

Destination Sydney Surrounds South



Destination Weddings & Business Conferencing Strategic Review Report

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1. Introduction

On behalf of Destination Sydney Surrounds South (**DSSS**), Locale Consulting has developed this Strategic Review Report to provide clear direction for the development and growth of destination weddings and business conferencing in rural locations.

The project has assessed the current context of destination weddings and business conferencing in consultation with industry and the six councils comprising the DSSS region, including Wollongong, Shellharbour, Kiama, Shoalhaven, Wingecarribee and Wollondilly local government areas (**LGA's**).

1.1 Purpose of the Strategic Review Report

The purpose of the project is to examine the contribution and demand for weddings and business conferencing in the DSSS region, the extents of which are shown in Figure 1. The project also investigated the management of associated land use approvals and issues associated with the current planning system.

The development of this report is founded on a strong evidence base including, but not limited to, consultation with key stakeholders in each council area, as well as with DSSS staff and others within the industry. Ultimately, the report aims to provide a sound and sustainable platform that can see the ongoing delivery of destination weddings and business conferencing in desirable locations within the DSSS region.

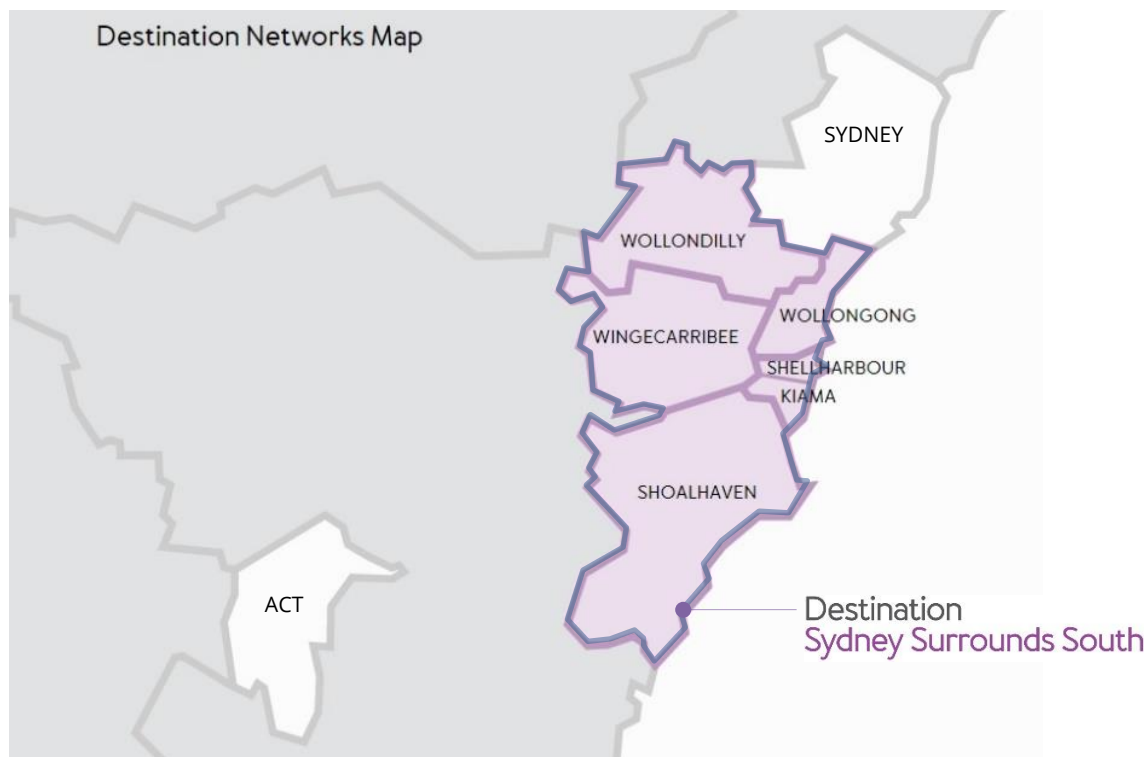


Figure 1: Destination Sydney Surrounds South Region

1.2 Destination Weddings and Business Conferencing Overview

A destination wedding is an opportunity for couples to celebrate their marriage at a unique destination of their choosing, away from their normal home, and typically in a rural, natural or coastal setting. A destination wedding can be held at a range of locations, from farms and other rural properties, to scenic and natural areas that have a high degree of “uniqueness” that differs from the urban context of many city-based weddings.

