



Hawkesbury City Council

Attachment 3
to
item 179

Draft Hawkesbury Rural Lands Study
- Synopsis

date of meeting: 24 September 2019
location: council chambers
time: 6:30 p.m.

Hawkesbury Rural Lands Strategy Synopsis



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The Hawkesbury Local Government Area (LGA) is located in the outer north west of the Sydney metropolitan area and is located approximately 50 km from the Sydney CBD. It has an area of 2,793 square kilometres and a population estimated to be 67,083 in 2018 with an annual average growth rate of 0.7% per annum for the past ten years and 0.6% for the 2017-18 year.

The rural lands of Hawkesbury are an important part of the City and the wider region. They contain agricultural activities, scenic rural landscapes, native vegetation, biodiversity corridors and areas for rural living. Agriculture has been identified by the Council and the community as being an important component of the economy.

The LGA has significant agricultural land as well as riverine and mountainous rural landscapes. The Hawkesbury River provides a wide floodplain of rich alluvial soils which grow significant amounts of vegetables and turf. The river and the mountainous vegetated landscapes also provide for a significant tourism sector that is also linked to the agricultural produce. There is also a significant horse industry – including both thoroughbred and recreational horses.

The land within the LGA provides an important resource, both for the Hawkesbury LGA and the wider Sydney region, particularly for agricultural produce. This resource consists of a number of components:

- Productive agriculture
- Industry
- Community facilities and services
- Towns and villages
- Cultural heritage
- Rural landscapes
- Waterways and Native vegetation including National Parks and Nature Reserves

The Hawkesbury LGA is being affected by the trend to lifestyle living as people move away from the hustle and bustle of the city to a more rural lifestyle whilst still having the ability to go to the city for business and leisure. These people seek to live in rural and urban settings. There have been an increase in the number of rural residential rural living lots – 2, 10, 40 ha or more that people live on and do not gain the majority of their income from the productive capacity of the land. This trend is being noticed all around the fringe metropolitan areas of Australia's capital cities.

There are a variety of land uses within the rural parts of the LGA. They include intensive and extensive agriculture, native vegetation, rural residential, urban, extractive industries, commercial and light industrial uses. They all have an impact on each other as well as the environment. The main land uses which are of note are agriculture, and rural residential. The resultant rural land use conflict from the various uses is perhaps one of the most important issues to be addressed for the future of agricultural landscapes. Finding the balance between these often-competing desires for rural land is the key to planning for rural areas.

There are basically two forms of land use within the study area – ones based on agriculture and ones that do not have an agricultural base.

The uses based on agriculture include the following:

- Irrigated plants
 - ⇒ Vegetables grown in market gardens and protected cropping structures,
 - ⇒ Nurseries
 - ⇒ Turf

- Intensive Animals
 - ⇒ Poultry meat and egg production
- Grazing animals
 - ⇒ Cattle,
 - ⇒ Horse studs, agistment/boarding, and horses associated with rural residential use
- Rural Tourism uses
 - ⇒ Farm gate sales,
 - ⇒ Horse riding,
 - ⇒ Farm Stay Accommodation.

There are also a number of uses that are not based on agriculture which include the following:

- Rural residential uses
 - ⇒ Rural residential dwellings only,
 - ⇒ Home businesses, tradesman or truck depots,
 - ⇒ Horses (domestic / recreational)
 - ⇒ Bed & Breakfast / accommodation
- Commercial Uses
 - ⇒ Petrol stations, shops, medical practitioners, mechanical repairs, clubs, cafes and restaurants
- Extractive industries
 - ⇒ Quarries
- Public Uses
 - ⇒ Cemeteries, halls, churches, pony clubs
- Rural Tourism uses
 - ⇒ Caravan Parks,
- Village development
 - ⇒ Residential, commercial, industrial uses

A land use survey has been carried out and this found that 86.1% of the land uses are rural residential with 18.8% of these being in the rural fringe category which are estates with kerb and guttering and adjoining or near to urban centres (Pitt Town and Windsor Downs) and the remainder being rural living category which are scattered throughout the rural landscape of the LGA this can be seen from figure 1 and maps 1 and 2. Most of the rural residential uses are just for living purposes but some also have other activities associated with the use including trucks, horses, home businesses and bed and breakfast accommodation. The next highest land use is irrigated plants which makes up 4.5% of the number of properties followed by extensive agriculture, commercial, public uses, vacant, intensive animals and extractive industries. The main types of irrigated plant uses are market gardens, turf farming, orchards and protected cropping, nurseries and mushroom farms. The intensive animal uses are made up of horse studs and poultry farms with some small dairies.

The rural land in the LGA is highly fragmented with the average size being 6.2 ha and a median of 2.0 ha. The majority of holdings are in the less than 0.8 ha range and followed by 0.81 – 3.0 ha range and that there is not very many larger than 18ha. In fact, 62.3% of the holdings are less than 3 ha and 81.1% are less than 8 ha This can be seen from figure 2 and maps 3 and 4.

