



Rural Land Use Discussion Paper

Consultation Report
2025



Acknowledgement of Country

Lismore City Council acknowledges the
Widjabul/Wia-bal people of the Bundjalung nation,
traditional owners of the land on which
we work, live and play.

We acknowledge their continuing
connection to the land, sea and community.

We pay our respects to the Widjabul/Wia-bal
people, their culture, their elders
and community leaders past,
present and emerging.

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Background

In 2024, Lismore City Council developed a Rural Land Use Discussion Paper, the first step in creating a Rural Land Use Strategy. During development of the Discussion Paper, Council staff met with agricultural industry groups to understand some of the key issues and opportunities for agricultural production in the Lismore Local Government Area (LGA) including berries, horticulture, sugar cane, cropping, beef, and dairy.

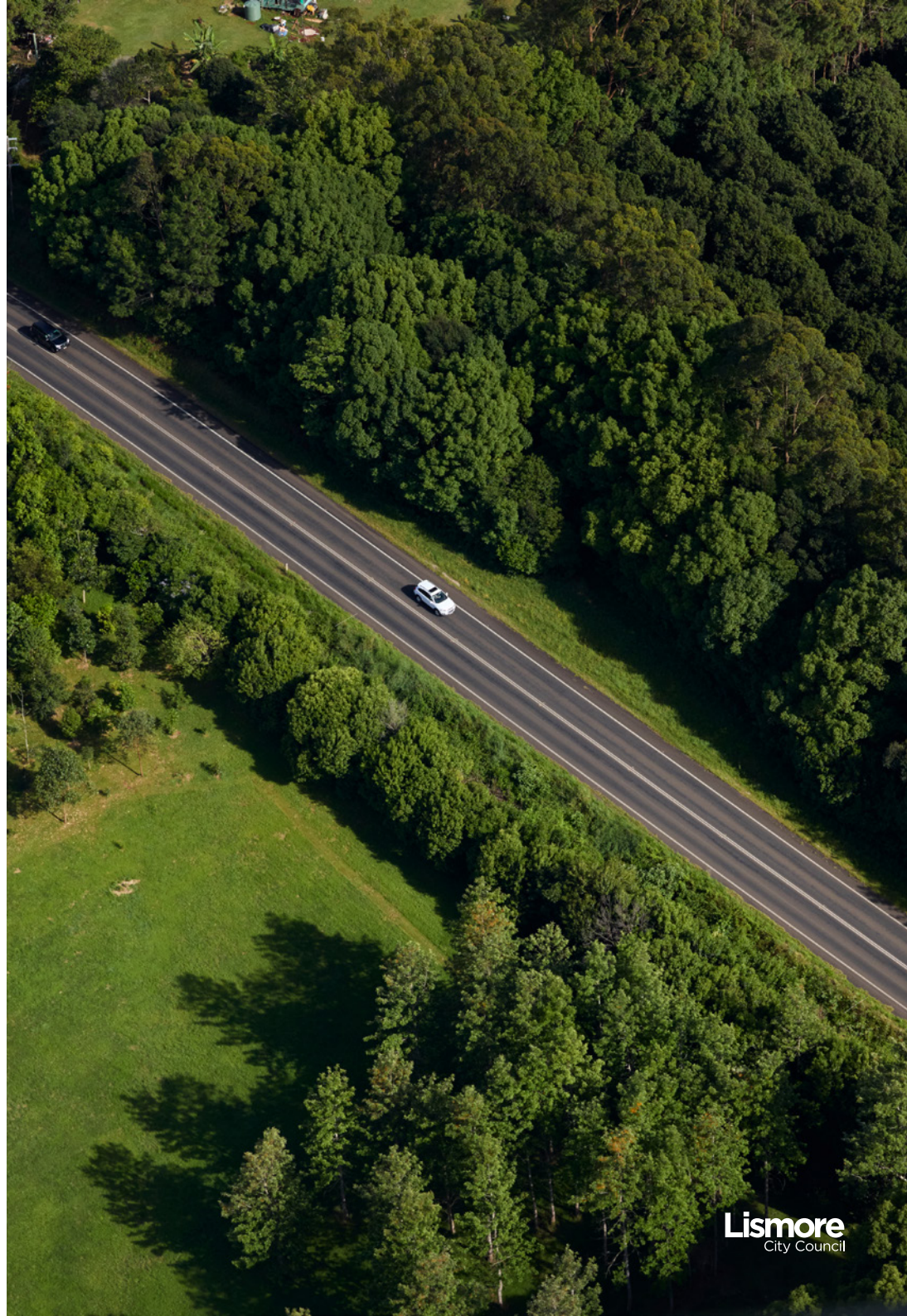
The Discussion Paper explored the strengths, challenges, opportunities and threats facing our rural lands, and sought to test these with, and hear more from, the community.

The Discussion Paper was placed on public exhibition between 15 May – 3 July 2024. Feedback was sought through completion of an online survey and/or written submissions to Council. The Discussion Paper was promoted via:

- Lismore City Council's (LCC) Your Say website,
- LCC newsletters,
- Promotion at Lismore Saleyards,
- Promotion at Primex,
- Promotion to rural residents via the rural halls meetings, and
- Direct stakeholder engagement.

