

22 February 2005

Draft Regional Plan Feedback  
Office of Urban Management  
Reply Paid 31  
Brisbane Albert Street BC, Qld 4002

Dear Sir/Madam,

This Submission commenting on the Draft South East Queensland Regional Plan is prepared and lodged by Maple Street Cooperative Society Ltd (Maple Street Co-op), 37 Maple Street, Maleny Qld 4552, and is signed by Leigh Findlay, Chairman, on behalf of the Board of Directors.

## **1.0 FACTS AND CIRCUMSTANCES**

Maple Street Co-op has been operating in Maleny for 25 years, having been established in December 1979, and has a long history of serving our members and being pro-active in the community at large. Over the years and up till today, our members have settled in Maleny and the surrounding district because of the special village character, the rural/agricultural landscape and the cooperative atmosphere (we have the most cooperatives per capita in the southern hemisphere and the second most in the world).

The Co-op has an active membership of 636, representing a broad cross-section of the community, and is also a significant local employer and outlet for local organic food producers. We publish a bi-monthly newsletter with a circulation of 2,500 (the latest edition is attached).

The Maple Street Co-op, which operates in accordance with the Cooperative Act, is an ethical organisation which retains its profits for the benefit of members and the community. We are committed to achieving sustainability now and in the future and to providing our community with healthy, ethical and progressive choices for personal and planetary wellbeing through the practice and promotion of cooperative principles.

The Board members of Maple Street Co-op are making this Submission on behalf of the cooperative's members.

## 2.0 GROUNDS FOR THIS SUBMISSION

While congratulating the Office of Urban Management for taking on the formidable task of preparing a groundbreaking SEQ Regional Plan to help control development and preserve the environment in southeast Queensland over the next 20 years, the Board of Maple Street Co-operative has a number of concerns about the Draft Plan in relation to our region.

Maple Street Co-op is part of a diverse local economy comprising cooperatives, small businesses including knowledge-based industries, primary producers and more – and that don't really stand to gain from an expanded Urban Footprint in the Maleny district. Indeed, we have more cooperatives in Maleny than anywhere else in the southern hemisphere; they are seen by many nationally as well as internationally as a model for sustainable communities. The expansion of "suburbia" within our district will undermine our special economy and compromise the social, environmental and spiritual values that we have integrated within our cooperatives and broader community to date.

The area that primarily interests us is the Maleny district, but we are also concerned about preserving the entire Blackall Range and its foothills from Mapleton to Montville to Maleny and beyond, to Witta and down to Conondale in the Mary Valley.

As a food co-operative, we sell organic produce from a variety of SEQ growing regions, so it's in our interest, too, to help protect the integrity of their local environments and their economic and social well-being. We also sell organic produce and products from local suppliers who are keen to keep their businesses intact, even when some of them are being encroached upon by housing estates and other urban uses.

And while it could be argued that Maple Street Co-op could benefit from more and more people moving to the area in terms of increased sales, we contend that a larger population allowed for under the Draft SEQRP will be unsustainable in this sensitive water catchment area and will have a deleterious impact on our environment and rural amenity. We are concerned, too, that the population growth projections for the Sunshine Coast within the next 20 years will be unsustainable if only in terms of the limited water supply sourced from our very own Obi Obi Creek and nearby Baroon Pocket Dam (Lake Baroon).

We note that the Maleny region is not mentioned in the text of the Draft SEQRP and noted only on maps 3, 4 and 5 in the Draft SEQRP, so it would appear it has not been earmarked as a Regional Activity Centre or for a significant regional role in SEQ. However, Maleny and surrounding districts have special qualities setting them apart from other rural areas and so, we maintain, deserve special consideration under the SEQ Regional Plan.

### **3.0 THEMES OF THIS SUBMISSION**

#### **3.1 Maleny's proposed "Urban Footprint" is far too large**

The Draft SEQRP "Urban Footprint" proposed for Maleny is up to three times the size of what is currently designated under the Caloundra City Plan (the preparation for which involved some degree of community consultation). Granted, the Urban Footprint is designed to define the areas outside it that cannot be developed, but in Maleny it amounts to around 873 hectares compared with 292 ha (or 594 ha if Rural Residential Settlement areas are included) under City Plan. (We refer here to figures provided in the Submission prepared for Maleny District Green Hills Fund by Mr Paul Summers of Paul Summers Planning Strategies.)