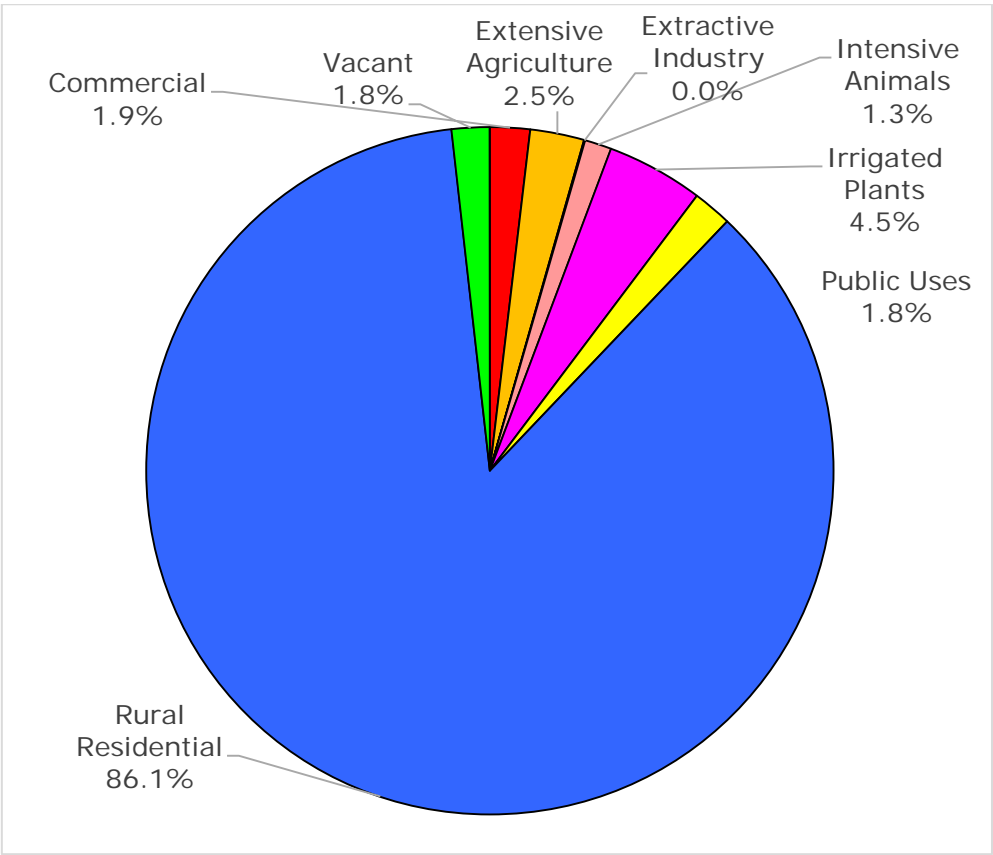


Figure 1: Rural Land Use

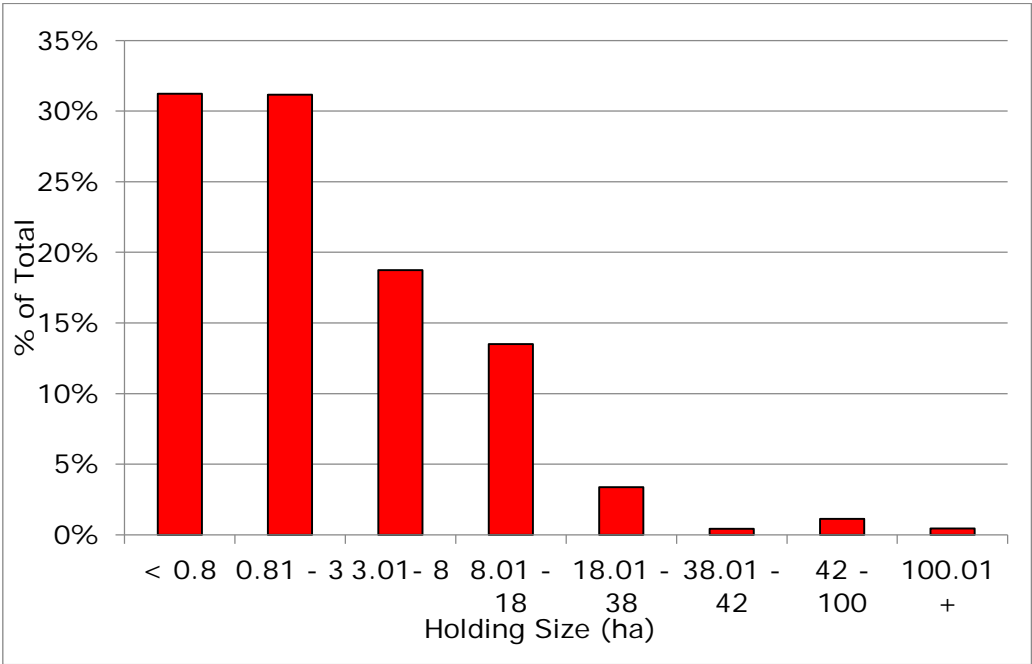