Council received 68 submissions, received via the following methods:

- 53 survey responses
- 15 submissions (email and open submissions via the Your Say page)



Who responded?

The survey included questions related to demographics to gain an understanding of respondents' background in the context of a cross-section of Lismore's rural lands.

Most respondents (57%) were aged 60 years or over however feedback from younger generations was also received (Figure 1a). 92% of survey respondents lived and/or worked in a rural area of Lismore (Figure 1b).

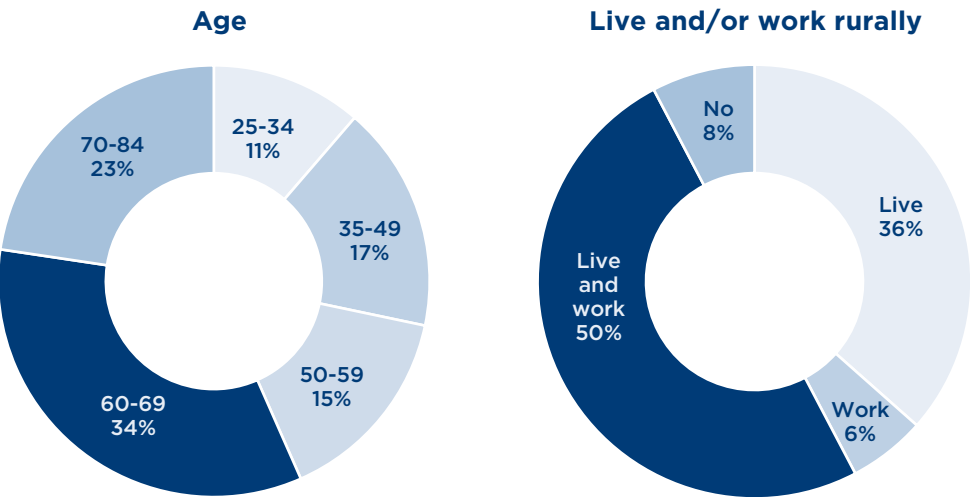


Figure 1
Demographics of the survey respondents (a) age groups of respondents and (b) respondents' connection to rural areas in Lismore.

Surveys were received from a broad range of rural residents, covering a good cross section of localities within the LGA (Figure 2). Each of the green dots in Figure 2 represents the residential location of a submitter. There were 4 submissions from Nimbin and 3 from Jiggi, Eltham, Dorrroughby and Wyrallah.

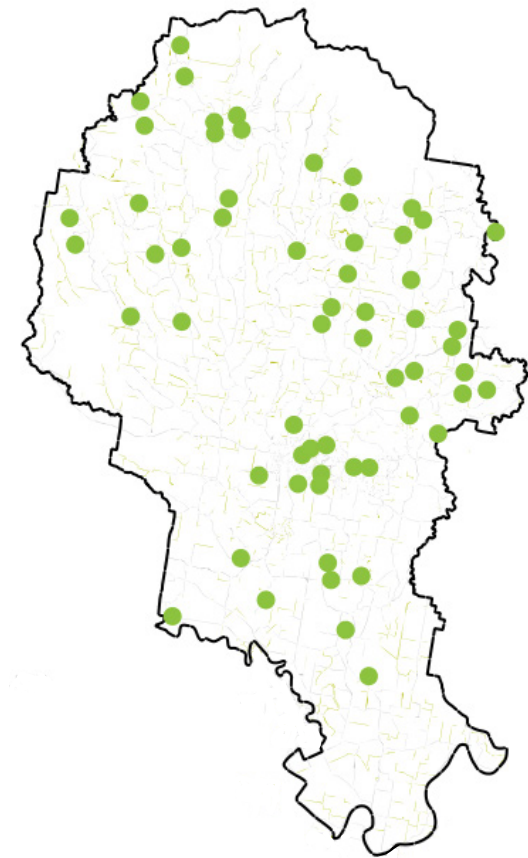


Figure 2
Locality coverage of the survey respondents, indicating responses from across the Lismore LGA.

Respondents were asked what they valued most about Lismore's rural environment (Figure 3). The primary reason given was biodiversity value – the plants and animals that inhabit Lismore's rural areas. This was followed by the agricultural economy and the peacefulness. Many who chose 'other', responded that they valued multiple aspects of Lismore's rural areas.

