seek advice from the community about the preferred planning boundary for the region.

Submissions to the draft regional plan strongly favoured the region encompassing only Maranoa Regional Council and Balonne Shire. Further, it was recommended that the region be renamed the Maranoa–Balonne region.

Accordingly, the plan has been finalised to incorporate only the Maranoa Regional Council and Balonne Shire Council. The former Murilla and Tara Shire Councils are no longer included.

An amendment to the Integrated Planning Regulation 1998, in May 2009, redefined the designated region—changing the boundary and name. The plan now reflects these changes.

As part of resolving planning boundaries, before undertaking regional planning to encompass all of the Darling Downs, the state government will review the appropriateness of the Maranoa–Balonne boundary. The Maranoa–Balonne Regional Plan is now final, but may be subject to early review in the light of future regional planning boundary decisions.

The regional plan applies to the western section of the Surat Basin, approximately half its area. There is currently no regional plan for the Darling Downs, apart from the Toowoomba Statistical Division, which is incorporated into the South East Queensland Regional Plan. Nor is there a regional plan to fully encompass the Surat Basin. Pre-planning studies being undertaken for the Surat Basin will inform future regional planning for the basin and the broader Darling Downs region, including the former Murilla and Tara shire sections of Western Downs Regional Council.

People who live and work in the Maranoa–Balonne region are faced with a number of opportunities and challenges over the next 20 years. These include:

- managing growth associated with the development of energy resources in the Surat Basin
- maintaining profitability of enterprises reliant on transport services and facing fluctuating commodity prices
- addressing irregular climatic and weather conditions
- providing opportunities for young people who have traditionally migrated to urban areas
- attracting and retaining skilled staff
- accessing and providing essential services in smaller centres.

1 Planning Information and Forecasting Unit (PIFU), Department of Infrastructure and Planning (December 2008)
Maranoa-Balonne locality map

Disclaimer: The information on this map should be treated as indicative only and subject to ongoing refinement. Based on or contains data provided by the State of Queensland (Department of Environment and Resource Management) 2008. In consideration of the state permitting use of this data you acknowledge and agree that the state gives no warranty in relation to the data (including accuracy, reliability, completeness, currency or suitability) and accepts no liability (including without limitation, liability in negligence) for any loss, damage or costs (including consequential damage) relating to any use of the data. Data must not be used for direct marketing or be used in breach of the privacy laws. Data source: Department of Environment and Resource Management and Department of Infrastructure and Planning.
Future challenges for local communities may also include population reductions in smaller centres, water shortages associated with shifting climate patterns and the effects of significant energy developments.

In response to these challenges affecting rural Queenslanders, the Queensland Government’s Blueprint for the Bush initiative and the Rural Economic Development and Infrastructure Plan were developed to lay the foundations for the future sustainability, liveability and prosperity of these communities. The regional plan will be an essential mechanism for managing change and shaping the prospects of rural communities by:

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

The regional plan, whilst meeting some of the government’s Blueprint for the Bush commitments, is also part of a wider process—ensuring that a consistent and contemporary regional planning framework is operating across all of Queensland. This framework is a key mechanism for integrating federal, state and local government planning agendas, linking infrastructure and service provision to manage future population change, and providing certainty to communities and the business sector.

**Statutory regional plans**

Recent amendments to the Integrated Planning Act 1997 (IPA) allow new or amended regional plans to take statutory effect. Under a statutory regional plan, all subject development and land use in the region will need to comply with the regional plan. The responsible local government authority must amend its planning scheme to reflect the regional plan, within 90 business days of the regional plan’s gazettal. The regional plan prevails where there is inconsistency between it and a local government planning scheme within the region.

The plan also recognises local governments in the region have planning schemes prepared under the IPA and many of the strategies that can be incorporated into planning schemes may already be evident.

The regional plan does not include regulatory provisions in relation to land use, nor does it specify region-specific variation to current state planning policies.

**Working with other plans and strategies**

The regional plan sets out desired regional outcomes, which identify aspirations for ecological sustainability for the region. These desired regional outcomes cannot, however, be achieved through the policies and strategies in this plan alone. Implementation of the strategies and actions of other plans is critical to achieving the region’s vision. Figure 1 depicts the relationship between the regional plan and other plans and strategies.

The regional plan is not an economic, environmental or social plan, and it does not attempt to take the place of conservation or tourism plans or strategies. However, the plan does

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2 Department of Communities (2006) Blueprint for the Bush, Queensland Government, Brisbane
3 Some development assessment and approval processes lie outside the jurisdiction of the Integrated Planning Act 1997. For example, approvals relating to mining and energy developments on mining tenements and for state-significant projects are provided under other legislation. Regional plans are taken to be state interests under the Integrated Planning Act 1997, and to the extent that state interests apply in those legislative processes, the regional plan’s policies apply.
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includes regional land use planning policies that will directly and indirectly work towards achieving environmental, social and economic outcomes.

Other regional planning initiatives in Maranoa–Balonne include the development of the non-statutory regional health services plan and scenario planning for energy developments in the Surat Basin. These were considered in the development of the draft regional plan.

Also considered were statutory planning activities including:
- the development of water resource and resource operations plans for the Moonie, Condamine-Balonne, Warrego-Paroo-Bulloo-Nebine, Fitzroy and Great Artesian basins
- regional vegetation management codes for the western and Brigalow Belt and New England Tableland bioregions.

Preparation

The regional plan has been developed with extensive advice from the Maranoa–Balonne Regional Coordination Committee. The role of the committee is to:
- provide advice to the Planning Minister on regional planning matters
- assist with the preparation, implementation and review of the regional plan
- facilitate the resolution of regional planning issues
- promote a coordinated approach to regional planning.

The Regional Coordination Committee draws representatives from local governments, state government, AgForce, the former Southern Inland Queensland Area Consultative Committee, community organisations and the Queensland Murray-Darling Committee. The advice of other key stakeholders is sought as required.

The draft regional plan was initially made available for public comment for a period of 60 business days, as per the provisions of the Integrated Planning Act 1997. This was extended for a further 22 business days. After considering comments received through formal submissions from the public, local government and other state agencies, the state government produced the final plan.

Application, implementation and review

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Structure of the regional plan

As shown in figure 2, the regional plan comprises the following:

Part A Introduction — provides background material to establish the context and intent of the regional plan. It also outlines the need for the regional plan and its relationship with other planning processes and instruments.

Part B Regional vision — outlines the desired future for the Maranoa–Balonne region.

Part C Strategic directions — sets down the broad policy framework for the regional plan.
Part D Regional activity centres network—applies a statewide framework—used to characterise Queensland’s centres, their facilities and services—to Maranoa–Balonne centres.

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

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

Maps

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

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

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