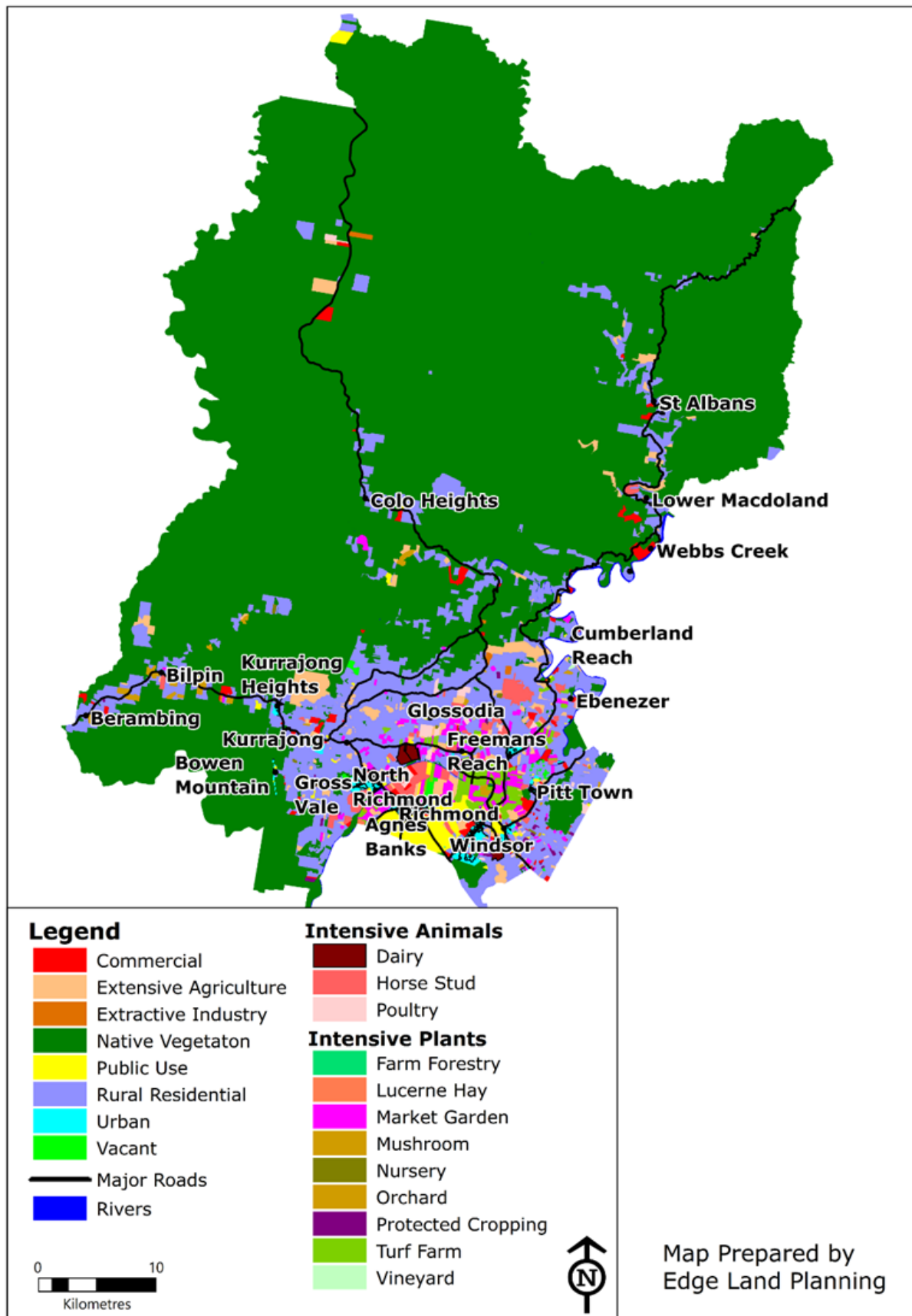
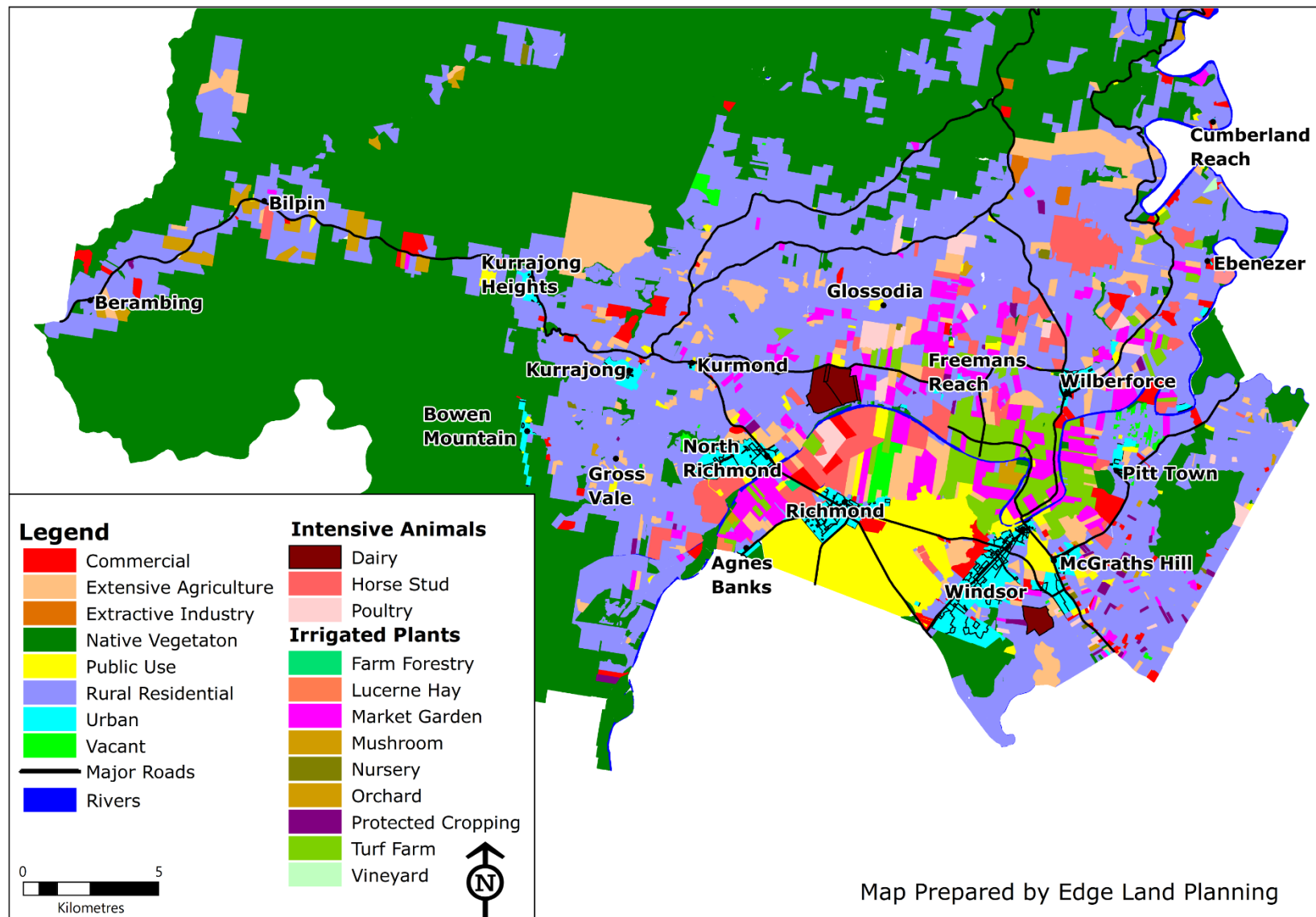


