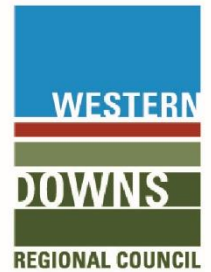


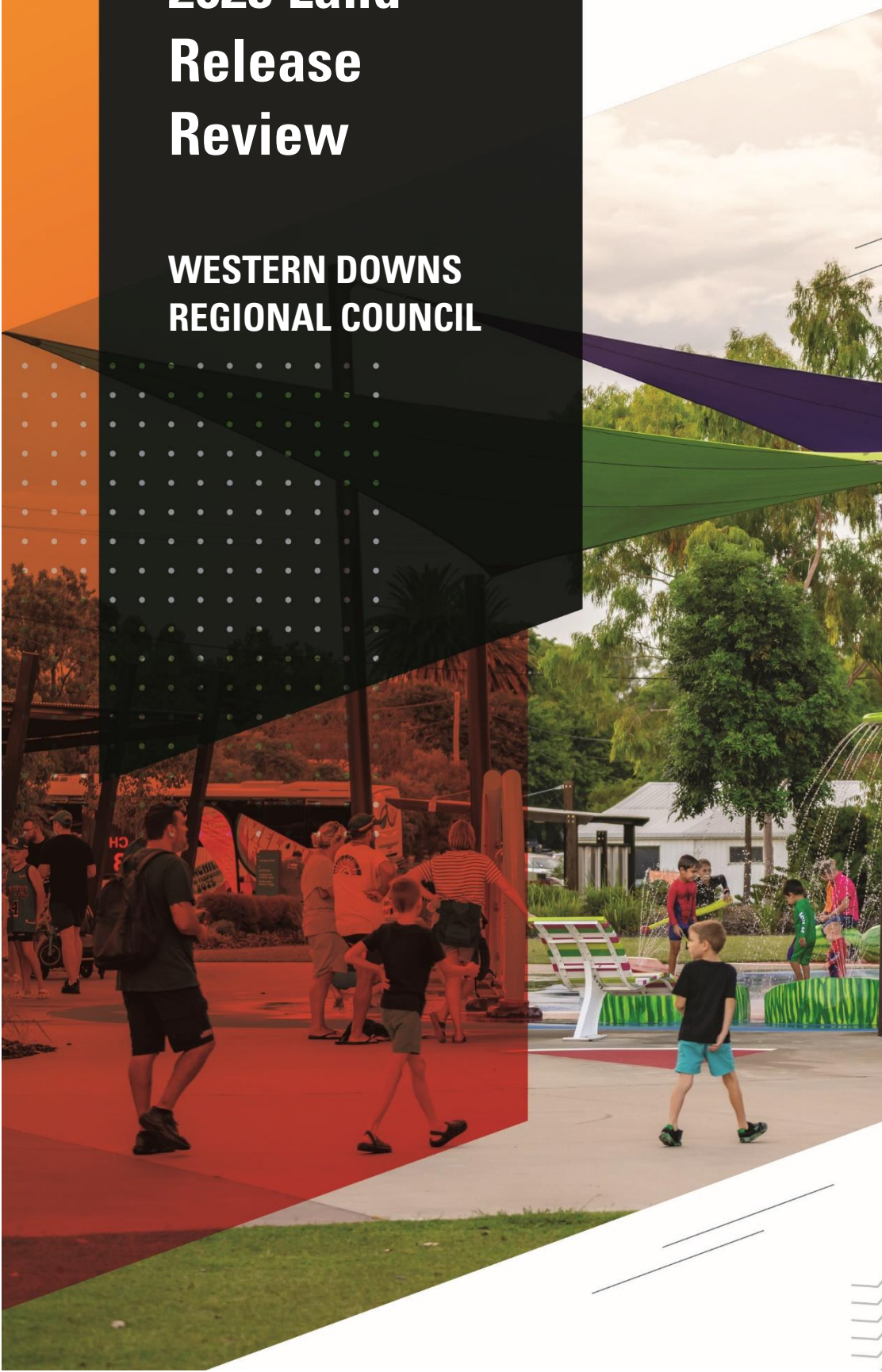
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2025 Land Release Review