We consider the term "Urban Footprint" to be inappropriate as applied to the rural township of Maleny, a town founded on forestry and then dairy industries and diversifying over the years to include other agricultural and rural enterprises supported by a resident- and visitor-based economy. We still prize what is left of our native forests and, indeed, support moves to preserve them and create more wildlife corridors, and we appreciate seeing agricultural land and contented cows as a backdrop to our town. We also support appropriate development, including creative, sustainable enterprises that are permitted under the City Plan's designations.

We don't think Maleny needs additional land committed to "urban" development beyond that which is already allowed for under the Caloundra City Plan – which we consider is already more than enough in this sensitive water catchment area – and we urge the OUM to amend the Urban Footprint of the Draft SEQRP at least in line with City Plan. And particularly considering the fact that there is a review period, we do not consider it appropriate at this stage and up to the first review period that such a significant increase in land which has the potential to be zoned for urban development should be allowed.

#### **3.2 We live in an important water catchment area**

The Draft SEQRP does not give special status to the Obi Obi catchment area, which provides water supply not just for Maleny township but, via Baroon Pocket Dam, much of the southern end of the Sunshine Coast, where water needs will be rising over the next 20 years if a much larger population is to be accommodated.

We are aware that Lake Baroon Catchment Care Group President Peter Stevens, who is on Caloundra City Council's Environment Advisory Committee (EAC), has urged the OUM to declare Maleny a Water Catchment Region, which has a specific definition under the Water Act; this action would offer more protection to the Obi Obi/Baroon catchment.

### **3.3 We still have good agricultural land and room for innovation**

The Draft SEQRP Urban Footprint proposed for Maleny still includes good agricultural land and productive primary industries that are also engaged in value-adding activities. Properties/producers located within the proposed Urban Footprint, whether they be family farms or emerging, innovative industries set up on relatively small, fertile parcels of land, should be allowed to stay in production. We suggest the OUM remove City Plan–designated Rural and Rural Residential Settlement Areas from the proposed Urban Footprint and have them placed within the Regional Landscape and Rural Production Areas.

### **3.4 We are geographically unique**

The Draft SEQRP regards Maleny in a similar way to hinterland railway towns such as Landsborough and Beerwah, which are on railway and highway transport links and are closer to major service centres. These towns have a flat topography compared with Maleny's rolling green hills and water catchment. We don't think it appropriate that the SEQRP categorise Maleny and environs according to the same criteria as these railway towns.

### **3.5 We have an economy that depends in part on tourism**

The Draft SEQRP fails to acknowledge Maleny's special role as a regional town on the tourism route, where tourists want to spend time enjoying the rural atmosphere of the town and environs. At Maple Street Co-op, we have interaction with visitors to our shop, particularly at weekends and during holiday periods. Further urban development around Maleny will seriously detract from the town's scale and character and will have a deleterious impact on tourist numbers and the quality of the tourist visit.

And while it can be argued that the Co-op stands to win from a larger Urban Footprint bringing with it more customers, this would be out of line with our principles of promoting sustainability, personal well-being and environmental integrity. In other words, we don't see an extended Urban Footprint furthering the interests of Maple Street Co-op, our members or our community. Exacerbating the traffic chaos already experienced in Maleny at key times every day is but one negative spin-off of a larger Urban Footprint.

### **3.6 Our town is growing too quickly**

The Draft SEQRP does not acknowledge that the Maleny district has limited infrastructure, transport services, community services and social services and is not geared to cater for a larger population as allowed for under the Draft SEQRP. Past Caloundra City planning regulations have allowed housing and commercial developments to spring up in recent times that should never have been approved,

some of them encroaching on the water catchment and the Obi Obi Creek ecology. Not even the City Plan, adopted in August 2004 is devoid of deficiencies. Allowing for a much larger Urban Footprint is likely to provide an opportunity for increased development which would place additional stresses on our sensitive area.

Our Community Centre is in need of major refurbishment or reconstruction, and we have a vague promise that Council will provide some community facilities if agricultural land (Porter's and Armstrong's farms) can be rezoned and developed for a "Community Precinct and Golf Course" including another housing estate. Our community's needs into the future won't be met under the Draft SEQRP as we see it.