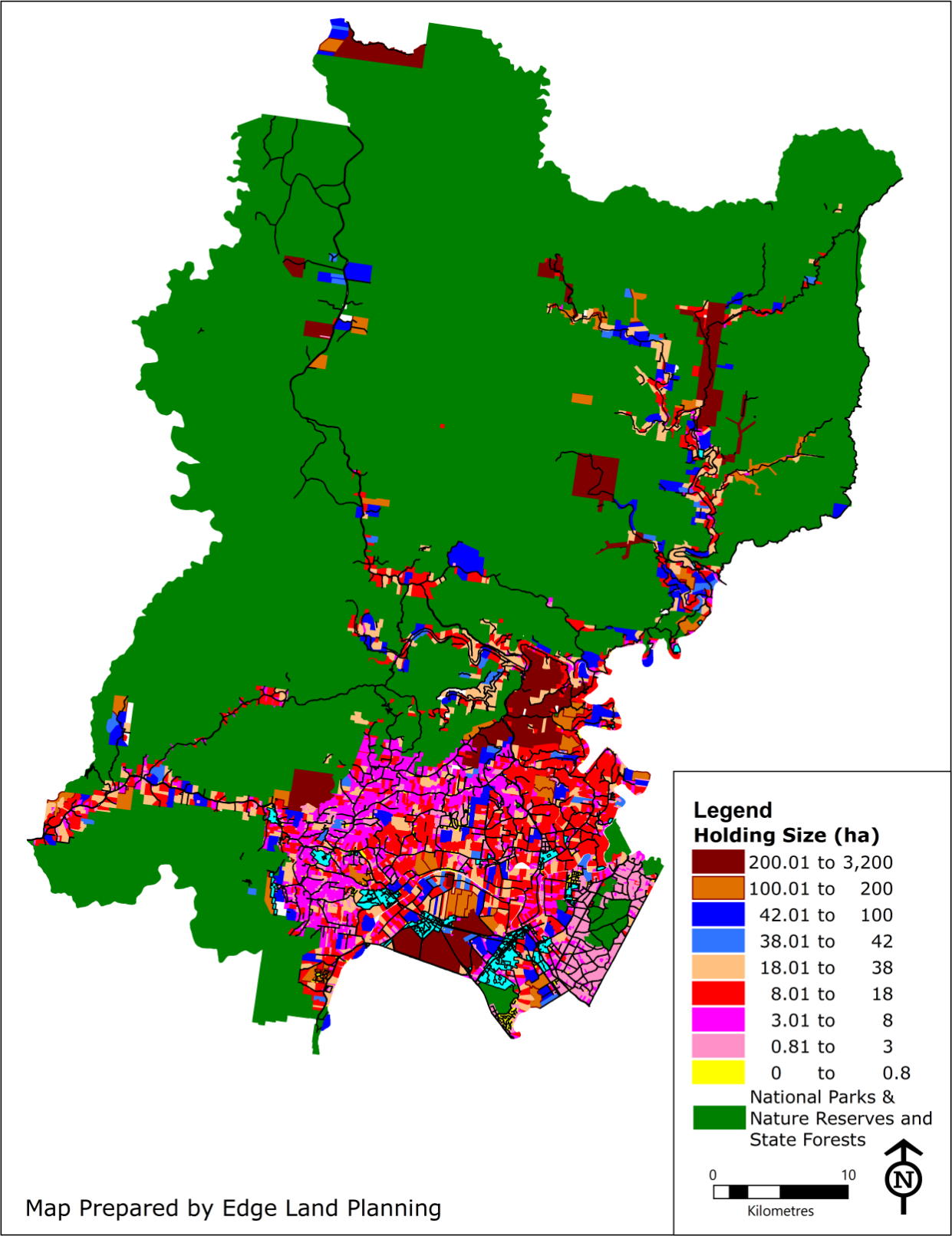
Figure 2: Rural Holding Sizez



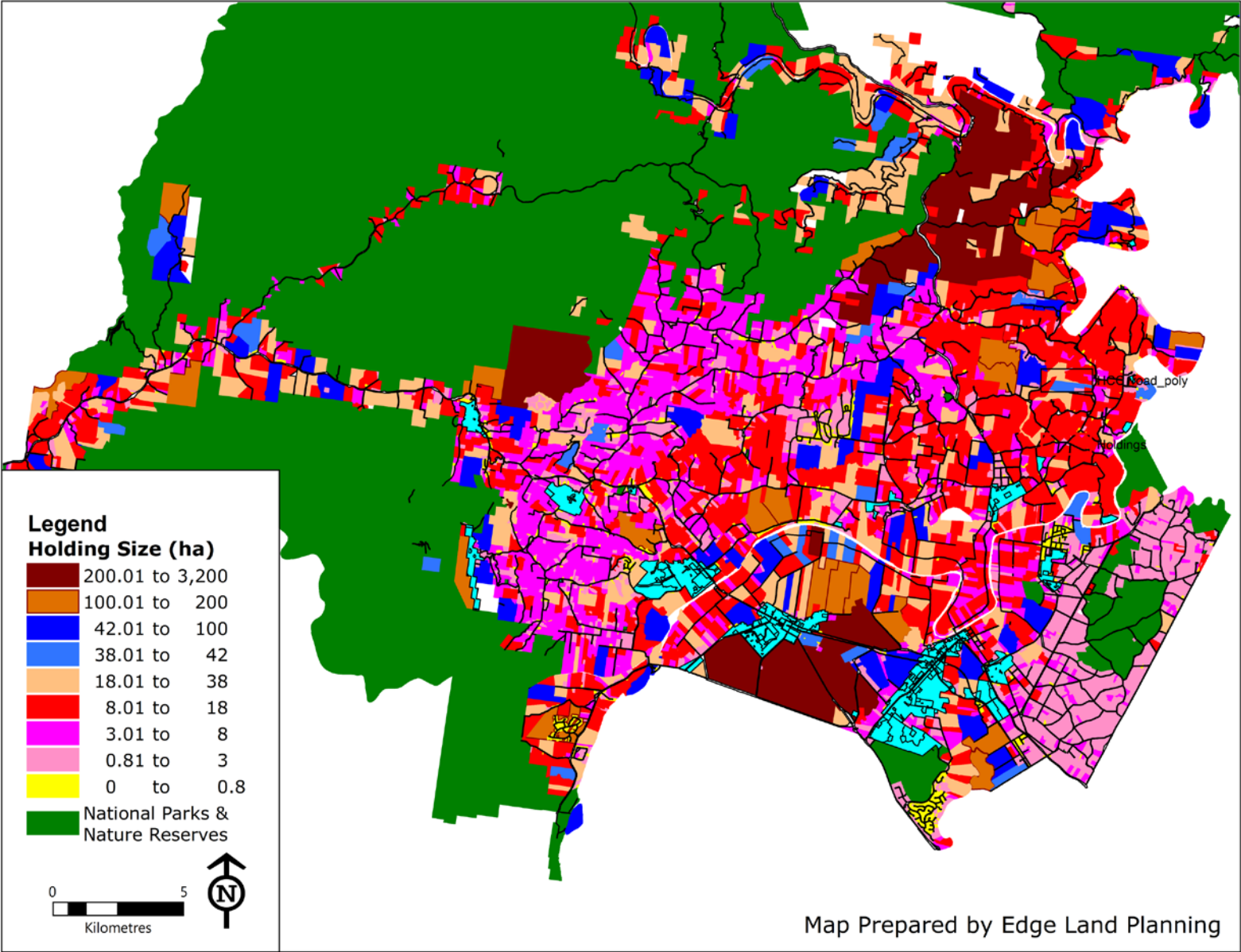
Map 1: Rural Land Use



Map 2: Rural Land Use South

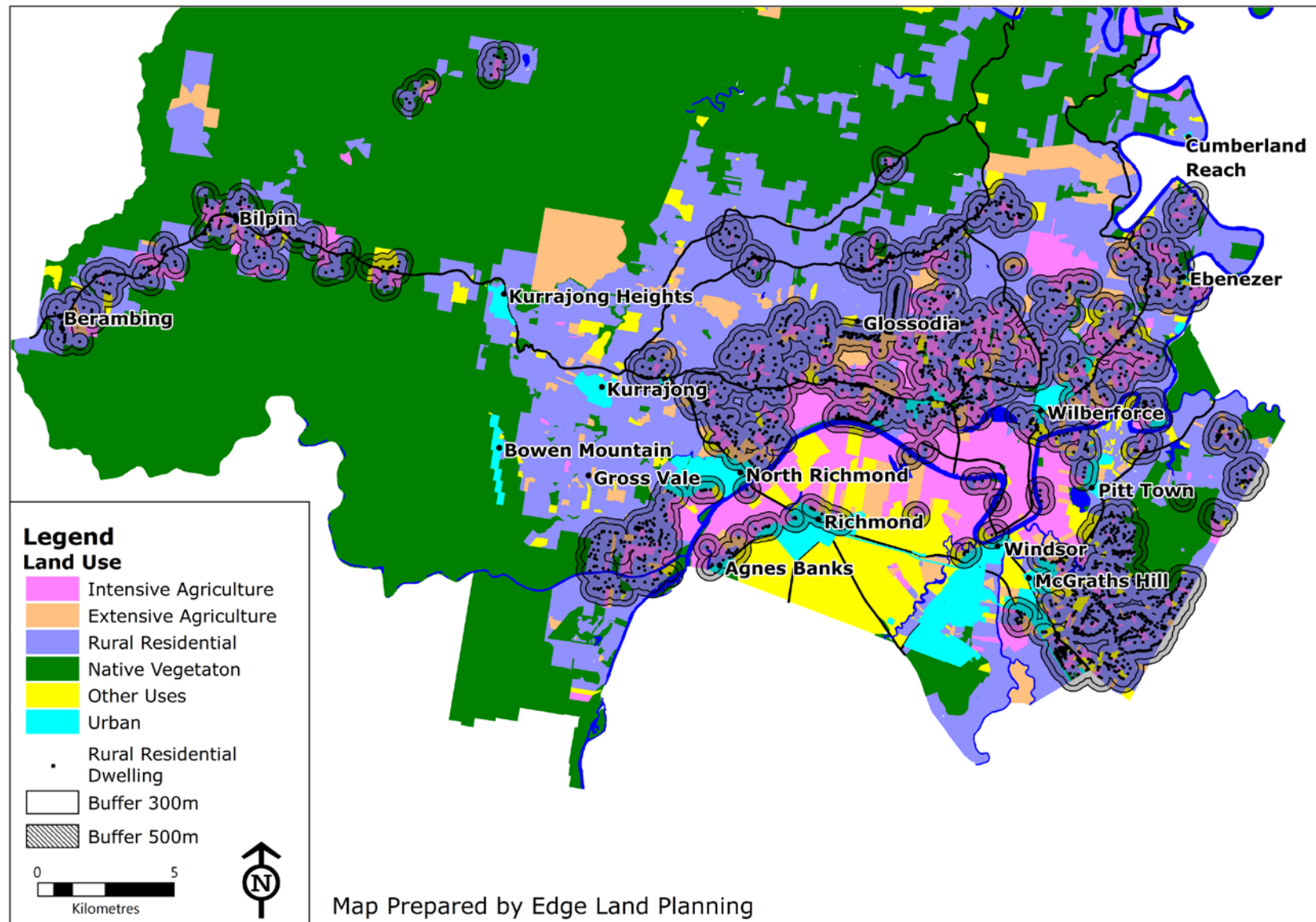


Map 3: Rural Holding Size



Map 4: Rural Holding Size South

The mixture of rural residential use amongst agricultural uses such as vegetables, fruit and poultry can cause land use conflict. The effect of the pollution laws is that a neighbour can complain about any pollution emanating from a farm such as noise from a tractor or pump, trucks taking produce from the packing shed, spray drift or odour. The Council must then investigate and can require the farmer not to farm part of the land, providing a “buffer area” to the rural residential use, or to conduct farming activities at restricted hours. This is because the farm is causing pollution to cross its boundaries and causing the neighbour a loss of amenity. The fact that the farm was there first and is carrying out normal agricultural activities is irrelevant in this case because it is causing pollution. These affected buffer areas between the dwellings and the agricultural uses can be referred to as the “contested land” which can be seen from map 5. The total area of contested land in the LGA has been calculated to be 21,230 ha of land, with much of this being agricultural land. This covers nearly all of the agricultural uses except for those on the Hawkesbury River floodplain where there are not many rural residential uses. The issue of land use conflict and its potential impact on agricultural and tourism land use is very significant for the future of the rural lands of the LGA.



Map 5: Contested Land