**WESTERN DOWNS
REGIONAL COUNCIL**



18 August 2025

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Department of Natural Resources and
Mines, Manufacturing and Regional and Rural Development
PO Box 15216
City East QLD 4002

Sent via [email: resources-tenders@resources.qld.gov.au](mailto:resources-tenders@resources.qld.gov.au)

Dear Committee,

RE: 2025 Land Release Review

The Western Downs Region Council ("Council") oversees a vibrant local government area spanning 37,937 square kilometres, serving a diverse population of approximately 35,000 residents. Our region thrives on a robust foundation of agriculture, intensive agriculture, energy, and manufacturing industries. These sectors are bolstered by a rich and diverse workforce, including a significant number of migrant employees, who contribute to the social and economic fabric of our community

We thank the Resources Cabinet Committee (RCC) for undertaking its 2025 Land Release review to improve how land is made available for exploration, production and commercialisation - which is of strong interest to our region. We commend the Queensland Government for creating the RCC, and the proposed changes that this review outlines. We particularly acknowledge that concerns Council has raised in previous consultations have been addressed in the following provisions:

- Simplifying the tender process and reducing tender process timeframes.
- Early engagement with local government during the EOI stage and consideration of local government priorities when prioritising areas for inclusion in land release programs.
- Stakeholder and community notification for land released for exploration, production and commercialisation
- The inclusion of infrastructure, water resources, housing, and workforce management considerations in the RCC's decision making process.

Nonetheless, we have identified some concerns that should be considered, and future opportunities to ensure optimal outcomes for regional communities.

Council's submission addresses four areas of concern, including:

- The need to promote collaborative development of the CSG industry with community and landholders,
- Ensuring early commitment to existing local government Communities Partnering Framework and management of project delivery timelines,
- The need to strengthen early community engagement without burden shifting onto local governments,
- Limitations of the online information Portal for stakeholders living in digital connectivity blackspots.

Council's recommendations aim to address these areas of concern and will enhance the goals of the proposed changes. These recommendations are based on Council's deep knowledge of the Western Downs region, industries and population and are aligned to Council's long-established advocacy priorities. We believe that the insights provided will offer valuable contributions to the review process and help shape policies that foster growth and inclusivity in regional areas like ours.

For any further information or questions, please contact either myself via email jodie.taylor@wdrc.qld.gov.au Signature hidden or Lidewij Koene-Sloss, Economic Development Manager via email lidewij.koene-sloss@wdrc.qld.gov.au or phone (07) 4679 4526.

Yours Sincerely,

Jodie Taylor
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

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About the Western Downs Regional Council

The Western Downs is located on the Darling Downs, approximately 207 kilometres north-west of Brisbane and 83 kilometres north-west of Toowoomba. The region encompasses the centres of Dalby, Chinchilla, Jandowae, Miles, Tara, and Wandoan, covering nearly 38,000 square kilometres. Combining country lifestyle with modern living, excellent retail offerings and conveniences, the area is home to a population of around 35,000 people and has a large working age population of 60.9% aged 15-64 years.

Built on agriculture and thriving in the intensive agriculture, energy and manufacturing industries, Western Downs Regional Council is focused on making our region a great place to live, work, visit and invest and to ensure our future generation have the opportunity to do what they love whilst enjoying a regional lifestyle and continue the strong economic growth of the region.

Council manages Australia's second largest road network with highways leading into the region including the Bunya, Leichhardt, Warrego & Moonie, an extensive water, gas, and sewage network, and one of Australia's largest cattle saleyards. Located in the heart of the resource rich Surat Basin, the Western Downs has a diversified energy portfolio with five pillars of energy generation: Coal, Gas, Hydrogen, Wind and Solar cementing our reputation as the Energy Capital of Queensland. This contributes to the region's strong economic growth, investment, and consistently high employment with a GRP of \$5.28 Billion.