The same venues and locations can also provide for small scale business conferencing or events. Such business activities would typically occur on weekdays and would typically range from team building retreats to board workshops and meetings. They provide operators with potential for supplementary revenue during the mid-week or at off-peak wedding times (such as summer and winter).

1.3 Strategic Review Report Development

The project has been developed in stages to ensure that sufficient evidence was captured to support the anecdotal feedback received by DSSS regarding blockages to the development of the industry. These stages have included:

- initial engagement and research with the DSSS regions tourism operators, councils and other stakeholders to gain first-hand understanding of the issues being experienced
- targeted research including market analysis and land use planning investigation to understand value and technical limitations to future growth
- a process of review of the fundamental opportunities and constraints to develop clear pathways for change

The outcome of this comprehensive process is the development of this report that reviews the status of the sector and identifies opportunities for local authorities to balance the existing situation with changes that are necessary to support growth in regional tourism. This report therefore seeks to maintain a collaborative process that harnesses a wide range of industry experience and specialist knowledge to develop and enhance existing tourism and business sectors to better align with current and future trends and to cater for the changing needs of the tourism market.

A flowchart showing an outline of the process undertaken in preparation of this report is shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2: Review Process

2. Demand for Destination Weddings and Business Conferencing

This section provides a brief examination of the known demand for destination wedding and business conferencing.

2.1 Demand for Destination Weddings

As with any wedding, destination weddings can range from smaller intimate gatherings, to much larger affairs with large numbers of guests. What is clear from known trends, is that over the last 100 years, the "traditional" religious wedding is now very much in the minority - dropping in the last 20 years from around 50% of weddings, to just over 10% at the current time - as highlighted by the graph at Figure 3.

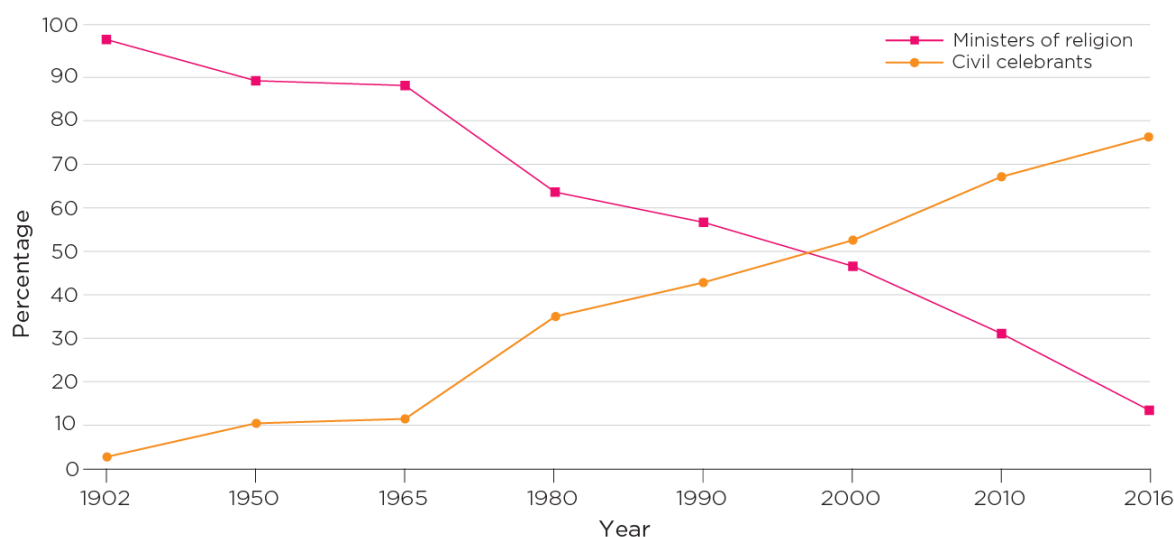


Figure 3: Weddings by celebrant type - 1900 to 2016¹

According to the ABS, there were 112,954 marriages registered in Australia in 2017, with a third being held in New South Wales. DSSS research (Waples 2019) has shown that the value of a destination wedding to the local economy can range from \$16,000 for a smaller "1-star wedding", \$40,000 for a mid-sized "3 star" wedding and \$92,000 for larger "5 star" weddings.