Who responded? (continued)

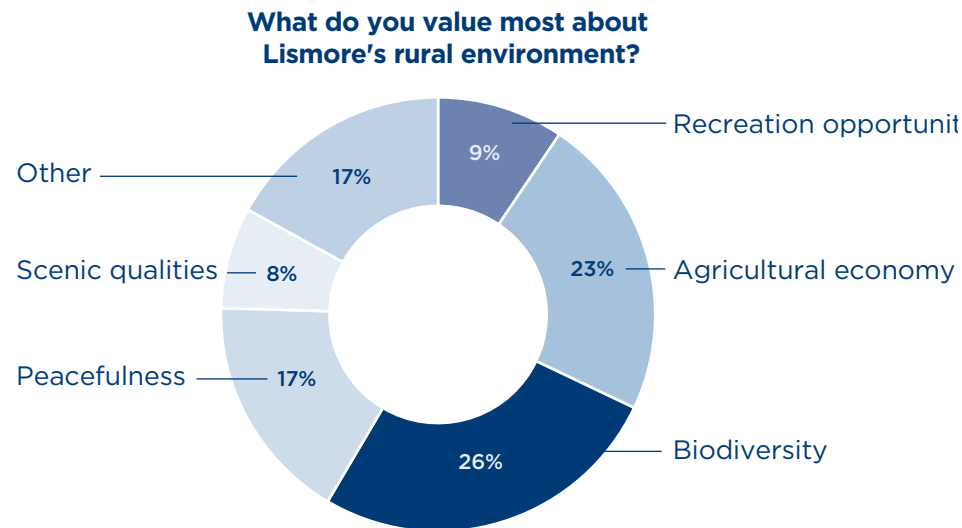


Figure 3
Survey respondents' most valued aspects of Lismore's rural environment

Reasons for living rurally

Of the 80% of residents who responded that they lived rurally, the majority (59%) identified lifestyle as the primary reason for living in a rural area. Another 30% said the main reason was due to their farming or agriculture-related work (Figure 4).

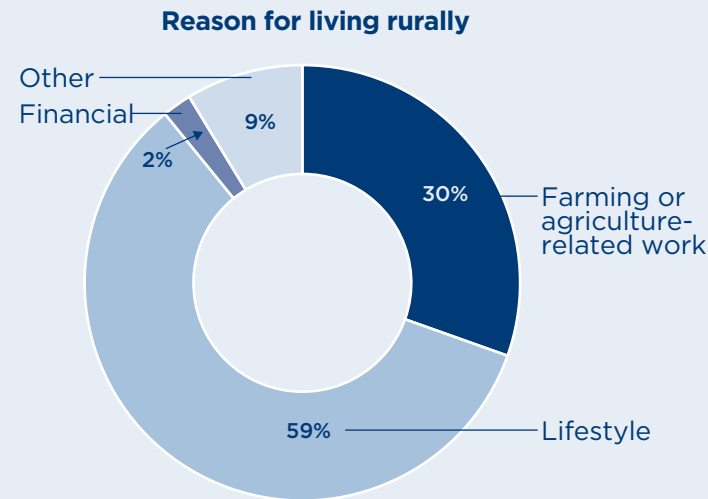


Figure 4
Reasons given in the survey for living rurally



What we heard – Key themes

Planning Objectives

The Discussion Paper contained several preliminary planning objectives that are listed in Figure 5, which also provides the percentages of respondents who ticked ‘Very important’ or ‘Somewhat Important’ for that objective in the survey.

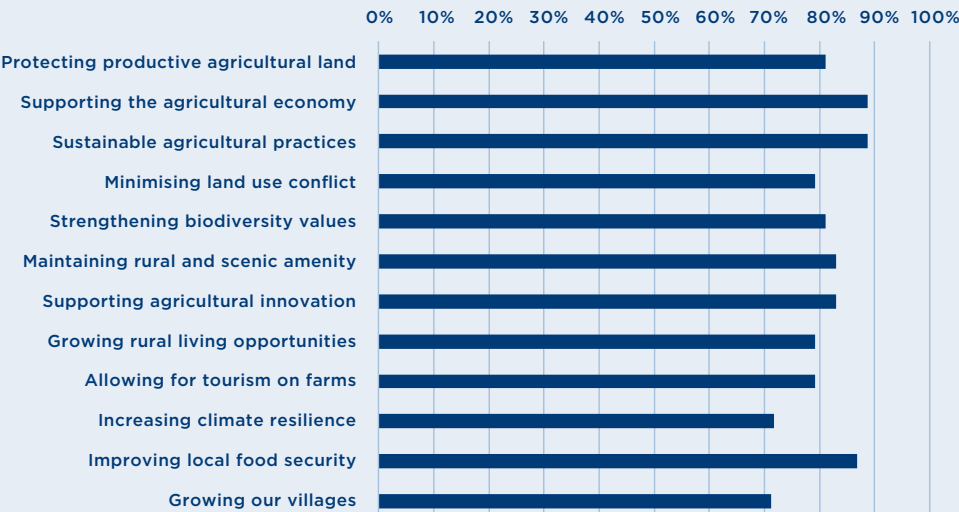


Figure 5
Percent of respondents who considered the listed objective to be very or somewhat important for Lismore’s rural community and economy.

Survey respondents felt most strongly about ‘Supporting the agricultural economy’, ‘Sustainable agricultural practices’ and ‘Improving local food security’. While all the objectives were considered important, 17% of respondents considered ‘Growing our villages’ not important to Lismore’s rural community and economy.

The survey results combined with written submissions and feedback from industry groups indicates strong support for addressing all the listed objectives in the Rural Land Use Strategy.

Feedback during consultation indicated support for including another objective, to ‘**Protect sacred First Nations lands and sites**’.