Council's five-year [Economic Development Strategy](#) (2023 to 2028) addresses critical issues and clearly articulates a strategic pathway for the Western Downs to diversify and grow its economy, building on the region's competitive advantage and further attracting business and investment in value-adding opportunities and emerging markets. The Economic Development Strategy focuses on five key pillars:

- **Jobs & Skills** - The Western Downs workforce is growing, optimised and fit for the future.
- **Liveability & Infrastructure** - The Western Downs is equipped with modern infrastructure and quality essential services across the region to enable liveability and wellbeing, whilst sustaining population growth.
- **Population** - The Western Downs demonstrates population growth to meet workforce demands.
- **Productivity & Innovation** - The Western Downs is a recognised leader in agribusiness, energy and manufacturing, and local productivity continues to increase.
- **Sustainability & Resilience** - The Western Downs is future-proofed for a changing climate and transitioning economies, and circular economy principles are stimulated.

This strategy aligns closely with the Council's [Corporate Plan](#) and supports one of Queensland's most progressive [Planning Schemes](#) which is committed to attracting and enabling development, ensuring the Western Downs is a diverse region at the forefront of the changing world.

Executive Summary

Western Downs Regional Council ("Council") welcomes the opportunity to provide a consultation submission and contribute to the Land Release Review - Consultation Paper 2025.

At the outset, Council commends the Queensland Government for its policy ambition, to ensure "this review focuses on improving the land release process, so it is more efficient and responsive to industry needs and ensuring the regulatory framework and business processes optimise resource development for the benefit of all Queenslanders". It is a principled objective, and one that aligns with Council's own strategic commitment to foster a collaborative approach to development, working closely with landholders and communities to address concerns and ensure mutual growth for all industries involved.

Council is generally in support of the proposal for the expansion of existing projects in instances where land is adjacent to a current project, the company is the sole operator and the development does not share boundaries with any other company tenders. However, it is essential that meaningful landholder and community consultation is undertaken as part of the approval for expansion of existing projects, particularly where they occur on private land.

Council supports the proposal to fast-track and streamline applications to develop projects in particular areas and basins, where there are existing Communities Partnering Framework to ensure optimal outcomes for industry and community alike. Council urges that the establishment of zones where direct application will be permitted to be developed in consultation with local government.

Council has no direct concerns in relation to the consolidation and provision in the Resource Acts to improve efficiency in the application process, and establishing a flexible process that allows both competitive tender and direct applications as determined by the Minister and believes this will establish both best practice and flexible land release processes across all resources.

Council endorses the establishment of a dedicated land release intelligence team to determine where prospective land should be released in line with government interests. However, Council stresses the importance of leveraging local knowledge and acknowledging that local priorities may not always be aligned with State Government interests. Council strongly recommends that the Intelligence Team works in partnership with local governments when considering land for release.

Nonetheless, we have identified opportunities to further improve the process and ensure optimal outcomes for regional communities. This submission is drawn from Council's

longstanding advocacy positions, stakeholder consultation, and deep knowledge of the region, industries, and communities we represent.

While Council agrees with the aims of the proposed changes to the process, we have included four specific recommendations in this submission which we believe will ensure the proposed changes meet their objectives in the regions.

Council is committed to working with the RCC to ensure that we can continually strengthen, build and diversify the Western Downs economy, while continuing to improve the quality and spacious lifestyle our residents love so much.

Recommendations

Council has made four recommendations for consideration by the RCC. These are summarised here:

Recommendation 1: Council recommends promoting collaborative Coal Seam Gas (CSG) Industry development for the benefit of industry and community. The CSG industry is a critical economic growth driver and promoting a collaborative approach to CSG development, which recognises the needs and concerns of landholders and communities, will further strengthen co-existence.

Recommendation 2: Inclusion of Communities Partnering Framework and Address Delays in Mining Project Delivery in Tender Documentation. These inclusions will ensure successful applicants understand and uphold the existing Communities Partnering Framework and commitment and accountability for timely development. This will assist mitigating negative impacts and elevating positive impacts.