Hawkesbury has a significant rural economy. Agriculture is a significant land use in the Hawkesbury LGA. In 2016 the Hawkesbury LGA produced a total of \$158,670,281 value of production (ABS, 2018a). This is equivalent to 19.7% of Peri-Urban Sydney, 1.2% of the NSW value of production and 0.3% of Australia's total value of agricultural production. It is number two in the Sydney Peri-Urban Area behind Central Coast which has \$161,449,035. The main commodity in Central Coast is poultry and in Hawkesbury it is Vegetable production which is the most significant. Crops have a value of \$118,853,279 which makes up 74.9% of the total LGA value of agricultural production. Vegetable production is \$63,686,875 (40.1%), Turf has a value of \$48,534,440 (30.6%). The top five commodities are vegetables, turf, poultry meat, eggs and nurseries. The significant agricultural commodities are as follows:

- Turf – number one producer in Sydney (82.5%), NSW (59.3%) and Australia (19.8%);
- Perishable Vegetables – Number one producer in the Sydney Peri-Urban area (32.6%) and NSW (16.3%) and the thirteenth highest in Australia (1.9%). It should be noted that the number LGA one in Australia is Lockyer Valley which has 11.9% of Australia's perishable vegetables;
- Other Poultry (ducks, turkeys, geese, etc) – Number four in Sydney (12.5%) and NSW (8.1%) and fifth highest in Australia(4.3%);
- Egg production – number two in Sydney (19.7%) , number four in NSW (7.3%) and number eight in Australia (2.3%).

The Sydney Peri-Urban area is a significant producer of perishable vegetables, poultry and eggs as well as nurseries, flowers and turf. It has a total value of \$806.4m which equates to 6.2% of NSW value of production from 1.5% of the land area. The significant commodities are as follows:

- Perishable Vegetable Production
 - ⇒ 49.8% of NSW – Number 1 region
 - ⇒ 5.8% of Australia Perishable Vegetables
- Poultry Production
 - ⇒ 35.6% NSW Meat Chickens – Number 1 region.