Agriculture

Protecting agricultural land

Submissions and feedback from industry highlighted the importance of protecting agricultural land for economic and food security benefits. Concerns were raised about the impact on agricultural productivity from allowing additional housing in rural lands, but most survey submissions supported investigating options for additional housing in rural areas. More detail about rural housing is provided in the next section.

When asked about better protecting rural land for agriculture, less than half of the survey respondents thought this was necessary (Figure 6). This response together with the very strong support for the planning objectives ‘Supporting the agricultural economy’ and ‘Sustainable agricultural practices’ (Figure 5) may indicate that current land use and growth management controls are sufficient in protecting agricultural interests.

Some survey respondents thought that ‘maybe’ (Figure 6) rural land use should have additional protection. Follow up commentary from this cohort suggested focusing protection on the most productive, fertile agricultural land rather than all rural land, some of which may not have high agricultural value or production potential.

Do you believe rural lands need to be better protected for agricultural purposes?

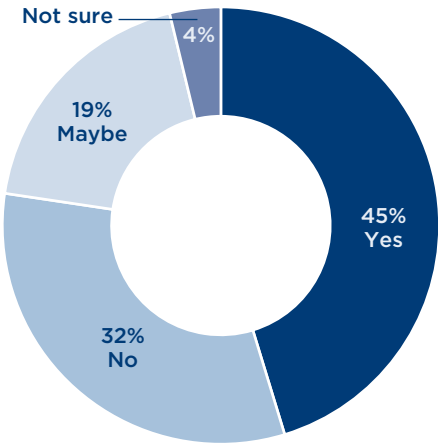


Figure 6
Survey responses about better protecting rural land for agricultural purposes

Protecting agricultural land (continued)

A potential action identified in the Discussion Paper was whether Council should consider identifying and mapping more land that may be rezoned to RU2 Rural Landscape and investigating the uses and the minimum lot sizes that may be suitable in such a zone. RU2 typically has smaller lots and land with greater agricultural constraints. 58% of respondents agreed with this potential action, whereas only 21% disagreed (Figure 7).

Do you support Council investigating RU2 zoning or less agriculturally productive / more constrained land?

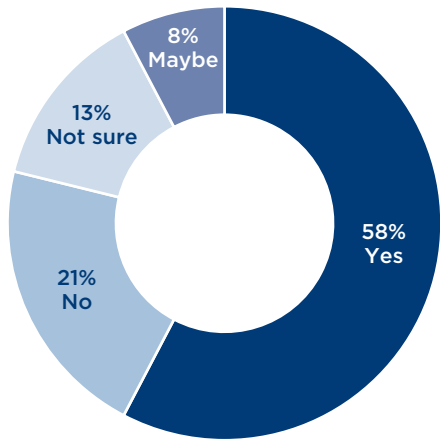


Figure 7
Survey responses on RU2 zone land for less productive agricultural land

Rural and scenic amenity and agricultural intensification

The Discussion Paper raised the idea of requiring some intensive agricultural developments to lodge a development application (DA), with controls, such as visual screening with trees, for developments that may have a significant impact on the rural landscape.

41% of survey respondents supported Council implementing additional controls on agriculture to protect rural and scenic amenity. Nearly a quarter (22%) of respondents were ‘not sure’. Industry groups indicated that rural and scenic amenity impacts are currently managed well through industry best-practise guidelines and state government requirements, that have been developed as agriculture intensifies.

There was also a view that additional Council planning controls could discourage some agricultural industries from establishing. Introducing additional DA requirements may require Council to have the right expertise, such as an agriculture officer, to ensure impacts are effectively assessed. Extensive agriculture (cropping and grazing) and horticultural plantations do not currently require farmers to submit a DA.

Emerging agricultural industries

Survey responses and industry feedback suggested that key emerging agricultural industries that Lismore could be planning for include agritourism, hemp production and regenerative agriculture.

Rural land use conflict

There was an almost even split amongst the survey respondents who said they had experienced rural land use conflict (51%), and those who had not (49%). The most common conflict issues experienced were chemical spray drift, noise (from both agriculture and non-agricultural activities) and issues with uncontrolled pets affecting native animals. Industry groups are aware of the rural land use conflicts and their suggestions for managing conflict with residential infrastructure included buffers, industry guidelines, self-imposed restrictions, and information for prospective buyers about what to expect living near agricultural and supply chain operations.

There was also support for creating a new role within Council for an Agricultural Extension Officer who could support farmers to adopt best-practice farming techniques, and to act as a liaison and champion for farmers within Council (Figure 8).

Do you support the creation of a Council agricultural extension officer to support farmers?

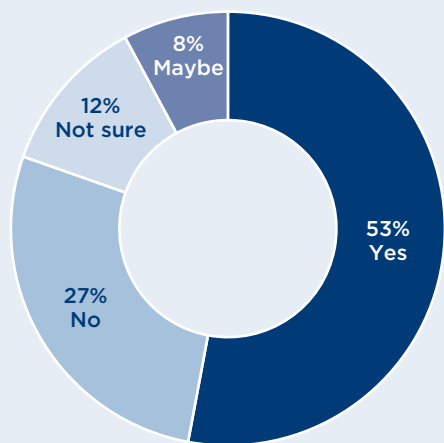


Figure 8
Survey responses on a Council agricultural extension officer to support farmers

Rural Living

While there was consensus on the importance of supporting agriculture, there was a split regarding whether more housing should be accommodated in rural areas and how to protect agricultural land, productivity and supply chains amidst increasing development pressures. Most of these concerns were raised in industry group discussions and the written submissions, including from the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure (DPHI) and the Department of Primary Industries (DPI).