Recommendation 3: Council recommends strengthening the Notification and Consultation process by including engagement with community stakeholders during the Expression of Interest evaluation phase, in addition to the already proposed consultation with local government. The introduction of local engagement early in the evaluation process acknowledges the importance of consultation with local government, landholders and the community and ensures it is a critical part of resource project development.

Recommendation 4: Council recommends an alternative means of information and communication to the proposed Portal. Connectivity in regional and rural areas can be limited and connectivity blackspots are widespread. Council is concerned that the provision for a digital portal as the only form for information and engagement towards proposed mining land release will be a disadvantage for regional stakeholders and urges the RCC to consider including alternative notification options.

Submission

Western Downs Regional Council welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the 2025 Land Release review. Council commends the Queensland Government for its policy ambition and the objective of the current proposal to increase the efficiency of the current regulatory framework for the benefit of industry and all Queenslanders. Council makes the following recommendations to strengthen the current proposal.

Collaborative Coal Seam Gas (CSG) Industry Development

Council recommends promoting collaborative Coal Seam Gas (CSG) Industry development for the benefit of industry and community. The CSG industry is a critical economic growth driver and promoting a collaborative approach to CSG development, which recognises the needs and concerns of landholders and communities, can ensure mutual benefits and growth for all involved.

Council continues to support and promote the CSG industry as a key driver of economic growth, local supply chain development, and employment opportunities. This will help attract investment, foster business development, and create jobs, contributing to regional economic stability. Encourage initiatives that enhance the skills and capabilities of the local workforce, ensuring that the community remains competitive and resilient. This includes supporting training programs and partnerships with educational institutions. Foster a collaborative approach to CSG development, working closely with landholders and communities to address concerns and ensure mutual growth for all industries involved.

Additions to Tender Documentation

Council recommends including reference to Western Downs' Communities Partnering Framework and Address Delays in Mining Project Delivery in Tender Documentation. These inclusions will ensure successful applicants understand and uphold the existing Communities Partnering Framework and committed and accountable for timely development. This will assist mitigating negative impacts and elevating positive impacts.

Council recommends that existing local government frameworks are acknowledged by applicants and a requirement that applicants outline their understanding and willingness to commit to such Frameworks where they already exist. For example, Council has recently developed a Communities Partnering Framework which aims to promote a collaborative, long-term and strategic partnerships which are driven by a shared commitment to strengthen economic, environmental and social outcomes across the Western Downs, in line with our Economic Development Strategy. Council would like to see a commitment from applicants seeking to establish developments in the Western Downs to support this Communities Partnering Framework as a part of the tender process, rather than an item to be negotiated after approval.

A commitment during the tender process to support existing Frameworks will support local governments in ensuring collaboration occurs with proponents of resource developments for the benefit of local communities. This will not only provide benefits in the short term, but will assist mitigating negative impacts and elevating positive impacts of projects, contributing to strong co-existence outcomes.

Council recommends the inclusion of measures in the tender process to address delays in project delivery. These measures should ensure there is a clear, defined and reasonable timeframe between the granting of a mining lease and the construction and commencement of resource development. This would provide certainty to local government, landholders and local communities with timelines for the construction and commencement of mining activities. This certainty is important to allow local government to plan and strategise for the future, with clear information about the development of energy projects in the region and allows local communities and land holders to set expectations for how development will progress and plan for any anticipated disruptions to their daily lives and livelihoods.

These two inclusions would enhance the commitment of successful applicants towards existing Frameworks and accountability for timely development. Both measures will greatly assist in preventing negative community and landholder experiences with resource developments and mitigate negative bias towards future projects.

Strengthening the Notification and Consultation process

Council recommends strengthening the Notification and Consultation process by including engagement with community stakeholders and landholders during the Expression of Interest evaluation phase, in addition to consultation with local governments. Strengthening local engagement early in the evaluation process acknowledges the importance of consultation with local government, landholders and the community and ensures it is a critical part of resource project development.