This report suggests that there are six key themes in wedding trends, which correlate to various locations within the DSSS region, as highlighted in the table below.

Table 1: Destination Wedding Themes

Theme	Related Products	Local Government Areas
Rustic	Farm stays, Agricultural attractions, Estates, Breweries and Distilleries	Wingecarribee, Wollondilly, Shoalhaven (Kangaroo Valley area)

¹ Refer - <https://aifs.gov.au/facts-and-figures/marriage-and-divorce-rates>

Theme	Related Products	Local Government Areas
Garden and Outdoor Weddings	Parks and Gardens, National Parks and Reserves	Shellharbour, Shoalhaven, Kiama, Wingecarribee, Wollondilly, Wollongong
Vintage Weddings	Historical sites and heritage locations, historical towns and villages, vintage transportation	Wingecarribee, Shoalhaven, Kiama, Wollondilly, Wollongong
Beach Weddings	Natural Attractions (Beaches), Surf Clubs	Wollongong, Shoalhaven, Kiama, Shellharbour
Boho Chic Weddings	Natural Attractions, Parks and Gardens, Caravan Parks, Glamping	Shellharbour, Shoalhaven, Kiama, Wingecarribee, Wollondilly, Wollongong
Vineyard weddings	Wineries and Vineyards	Wingecarribee, Shoalhaven, Kiama

Weddings, including destination weddings that are based around seasonal attributes, are more popular in Spring and Autumn - as shown in Figure 4. This benefits those within the DSSS region that have very high visitation during the summer period - particularly coastal locations.

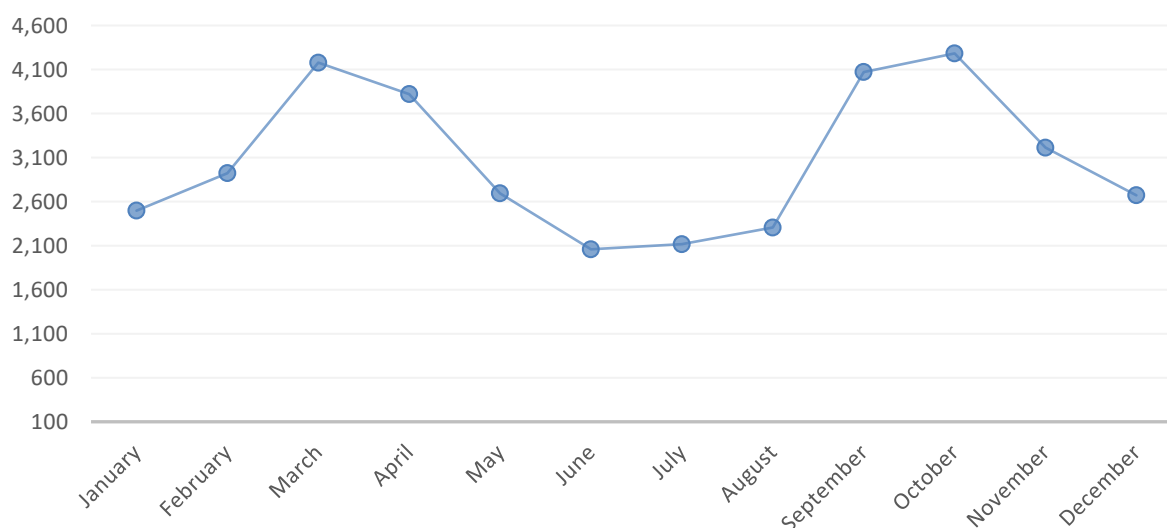


Figure 4: Number of NSW Weddings by Month

DSSS market analysis showed that there are four main wedding types relative to the location they are held. The types of weddings include the following.

- Local - 63% of weddings are held in the region / location where the one of both spouses live
- Destination Wedding with Local Link - 13% of weddings are held in a location where either or both spouses were from but no longer live

- Destination Wedding - 17% of weddings are held in a location where neither spouse were from or currently live
- Overseas Wedding - 7% of weddings are held overseas

Based on these figures, around 30% of all weddings are considered to be destination weddings, whilst a further 7% are being lost to overseas economies. Ensuring that there are sufficient and desirable venues to cater for this demand is important to capturing the benefits of these events to the regional economy.