Around half of the survey respondents supported increasing housing opportunities on rural land and almost a third were opposed to it (Figure 9). Throughout the survey and written submissions, there was repeated feedback that Council needed to carefully consider agricultural productivity, road infrastructure and land use conflict if choosing to increase housing in rural areas.

Industry groups raised concerns with additional rural housing leading to increasing complaints in response to normal farming operations such as the noise and dust associated with harvesting and transporting produce to processing facilities. There were also concerns raised that additional houses in rural areas could have an impact on rural road infrastructure and traffic, and increases to land value, making it more economically difficult for new entrants into agricultural industries locally.

Do you believe rural lands should accommodate more housing?

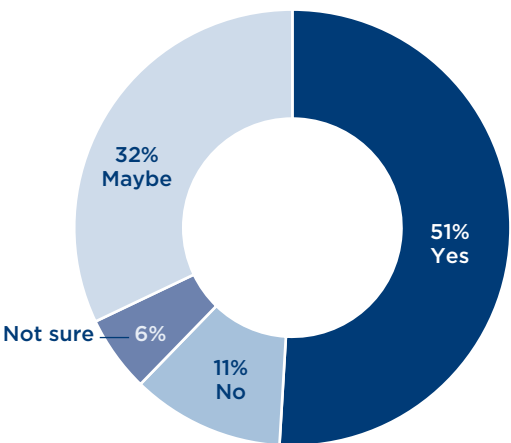


Figure 9
Survey responses about additional housing in rural land

Rural Living (continued)

In Figure 9, the responses to the ‘maybe’ (32%) included support for the options provided with the question on types of rural housing (see Figure 10) and concerns about jeopardising agricultural land use and increasing land value, and the need for adequate buffers and wildlife corridors. Feedback suggested it should only be looked at after urban options for housing are exhausted.

Survey respondents who supported additional housing were asked about the types of housing opportunities. The most selected option was allowing additional dwellings on current lots (Figure 10). However, many of the respondents also chose ‘Other’ and provided clarification, for example limiting additional housing to family or farm workers and additional dwellings being tiny homes or temporary housing options. ‘Other’ also included suggestions for subdividing lots that are currently too small to farm, creating new villages and agrihoods, or simply not adding additional housing due to road and infrastructure limitations.

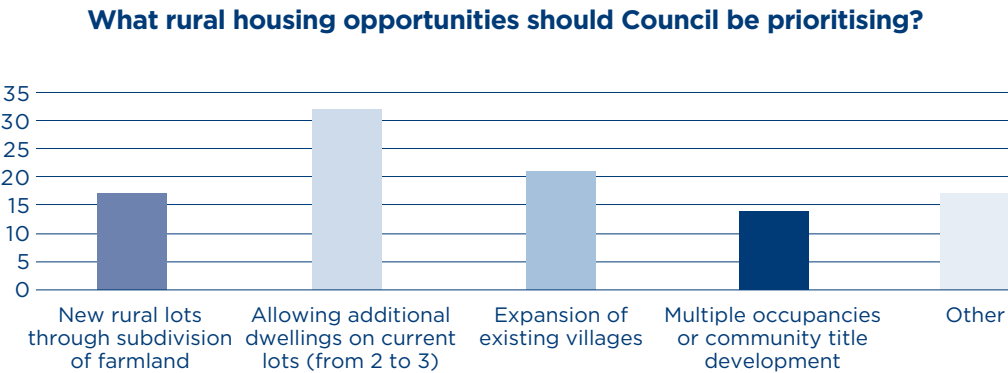


Figure 10
Survey responses on rural housing opportunities

In a separate question, 51% of respondents supported Council making it easier to set up rural land-sharing communities such as multiple occupancies or community title development. However, this was the least preferred method of the housing options presented (Figure 10). During consultation, a range of issues with existing multiple occupancies were raised, including land use conflict, servicing, bushfire risk and Council compliance.

Expanding existing villages was the second most preferred option for additional housing in rural lands (Figure 10) and when asked about it directly, there was significant support (63%) for growth of our villages (Figure 11).

Do you support the growth of our villages?

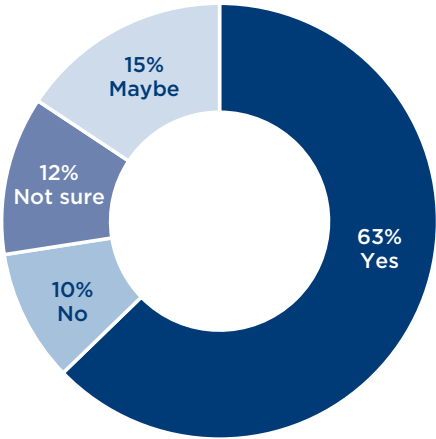


Figure 11
Survey responses on growing Lismore’s villages

A separate question asked about changes to minimum lot size, which was only supported by 47% of respondents. However, many of the ‘maybe’ respondents to that question indicated support if it avoided prime agricultural land and was based on a merit assessment. A common recurring theme throughout the survey was respondents indicating that additional housing may be more appropriate on lots that are already too small to support agriculture. However, according to industry feedback, some horticulture can operate commercially on small lots and rural lot size is not always important, although industry critical mass and supply chain links are critical to success.