Council strongly supports the inclusion of engagement with Local Government during the Expression of Interest evaluation phase as this recognises the importance of early engagement. However, there is no provision to activate adequate consultation with other stakeholders in the community. By ensuring that appropriate early consultation is undertaken with key community stakeholders, we can ensure that the diverse needs and perspectives of the entire community are considered. Engaging solely with local government is insufficient; true community engagement necessitates involving all relevant stakeholders to create more inclusive and effective outcomes.

Including direct community consultation provides a clear pathway for local stakeholders to voice their concerns and provide valuable feedback. Excluding this, places the responsibility to represent the local community back on local government and creates undue pressure to represent and engage in community consultation on behalf of developers and State Government. This creates a significant burden on local governments, exacerbating the issue of resource allocation and cost-shifting. By involving community stakeholders directly, the RCC can ensure a more balanced and equitable approach to consultation early in the development process, reducing the administrative load on local governments and fostering a more inclusive decision-making process.

Council has strong concerns that in the absence of direct community consultation, the responsibility for compiling consultation from all relevant stakeholders is being redirected to the local government level without any additional resource allocation. To alleviate this, Council recommends Local Government provide to State Government a list of relevant stakeholders who can be approached for consultation. This approach ensures local knowledge is utilised for stakeholder coverage, but local government is not burdened by extensive community consultation with no additional resources allocated to support these activities.

Alternative Means of Information and Communication

Council recommends an alternative means of information and communication to the proposed Portal. Connectivity in regional and rural areas can be limited and connectivity blackspots are widespread. Council is concerned that the provision for a digital portal as the only form for information and engagement towards proposed mining land release will be a disadvantage for regional stakeholders and urges the RCC to consider including alternative notification options.

Despite areas of strong connectivity, the Western Downs region has significant gaps in internet and mobile coverage. Several coverage blackspots, where mobile networks are unavailable, exist throughout the region. In a recent community consultation piece, 64.81% residents rate their mobile data speeds as poor, very poor or no access to mobile data devices. Council has long advocated for improved digital connectivity in the region.

Given this limited connectivity in many regional areas in Queensland, Council is concerned that the provision for a digital portal as the only form for information and engagement towards proposed mining land release will be a disadvantage for those regional stakeholders who are the most likely to require ready access. Council recommends additional forms of notification and consultation for inclusivity for stakeholders who have limited or no connectivity.

While Council recognises the value of a single, centralised information Portal, we also stress the need for that information to be accessible to all stakeholders, particularly those with limited access to internet services due to their location.

Conclusion

Overall, Council supports the 2025 Land Release Review as a means to optimise resource development in Queensland and the benefits for our region. We congratulate the RCC on developing these proposed changes, however, Council requests consideration for addressing our recommendations outlined in this submission:

- Support for the Coal Seam Gas (CSG) Industry
- Inclusion of Communities Partnering Framework and Address Delays in Mining Project Delivery in Tender Documentation
- Strengthen the Consultation Processes and limit burden shifting
- Make the Information Portal more accessible to stakeholders experiencing limited digital connectivity

Council is committed to good governance, strong economies and vibrant communities. We congratulate the RCC on the 2025 Land Review and recognise that many of the recommendations made by Council in consultation earlier this year have been incorporated into the proposed regulatory framework. Council believes the recommendations made here will further strengthen the framework and ensure the best outcomes for all stakeholders.

Contact Details

Please do not hesitate to contact myself on email jodie.taylor@wdrc.qld.gov.au Signature hidden or Lidewij Koene-Sloss, Economic Development Manager via email lidewij.koene-sloss@wdrc.qld.gov.au or phone (07) 4679 4526 should you wish to discuss any aspect of this submission.

Appendix

1. Western Downs Council, Economic Development Strategy 2023 – 2028, [economic-development-strategy-document-ver-22.02.23.pdf \(wdrc.qld.gov.au\)](#)
2. Western Downs Regional Council, Corporate Plan 2021 – 2026, [Plans & Publications Western Downs Regional Council \(wdrc.qld.gov.au\)](#)
3. Western Downs Regional Council, Community Partnership Frameworks 2028 - 2028, [communities-partnering-framework-western-downs.pdf](#)



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