 - ⇒ 64.5% NSW Other Poultry – Number 1 region
 - ⇒ 36.8% NSW Egg Production – Number 1 region
 - ⇒ 11.9% of Australia's meat chickens
 - ⇒ 27.5% of Australia's Other Poultry
 - ⇒ 11.6% of Australia's Egg Production
- Nurseries, Flowers & Turf Area
 - ⇒ 39.2% of NSW Nurseries – Number 1 region
 - ⇒ 54.3% of NSW Flowers – Number 1 region
 - ⇒ 71.9% of NSW Turf – Number 1 region
 - ⇒ 8.6% of Australia's Nurseries
 - ⇒ 7.1% of Australia's Flowers
 - ⇒ 24.0% of Australia's Turf

The LGA has a number of environmental characteristics which influence the location and type of land uses. The topography can broadly be described as being steep to undulating land in the west and north with flat to undulating land on the footslopes and banks of the Hawkesbury, Colo and Macdonald Rivers. The topography is a key determinant of the location of agriculture in the LGA. The flat to undulating land to the south and east is associated with alluvial river flats and these are areas where the intensive plants are grown as well as the poultry farms and also there is also an area of fruit orchards on the ridgeline to the west of the LGA along the Bells Line of Road.

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There is a significant amount of native vegetation within the LGA and this too is a function of the topography and soil types. There are a number of areas of ecological corridors within the rural lands of the LGA.

Analysis has been carried to show the demographic make-up of the rural lands. This showed that is the urban-rural population split was 57.6% urban and 42.4 % live in the rural land. There are more people in the rural lands in the secondary school age (12-17) and more parents and homebuilders (35-39), older workers and pre-retirees (50-69) and seniors (70-84). This can be seen from figure 3.