Environment

The Discussion Paper proposed the development of a biodiversity overlay to better support biodiversity protection. A mapped overlay, along with accompanying LEP provisions, could identify land with high biodiversity value and require development applications to consider the impacts of development against an avoid, minimise, offset framework.

However, the incorporation of a biodiversity overlay would need to consider the impact that it has on exempt and complying pathways established under the Exempt and Complying Development Codes State Environmental Planning Policy (Codes SEPP). One adverse impact may be that certain small scale land uses that currently do not require consent are no longer considered exempt or permitted development and therefore will require development consent.

A biodiversity overlay would also have limited effect (to uses not contained with the Codes SEPP) as it would only apply to development that requires consent. Development that does not require consent within the LEP, such as extensive agriculture and horticulture in the RU1 Primary Production zone, would not be affected by the overlay provisions.

More than half (56%) of respondents agreed that Council should implement such a layer, with 22% opposed (Figure 12).

Do you support Council creating an overlay to better protect biodiversity?

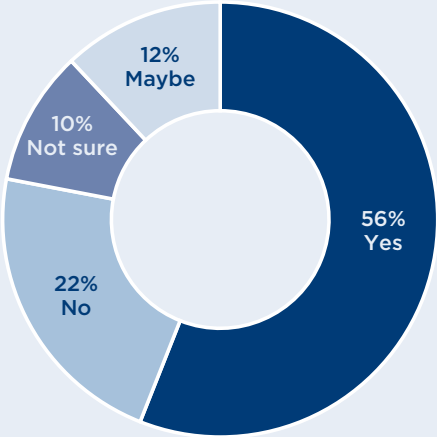


Figure 12
Survey responses to creating an overlay to better protect biodiversity

Separate to the survey, a number of written submissions suggested Council investigate additional options to better protect koala populations.

An equal number of survey respondents (41%) were in favour of and opposed to requiring a development application to be lodged for private native forestry (Figure 13). Taking into account written submissions, more were in favour than opposed. This action would allow Council some oversight of private native forestry agreements and understand infrastructure needs.

Should Council require development applications to be lodged for private native forestry?

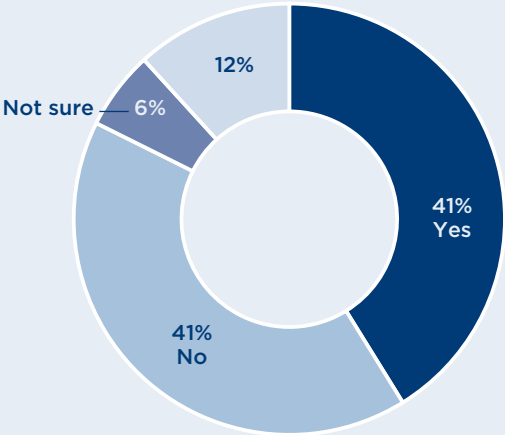


Figure 13
Survey responses on whether a development application should be required for private native forestry



What we heard – SWOT analysis



Strengths

The survey asked respondents to detail the strengths, challenges, opportunities and threats that faced rural lands in the Lismore local government area. Survey responses were combined with written submissions and industry feedback, and were grouped into relevant themes. The topics included in each grouping are provided in Table 1.

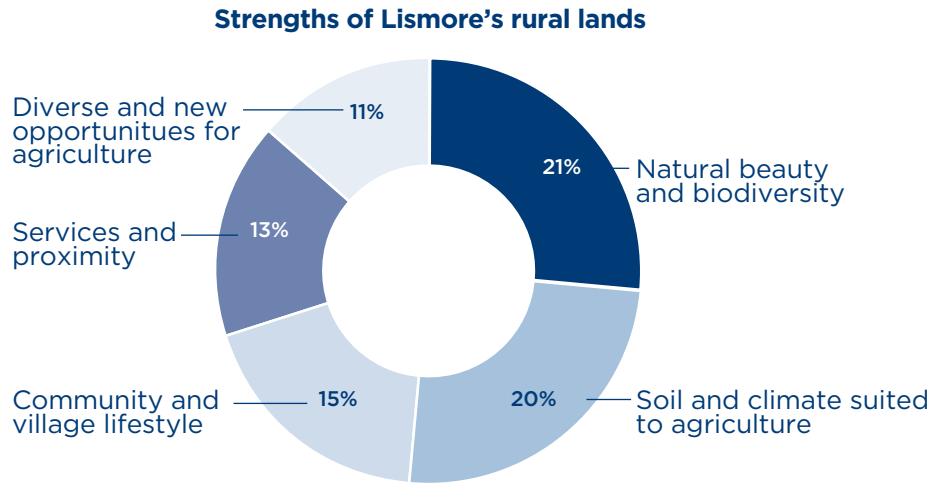


Figure 14
Grouped feedback on the strengths of Lismore’s rural lands

The strengths identified for Lismore’s rural lands (Figure 14) related to the region’s natural beauty and biodiversity, including scenic amenity and peacefulness. Soils and climate suited to agriculture were also identified as a strength of similar importance followed by the community values and village lifestyle afforded by rural areas (Figure 14).