2.2 Demand for Business Conferencing

The Business Events Council of Australia reported² that business conferences and events contribute close to \$30 billion in direct expenditure in Australia every year. The value-add component, such as additional spending by delegates on goods, services and local tourism, is worth \$13.5 billion. That expenditure was generated by 412,000 business conferences and events with the spend by delegates being up to six times higher than tourists, backpackers and grey nomads.

In NSW, the regional conference industry is valued at \$145 million. Anecdotal evidence suggests there is increasing demand for venues offering small scale meeting facilities for businesses in the DSSS region - particularly those that can offer accessibility to the Sydney market. Events may include board meetings, business retreats as well as social programs and tour opportunities.

The demand for facilities for these business events is complementary to the destination wedding sector. Business events typically occur over mid-week, whilst the wedding market is dominated by the weekend, particularly the Friday, Saturday and Sunday period. This provides important supplementary income to venue operators and can establish additional low scale uses that can assist in viability. With many operators being agricultural producers supplementing their rural income through tourism initiatives, this provides additional opportunities for the diversification of rural incomes and also assists the viability of agricultural sectors.

² The Value of Business Events to Australia - Business Events Council of Australia - February 2015

3. Market Analysis and Benefits

This section provides a brief overview of the current market and benefits associated with the destination wedding and associated business conferencing sector.

3.1 Market Analysis

DSSS developed a comprehensive report on the destination wedding sector's contribution to the visitor economy (Waples 2019). The report concluded:

- On average 91 people attend a destination wedding
- The average cost of a wedding is \$41,000
- Destination weddings make a considerable contribution to the economy within the DSSS region, with the value of visitor expenditure estimated at \$215 million per annum
- Destination weddings in the DSSS region employed 1,441 persons directly and 2,146 persons indirectly, meaning that more than 3,500 jobs in the area relate to the destination weddings sector

Importantly, the report found that the value of local weddings to the broader visitor economy is also high. They deliver large numbers of overnight stays that are booked well in advance, with known flow on benefits and multiplier effects around food, beverage and tourism experiences. Importantly there is a direct relationship between the support and viability that suppliers provide between each other - venues requiring accommodation providers, and accommodation providers requiring venues.

The concentration of weddings on Saturdays, and seasonally in Spring and Autumn, suggest opportunity in the non-traditional market for weekday weddings, but also for a range of supplementary event types, including low scale business events, meetings and conferences.

3.2 Diversification of Rural Economies

Rural areas are mostly used for agriculture, from less intense activities like grazing, to cropping, forestry and rural industries. Rural areas are extensive in most local government areas in the DSSS region.

Tourism has an important and growing role in rural economies. Tourism offers an opportunity for diversification, whether as an alternative or a supplement to farming and other rural incomes. Tourism in rural areas allows people to experience a rural lifestyle and learn about rural and agricultural pursuits.

The area already provides a diverse range of tourism and related experiences, including well known food, wine and natural areas. There is significant potential to build on existing competitive advantages, including a link to these existing experiences and their accessibility to the Sydney and ACT markets, to stimulate further tourism and economic development, and in doing so, to generate more local employment.

Enabling the full weddings and business conferencing market to be fully explored can assist in moving in this direction. Developed in controlled ways, the industry can help to sustain the

economies of local towns and villages, aid rural diversification and attract a range of visitors in various times of the year, creating a more constant stream of tourists and balancing their related activities - including a range of other attractions and events.

3.3 Social Benefits

Tourism in a regional area provides a range of social and cultural benefits to an area as well as additional economic activity. New tourism activities enrich a community by providing focal points and opportunities for local socialising and recreation. Visitors to the DSSS region also bring with them new ideas, perspectives and inspirations, adding to the local community's connectedness to its region and its broader setting.

Being cognisant of the potential negative (whether real or perceived) impacts that can also occur with increasing tourism and general activity in rural locations, it is paramount that future proposals are able to demonstrate a balance between their benefits and mitigate their impacts. Careful planning, on a site by site basis, is therefore recognised as an integral part of the process and recognised in recommended controls as highlighted within this report.