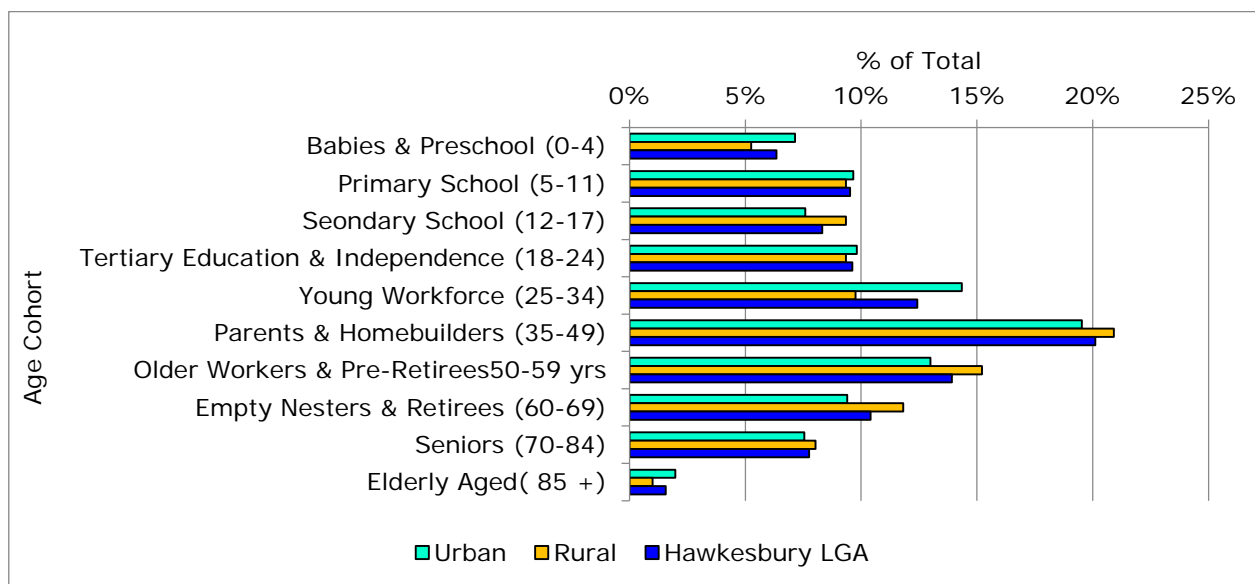


Figure 3: Age Structure

There are considerably more couples with children over 15 and couples with no children at home in the rural areas and slightly more couples with children under 15 in the rural areas than the urban and LGA. The weekly family income is higher in the rural area for all families earning more than \$1,000 per week and higher with considerably more in the \$4,000 per week and higher. There are less people who own their house outright and also who own with a mortgage and more people who rent in the rural area. There are more people who lived at a different address one year ago but less who lived at a different address five years ago. The number one sector of employment is construction, followed by retail, education and training, health care and social assistance, manufacturing, public administration, professional scientific and technical services, other services, accommodation and food services with agriculture coming in at number ten. This verifies the high number of rural residential uses in the rural landscape. This can be seen from figure 4.

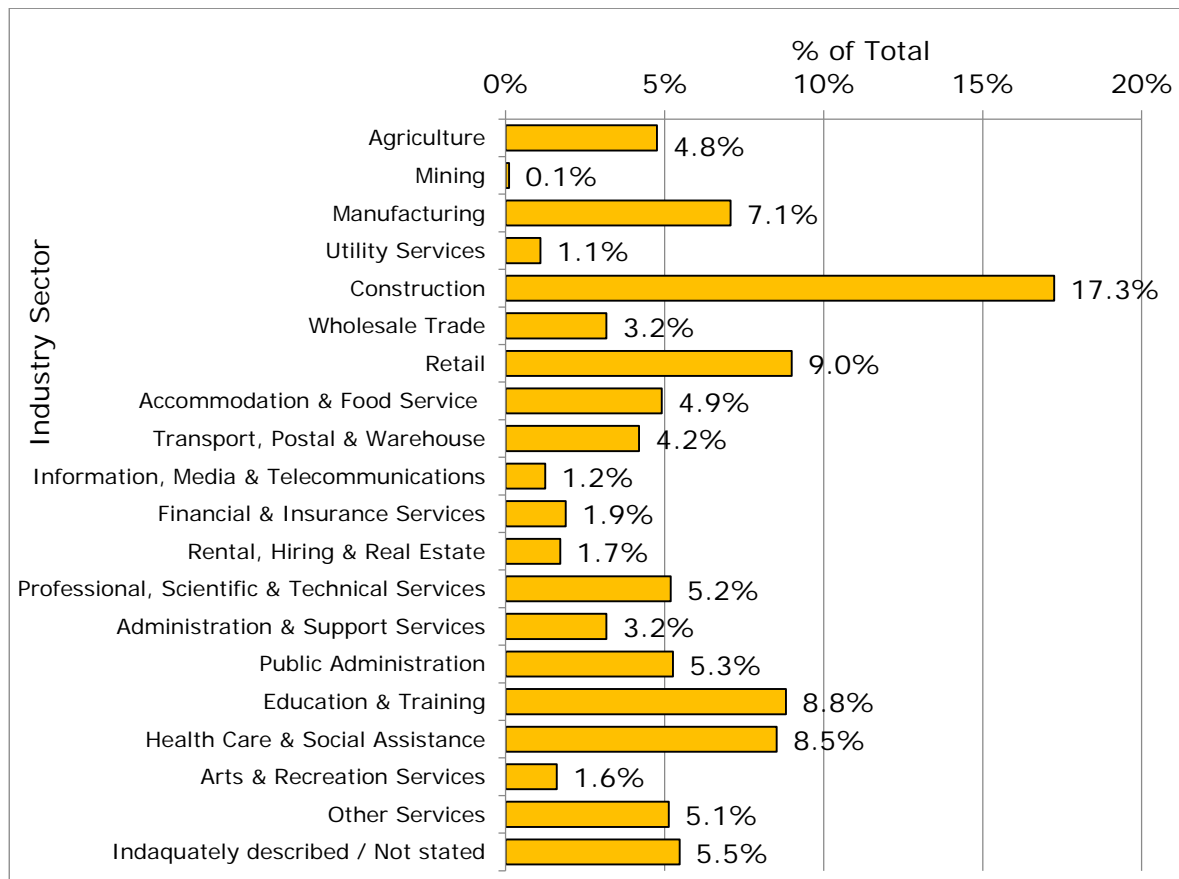


Figure 4: Industry of Employment

There are more managers and technician and trade occupations in the rural areas and also slightly less people with degrees and certificates in the rural areas. There are 4.1 % of the rural workforce who work from home compared to 1.6% in the urban area which can be seen from figure5.