Challenges

The most commonly suggested challenge currently affecting Lismore’s rural lands was the difficult economic environment for many agricultural commodities (Figure 15). An example mentioned a few times was the significant drop in the value of macadamia nuts compared with the cost of production. Extreme climate events and poor land management practices tied with 23% of submissions identifying these issues as current challenges for rural lands in Lismore LGA (Figure 15).

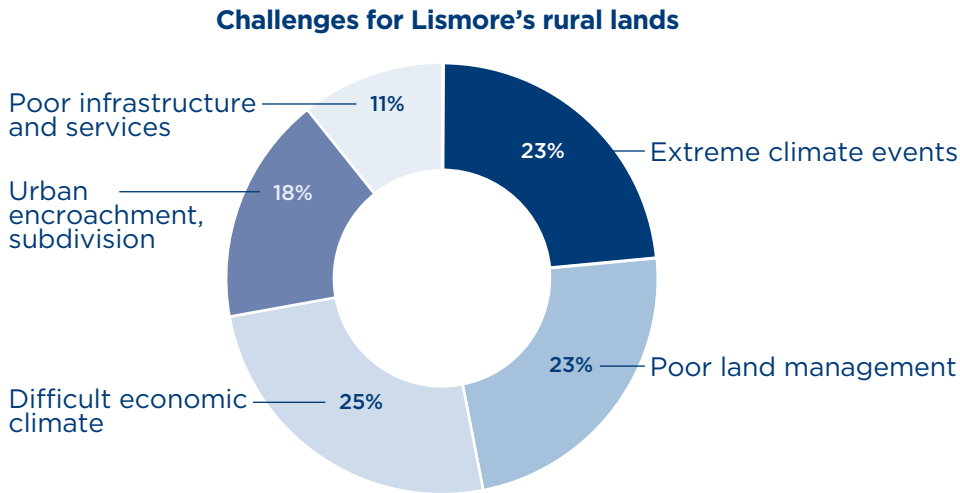


Figure 15
Grouped feedback on the strengths of Lismore’s rural lands

Opportunities

Agritourism and ecotourism, regenerative agriculture and emerging agricultural industries were all seen as opportunities for Lismore’s rural land use (Figure 16). In this analysis, regenerative agriculture includes sustainable agricultural practices and nature-based solutions that support and enhance agricultural production. Emerging agricultural industries includes crops such as hemp, rain-fed rice and bush foods, protected agriculture and small-lot farming and innovations such as water recycling (Table 1). Local food production with value-adding and local marketing was also seen as important for food security and for providing an avenue for agriculture industry entrants and young farmers. Housing opportunities such as providing more housing and growing villages was also identified as an opportunity for rural land use in Lismore (Figure 16).

Threats

The impacts of poor land management and subdivision and development were seen as the primary threats to rural lands in Lismore LGA (Figure 17). The impacts of poor land management was also raised as a current challenge, and includes land degradation, loss of habitat and scenic amenity, poor riparian management and poor river health (Table 1). Lack of vision and overregulation included a wide range of issues such as indecision, ignorance, and lack of commitment in protecting the environment (Table 1). Biosecurity threats included increase in weeds and new weeds, and pests such as fire ants. Climate change was also raised as a threat, consistent with the challenges of extreme climate events (Figure 17).