With these checks and balances in place, the destination wedding and business conferencing market provides a range of opportunities to address key social issues. Examples include youth employment through casual work that can lead to more permanent opportunities, increasing entrepreneurial activity as greater levels of visitation offer new localised opportunities to be involved in the sector, and general association with the area being a positive experience as most weddings will provide.

The outcomes therefore provide opportunities to improve the experience of living in the DSSS region through enhancing its social and cultural assets and connections. A vibrant tourism sector increases the range of products, services and experiences that residents can enjoy locally on a day to day basis.

4. Responding to Planning Challenges

As identified within the Weddings Market Report & Product Database (Waples 2019) report commissioned by DSSS, the number of couples choosing to celebrate in traditional wedding venues, such as banquet halls and hotel reception rooms, has dropped significantly in the past eight years (a trend supported by the graph previous shown at Figure 3). Meanwhile, “unconventional” venues, such as barns and farms, are growing in popularity.

As a consequence of the changing nature of the weddings market, councils within the DSSS region are having difficulty balancing high market demand for venues for destination weddings, with the current available planning pathways - which remain more closely aligned with the “traditional” wedding model.

As a consequence of the existing land use planning situation, and the difficulties being experienced in gaining approvals in a cost effective and timely way, there is a high incidence of illegal, unregulated or temporary use activities being relied upon as the NSW Government's “Standard Template” does not cater to a modern interpretation of wedding and business conferencing venues. These issues are further explored below.

4.1 Standard Template Definitions

More traditionally, weddings would be held at a church and/or reception centre, and if non-religious, a public space and restaurant or a larger hotel ball room / function room or similar space. Under the NSW Government's “Standard Template” approach to local planning laws, these types of facilities would typically be defined under the following land use types:

- *Function Centres: A building or place used for the holding of events, functions, conferences and the like, and includes convention centres, exhibition centres and reception centres, but does not include an entertainment facility.*
- *Place of public worship: A building or place used for the purpose of religious worship by a congregation or religious group, whether or not the building or place is also used for counselling, social events, instruction or religious training.*

These types of facilities, and in particular function centres, are often only available and permitted by the planning system in urban settings or zones - such as town centres and commercial zones.

Within rural and more isolated locations, which are commonly desired with respect to destination weddings, the opportunities to facilitate venues suitable for destination weddings is much more difficult. Those land uses which may be applicable to destination weddings in more rural localities, albeit not all, can include:

- *Cellar door premises: A building or place that is used to sell wine by retail and that is situated on land on which there is a commercial vineyard, and where most of the wine offered for sale is produced in a winery situated on that land or is produced predominantly from grapes grown in the surrounding area.*
- *restaurant or café: means a building or place the principal purpose of which is the preparation and serving, on a retail basis, of food and drink to people for consumption on*

the premises, whether or not liquor, take away meals and drinks or entertainment are also provided.

However, there are a number of issues associated with the interpretation and use of these definitions, as even when they are possible in rural areas, destinations weddings are not able to be the main or significant aspect of their operation, instead being "ancillary" to that main use - i.e. they can only be an occasional use. In addition, there is well established case law around the meaning of ancillary use and there is typically little flexibility in this area.

4.2 Heritage Conservation

NSW Government's "Standard Template" contains a heritage conservation clause (Clause 5.10 Heritage Conservation). The heritage conservation clause provides opportunity for development that may meet the needs of a destination wedding venue via the "adaptive use" of the heritage item. However, opportunities are limited by the need for an existing heritage item being present (of which there are typically few), ability for this to meet the needs of a destination wedding / business conferencing venue, and requires a link to a Heritage Management Plan which limits the level of adaptability and can be unviable / expensive to implement. As such this clause is not conducive to the needs of the sector more broadly.

4.3 Temporary Use of Land Clause

Where a permanent and permissible land use term cannot be found to facilitate destination wedding venues for a particular site or locality - which is typically the case - the "temporary use of land" clause is typically then used to "by-pass" the need to be a permanent permitted use.

Several councils within the DSSS region currently utilise Clause 2.8 Temporary Use of Land to enable a number of facilities to operate. However, the use of this clause not only restricts activities and creates uncertainty for operators, they can also result in sub-standard outcomes with respect to their treatment of noise and visual impacts - for example by allowing "temporary" marquees that remain in place for many years.