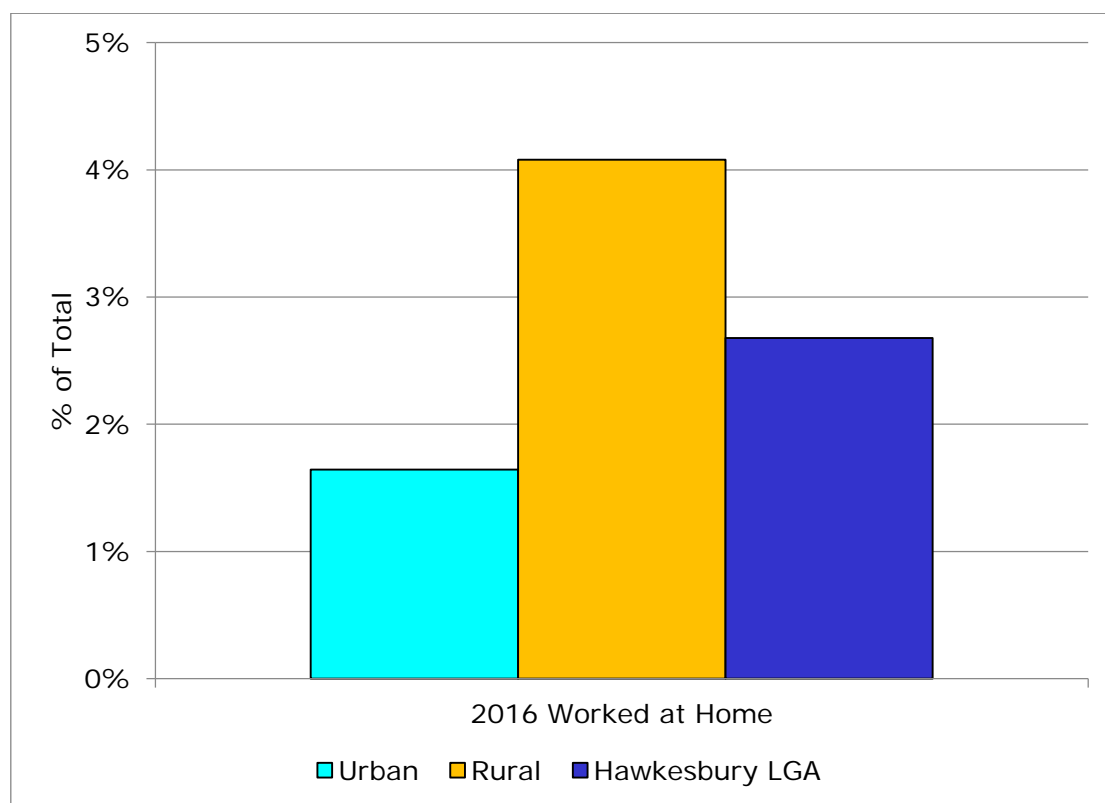


Figure 5: Worked from Home

The management and control of land uses within the Hawkesbury LGA are guided by a number of policy and legal processes. These are Acts of Parliament and Regulations as well as Plans and Policies prepared under the provisions of those Acts and Regulations. The key document for the future of the LGA include the strategies prepared by the Greater Sydney Commission titled The Metropolis of Three Cities and the Western City District Plan.

There are a number of development and planning issues that have an impact on the sustainability of agriculture. They can be categorised into environmental opportunities and constraints and social and economic factors. They are as follows:

Environmental Opportunities and Constraints

- Climate Change
- Water Catchments
- Groundwater
- Native Vegetation and Biodiversity
- Topography
- Soils
- Landscape Character
- Flood Prone Land
- Bushfire Hazard
- Weeds

Social and Economic Factors

- Land Use
- Rural Land-Use Conflicts
- Sustainable Agriculture
- Food Security
- Economic Development
- Extractive Industries
- Infrastructure
- Domestic Effluent Management
- Heritage

Consultation with the stakeholders is seen as an integral component of this strategy. Targeted consultations were held with key stakeholders from Government Agencies and the community including agricultural producers, and farmer groups. The key messages coming from these were the importance of agriculture and the need to preserve it.

The key issues facing the future of the rural lands are preservation of agricultural land, pressure for rural residential and urban development, change of land use to rural residential by purchase, land use conflict, climate change impacts, biodiversity and water quality and water supply

The competing demands on agricultural land are complex and the policy solution has traditionally been focused on planning policy and regulation. However, there is a need is to balance this with incentives, economic development initiatives and infrastructure as well as community engagement, communication and education.

A key component is the designation of land for its best use. A methodology has been devised that identifies the various characteristics of the land from both the physical, social and economic sense and results in two land use designations that can be used to protect the land for its best use. These zones are RU1 Primary Production and RU2 Rural Landscape and reflect the future use and character of the land use within the LGA. The current zone boundaries are not in conjunction with the best use of the land. The land use survey has confirmed this by showing that the most intensive agricultural uses are in the rural landscape zone and the most rural residential uses are in the Primary Production zone – this does not reflect the intention of the zones nor the objectives. There is also a RU4 Primary Production Small Lot zone which has mostly rural residential use and a small number of intensive agriculture. A simplified zoning regime has been recommended which has the Primary Production zone covering the most important agricultural land and the rest of the land being proposed for Rural Landscape.

Other recommendations include the following topics:

- New zoning and objectives to promote agriculture
- Link zoning to incentives and land use conflict issues
- Economic Development Strategy and incentives
- Encourage new forms of agriculture including protected cropping
- Western Sydney Airport and export opportunities
- Food Culture, Branding & Regional Cuisine, Providores, link to tourism, Hawkesbury Harvest trails, etc
- Preserving environment and landscape significance
- Promote Tourism and link to Agri-Tourism
- Promote Recreational horse sector
- Review Rural Village Zones to consolidate these