The township is already having significant peak-hour traffic problems seven days a week, even before new residential housing estates are completed. The traffic problem is already exacerbating the quieter, rural ambience and lifestyle that we appreciate about our area.

### **3.7 We want to avoid urban development pressure**

If the City Plan has to be amended in accordance with the SEQRP as it now stands and in accordance with the Integrated Planning Act, the pressure for the entire Urban Footprint area to be developed long before 2025 will be too great. We need to be assured that the SEQRP will prevent the pressure for development in our area and help us retain its present scale and character.

In our view, the crux of the matter is the relationship between the SEQRP and the City Plan: where they overlap, it is likely there will be major conflict. It is realistic to assume that pressure for development in the Urban Footprint will be intense. We are seeing it now, one such example being the current debacle over the proposed Woolworths supermarket alongside Obi Obi Creek in the middle of Maleny township (which was approved by Council under a code assessibility, not an impact assessibility, ruling as would now be applicable under the new City Plan).

We contend that, inevitably, this pressure for development will apply to areas outside the current City Plan Urban zone, and when this occurs it is probable that the matter will be decided by a court. Historically, the community does not fare well in such situations, so it is also reasonable to assume that a court would give greater weight to the state legislation. We consider it imperative that the SEQRP legislation ensure that all development in the designated Urban Footprint be the sole responsibility of Caloundra City Council and that no legal challenge seeking to override Council's authority will succeed.

#### 4.0 SOLUTIONS AND CONCLUSION

We refer to the submission made by Maleny District Green Hills Fund (MDGHF) (prepared by Paul Summers Planning Strategies) which has identified the OUM's adoption of a "simple mapping approach" as a key deficiency in the Regional Plan proposed for Maleny. We support its call for a more sophisticated outcome for the Maleny township and region and for a better alignment between the SEQRP and the Caloundra City Plan.

With reference to Map 4 on page 8 and Map 5 on page 13 of MDGHF's submission, we agree that:

- **categories 1 and 8** should stay in the Urban Footprint, in line with City Plan's Urban designation, although we do note that category 8 is zoned for Open Space Conservation & Waterways by City Plan and thus should be protected from urban encroachment even under City Plan;
- **categories 3B and 5** should be removed from the Urban Footprint and be designated as Regional Landscape & Rural Production Areas;
- **categories 2, 4 and 7**, currently Rural and Rural Residential Settlement under City Plan, should be removed from the Urban Footprint and be designated Rural Living Areas;
- **categories 3A and 6**, covering the Porter and Armstrong land as well as the effluent treatment area (with the exception of land off Obi Lane which would be better designated as Rural Living Area), which are currently Rural or Open Space precincts under City Plan, should be reconsidered according to the proposed Mapping Investigation option as well as the Review option, especially as these two categories are still subject to investigation by Council and considering that the SEQRP is required to be reviewed every five years.

We also support Caloundra City Council's recommendation (section 6.2 of the Council's submission dated January 2005) that "the Rural Residential Settlement precincts at North Maleny and Walkers Creek be considered for removal from the 'Urban Footprint' and inclusion in the 'Rural Living' area" and thus "be able to develop for rural residential uses in accordance with the City Plan provisions and not allow urban uses". We note that Caloundra City Council supports its position in view of "long-term planning investigations for this area, the water catchment protection requirements for Baroon Pocket Dam and a strong local community mandate".

At a public meeting attended by around 200 residents in Maleny on 29 January, Mr Lindsay Enwright, the OUM's Director of Strategic Planning, said he recognises the valid concerns raised at the meeting and agrees to consider them seriously.

We make this submission in the expectation that the OUM will decide to reduce the size of the Urban Footprint proposed for Maleny and consider options so we may continue to enjoy the very qualities of our landscape, environment and townships that are our reason for being here. We want to preserve and nurture, not destroy, our precious town and region.

Thank you for your time and attention in considering this Submission from Maple Street Co-op on behalf of its members.

Yours faithfully,

Leigh Findlay (Dr)  
for the Board of Directors  
Maple Street Cooperative Society Ltd  
37 Maple Street  
Maleny, Qld 4552