In addition, it may be argued that ongoing approval under the temporary use clause should not be granted, creating further uncertainty within the industry and the community. Some councils hold the view the approval is not legal under this clause, necessitating changes in some other form or risking illegal operations taking place with no approval mechanism. The use of the temporary clause has also been widely deliberated in the Land and Environment Court (see for example *EMRR Pty Ltd v Murray Shire Council* [2016], *Allman Associates Pty Ltd v Wingecarribee Shire Council* [2016] and *Marshall Rural Pty Limited v Hawkesbury City Council and Ors* [2015]).

As wedding venues are generally booked one year or more before the event, it is an operational imperative that venues be in a position to guarantee to their clients the ongoing operation of the facility.

4.4 Summary of Existing Planning Pathways

The four main planning pathways and the issues being experienced with them are summarised in Figure 5. Ultimately this existing situation highlights the lost opportunity to positively respond to the known market needs and resulting in regional economies not being able to capture the economic and tourism benefits.



Figure 5: Potential approval pathways and issues encountered with Standard Instrument

4.5 Alternative Planning Approaches

Currently several councils, including Byron Shire and Clarence Valley Council, have submitted Planning Proposals to the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment to amend their Local Environmental Plans (LEPs). Both councils have proposed to do this through the addition of a local clause with a view to moving away from reliance on the temporary use clause.

Local clauses are generally applied in individual LEPs to reflect locality specific circumstances. These clauses are used to provide additional context and to assist in planning for issues that are not necessarily present state-wide. This precedent for a local clause has been approved by the Department of Planning, Industry & Environment via a "Gateway determination".

The local clause proposed by Byron Shire Council includes a specific definition for "rural events" with several policy requirements be applied to the definition. The planning proposal is currently in the post exhibition phase and is with the Department of Planning, Industry & Environment for final determination. The planning proposal for Clarence Valley Council

includes function centres in the list of uses permitted with consent in rural zones and proposes a local clause for an additional context to the provision of function centres on rural lands. This planning proposal has just completed public exhibition.

4.6 Recommended Alternative Planning Pathway

With the issue of potential operators not being able to respond to demand for destination weddings and business conferencing across many council areas within the DSSS region, it is preferable that a consistent local clause across all applicable LEPs be pursued. Given precedent exists for the use of a local clause for function centres in non-urban areas, it is recommended that councils within the DSSS region utilise a similar approach.

In reaching this position, it is however clear that specific land use planning issues and potential conflicts have been identified by several councils - such as traffic and noise related issues. These are legitimate concerns and any local clause should seek to balance these as part of a considered policy approach through requiring specific information to be provided and ensuring appropriate objectives are used.

It is also recommended that the use of the clause is accompanied by a supporting development control plan (**DCP**). The benefit of a supporting DCP approach is that whilst an overarching framework could be applied through a consistent LEP clause, a DCP provides for more specific localised input that can be used to recognise differences between councils within the DSSS region. This is discussed further in section 5.

In the circumstances of destination wedding venues, a new local clause would accompany the existing "function centre" definition being made permissible in certain zones. For example, the use may be appropriate in an *RU1 - Primary Production*, *RU2 - Rural Landscape* and *E3 - Environmental Management* zones, *E4 - Environmental Living* rather than the arguably more sensitive *E2 - Environmental Conservation* zones.

To counter the existing broad land use definition under the Standard Instrument, the local clause would then provide details on how and when applications of this type would be considered. The main benefit of a local clause is that the use can be better defined and regulated, reducing amenity impacts such as noise and traffic while stimulating investment and growth in the industry. Further benefits for a specific definition include the following:

- Provides the greatest level of certainty for landowners and operators as well as surrounding neighbours
- Provides clarity around the types of activities and an indication of scale that may be acceptable to Council
- Assists a growing industry and help diversify regional economies
- Provides consistency with Regional Plan objectives and actions
- Can further protect the rural or environmental context through the use of specific DCP provisions

A recommended draft local clause is further discussed in Section 5.

5. Recommended Planning Controls

The following section outlines recommended planning controls that seek to balance the potential for meeting the needs of the destination wedding / business conferencing market in rural areas with the potential for negative impacts resulting from poorly regulated outcomes. It includes a recommended local clause for potential inclusion in each council's LEP within the DSSS region, as well as supplementary DCP controls that are recommended to accompany the local clause for function centres in certain rural and environmental zones.

5.1 Recommended LEP Local Clause

The following recommended local clause has been developed in response to the known need for balance between future industry needs and localised amenity concerns. These should be read in conjunction with the accompanying DCP controls outlined in Section 5.2.

Clause [insert clause number] Function centres in certain Rural and Environmental Zones

- (1) Objectives of this clause are as follows:*
 - (a) to provide for appropriate functions and conferences, such as weddings and corporate retreats, in a rural environment, and*
 - (b) to ensure that function centres do not adversely impact on the agricultural production, scenic or environmental values of the land.*
- (2) This clause applies to land in the following zones:*
 - (a) Zone RU1 Primary Production,*
 - (b) Zone RU2 Rural Landscape,*
 - (c) Zone E3 Environmental Management, and*
 - (d) Zone E4 Environmental Living.*
- (3) Development consent must not be granted to function centres on land in a zone to which this clause applies unless the consent authority is satisfied that the development:*
 - (a) is, or will be, serviced by adequate access roads taking into account the scale of the development,*
 - (b) will complement the rural or environmental attributes of the land and its surrounds, and*
 - (c) will not have an adverse impact on agricultural production, amenity or the significant features of the surrounding natural environment.*
- (4) When assessing a development application for development on land to which this clause applies, the consent authority must consider the following:*
 - (a) that the location of development on environmentally sensitive land and is appropriate having regard to the management of bush fire and/or flood risk and achieving biodiversity outcomes, and*
 - (b) noise, privacy, traffic, visual and other impacts do not unduly detract from the amenity of the area, and*
 - (c) if the development will result in unreasonable conflict to the use of the land or any adjoining land for agriculture or rural industries, and*
 - (d) if the development is located in an unsewered area, adequate on-site wastewater systems will service the land without having an adverse impact on the water quality of the area.*

5.2 Recommended Development Control Plan Controls

The following recommended DCP controls have been developed to provide further details and context to the interpretation and implementation of the local clause recommended at Section 5.1. It establishes details to be considered in the assessment of development applications and how these may be considered by respective councils.

Introduction

These DCP controls provides specific requirements for the development of function centres in rural and environmental zones. Other requirements that must be addressed are contained in the relevant parts [insert relevant part/ section number as applicable] of this DCP. Where a conflict exists between this section and the [insert relevant part/ section number], this section prevails.

Purpose

To identify Council's requirements relating to function centres in rural and environmental zones.

Application

The planning provisions of this chapter apply to function centres in the RU1 Primary Production, RU2 Rural Landscape, E3 Environment Management and E4 Environmental Living Zones.

What are the objectives of controls for function centres?

- a) To diversify the rural economy by promoting destination weddings and business conferencing to facilitate growth in the local tourism economy.
- b) To ensure function centres are compatible with and supports the use of land for other rural and environmental purposes, including primary production.
- c) To ensure the size and scale of function centres is consistent with the aim of protecting and enhancing the natural environment or scenic amenity of the locality and that the potential impacts on the amenity of neighbours is minimised.
- d) To ensure that function centres are sympathetically designed and sited such that development does not impinge on the amenity of adjoining properties or the character of the area more broadly.

Design and operational controls

- a) The function centre should be integrated and able to operate in conjunction with agricultural activities whether on the same, or on an adjoining land holding.
- b) The development shall be designed to be complementary to the rural landscape and utilise building materials that blend with surrounds. The use of recycled materials and materials sourced from the region is also encouraged.
- c) Site planning and design of structures shall provide consideration of:
 - i. the topography and landscape features of the site

- ii. where there is a direct line of sight between area proposed to be utilised for event activities and adjacent dwellings
- iii. current and potential future use of neighbouring land
- iv. opportunities to minimise travel distances and impacts on surrounding land
- v. energy efficiency
- vi. flood prone land
- vii. high biodiversity values on the land
- viii. bush fire risk.

Refer to section/ part **[include section number]** for matters concerning hazards, flora and fauna and risk.

d) An **Operational Management Plan** is to be submitted with the development application and include the following:

- i. Proximity of development to residential dwellings and other sensitive receptors within a 5 km radius
- ii. Nominate operational parameters including:
 - hours of operation - being no later than 10 pm, and 8 pm on Sundays
 - hours of operation of amplified music where proposed - being no later than 9 pm
 - days of operation
 - maximum number of guests
- iii. Patron behaviour management and mitigation measures to be employed
- iv. Identified locations of guest access, including consideration of biosecurity management on operational farms
- v. Complaints management procedures to be employed.

e) A **Traffic Management Plan** is to be submitted with the development application and include the following:

- i. An appropriately scaled plan showing parking and access appropriate to the operational needs of the facility
- ii. Likely travel paths from the main roads from which guests are likely to access the facility, including their current condition and suitability for the proposed level of traffic to be generated.
- iii. Identification of appropriate design standards to allow safe and efficient vehicle (including bus/coach) movement to and from the site, and enables access and egress from the site in a forward direction.
- iv. Minimisation of hard stand areas that may be contrary to the local amenity / character of the locality.

- v. Provision of appropriate siting and landscape of parking and access so as to not detract or compromise the streetscape appearance of the locality.
 - vi. Measures to be applied to reduce vehicle traffic, including the use of bus services where appropriate.
- f) A **Noise Mitigation Plan**, prepared by a suitably qualified person, is to be submitted with the development application and include the following:
- i. quantification of the existing background noise levels and noise levels predicted for activities within the proposed development.
 - ii. noise mitigation measures used to reduce impacts on any sensitive receptors, including (but not limited to):
 - use of amplified music
 - location and design of areas likely to generate noise - e.g. dining rooms
 - use of outdoor spaces, including times of use and permitted activities
 - location and design of parking and transportation gathering spaces to avoid or reduce impacts of guests leaving the facility at night
- g) A **Land Use Risk Assessment** is to be submitted with the development application that objectively assesses the effect of a proposed land use on neighbouring land uses and provide strategies to help minimise the potential for land use conflicts to occur. Where land use conflict risks are identified, appropriate mitigation measures should be applied, such as vegetation buffers established on the proponent's land.
- NOTE: Where the proposed development is in close proximity to established agricultural land uses, in particular intensive agricultural uses, increased setbacks may be required in accordance with current Department of Primary Industries guidance, to ensure that the adjoining land owner maintains their 'Right to Farm'.
- h) A **Preliminary Site Contamination Report** is to be submitted if an existing farm building or the like that was previously used for agricultural purposes, is to be utilised to demonstrate the building is suitable for the proposed development.

Site Servicing

- i) A **Waste Management Plan** is to be submitted with any development application to set out measures to be employed to separate and dispose of green waste, paper products, and other recyclable materials.
- j) An **Effluent Management Plan** is to be submitted with any development application that demonstrates that the subject site can accommodate an On Site Sewer Management System (OSSMS).

6. Conclusion

Moving forward, balancing the demand for destination weddings and business conferences will be important. It is clear there is a strong market demand for this sector as it makes a considerable contribution to the local economy with the value of visitor expenditure estimated at \$215 million per annum in the DSSS region.

The sector also offers an opportunity for economic diversification in rural areas, whether as an alternative or a supplement to farming and other rural incomes. Tourism in rural areas exposes more people to the experience of a rural lifestyle and an opportunity to learn about rural pursuits, agriculture and farming practices, creating greater understanding of the importance of the agricultural sector and “farm to plate” processes.

Within the available planning pathways, regional councils have expressed their difficulty in enabling appropriate venues in suitable locations. This has resulted in adverse amenity impacts as the some uses are not being appropriately regulated, and are not meeting the long-term needs of the industry. This creates uncertainty and conflict within the land use planning system, for both communities and industry. The proposed local clause and supporting DCP controls will assist in balancing the current market demand for venues and locations for this sector.

The proposed local clause for function centres in rural and environmental zones will also provide a clear policy framework for councils. Unlike the use of the temporary use clause, the amendment will provide certainty for operators of function centres in non-urban areas. The additional clause will provide councils with the necessary force to ensure any proposed uses are appropriate to their location and that they are able to maintain the agricultural and environmental values of the land.

With appropriate land use planning foundations in place, rural function centres can be better regulated and as a result, potential for amenity impacts can be reduced, and key issues such as noise and traffic impacts can be managed.

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