Opportunities for Lismore’s rural lands

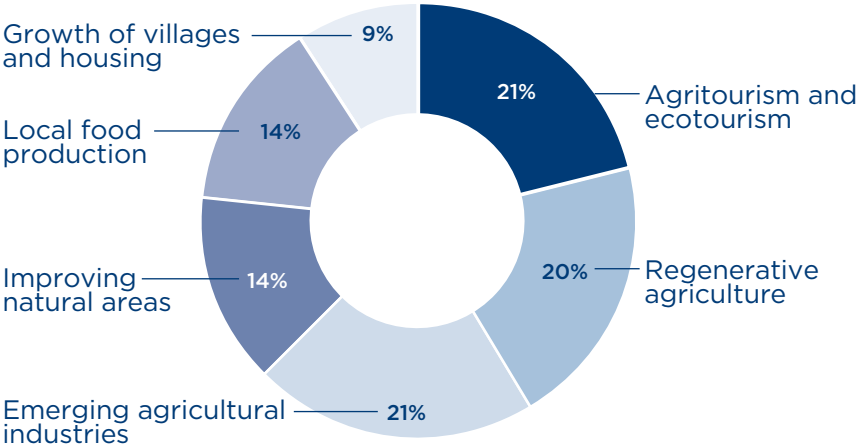


Figure 16
Grouped feedback on the opportunities for Lismore’s rural lands

Threats for Lismore’s rural lands

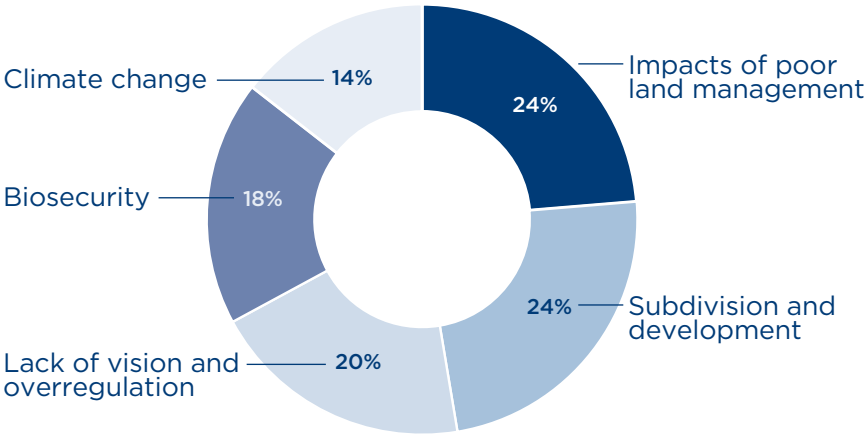


Figure 17
Grouped feedback on the threats to Lismore’s rural lands

The impacts of poor land management and subdivision and development were seen as the primary threats to rural lands in Lismore LGA (Figure 17). The impacts of poor land management was also raised as a current challenge, and includes land degradation, loss of habitat and scenic amenity, poor riparian management and poor river health (Table 1). Lack of vision and overregulation included a wide range of issues such as indecision, ignorance, and lack of commitment in protecting the environment (Table 1). Biosecurity threats included increase in weeds and new weeds, and pests such as fire ants. Climate change was also raised as a threat, consistent with the challenges of extreme climate events (Figure 17).

Table 1
Additional details of what is included in each grouping and the isolated topics that did not fit neatly within a grouping.

Grouping	Includes responses
Strengths	
Natural beauty and biodiversity	Natural beauty, biodiversity, scenic amenity, peacefulness, open land, proximity to forests and beaches
Soil and climate suited to agriculture	Good quality soil suitable for a range of agricultural activities, climate suited to agriculture
Community and village lifestyle	Village and rural lifestyle, passionate community, supportive community, diverse community, culture, protecting Indigenous sites.
Services and proximity	Local services and suppliers, labour skills, local markets, proximity to SEQ markets, proximity to processing and to the tablelands and the coast, road network and access to M1
Diverse and new opportunities for agriculture	Diverse opportunities for agriculture, emerging opportunities for agriculture, local research facilities and support

Grouping	Includes responses
Challenges	
Extreme climate events	Extreme climate events, flooding, bushfire, landslips, housing on flood/landslip-prone land
Poor land management	Poor land management, weed control, riparian management, fertiliser and pesticide runoff, water quality, difficult terrain, lack of wildlife corridors and buffers
Difficult economic climate	Profitability, increasing price of land due to subdivision, landbanking, affordable housing for workers, aging workforce, attracting next generation of farmers, focus on tourism
Urban encroachment, sub-division includes	land use conflict, providing roads and services to support more rural houses, influx of non-ag residents or residents from flood areas
Poor infrastructure ad services	poor condition of roads, saleyards, and bridges, lack of rail and public transport
Other (not grouped)	Access to water, lack of cross-departmental collaboration on rural land management

Grouping	Includes responses
Opportunities	
Agritourism and ecotourism	Agritourism, ecotourism
Regenerative agriculture	Regenerative agriculture, sustainable agricultural practices, nature-based solutions, flood resilient crops
Emerging agricultural industries	Hemp, protected agriculture, bush foods, small-lot farming, rain-fed rice, biofuels, water recycling with new industries
Improving natural areas	Restore koala habitat, increase native plants and corridors, habitat restoration, biodiversity and carbon offsets
Local food production	Market gardens, farmers markets, value adding, local food security, local production and selling
Growth of villages and housing	Additional housing, affordable housing, farm rentals, grow villages
Other (not grouped)	agroforestry, sustainable forestry

Grouping	Includes responses
Threats	
Impacts of poor land management	Land degradation, poor agricultural land condition, loss of scenic amenity, loss of habitat, poor riparian management and river health.
Subdivision and development	Lot size, subdivisions, land use conflict, fragmentation of land, impacts on rates, inability to buy a local farm
Lack of vision and over-regulation	Not committing to protect the environment, indecision, ignorance, corruption, government interference
Biosecurity	Biosecurity, weeds, fire ants, pest animals
Climate change	Climate change
Other (not grouped)	Loss of Aboriginal sites, fracking, overpopulation, looking to emerging industries over current ones, bin collection



What we heard

– State Government responses

The Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure (DPHI) and Department of Primary Industries (DPI) provided submissions on the Rural Land Use Discussion Paper.

DPI agreed with draft objectives as well as many suggestions put forward in the Discussion Paper, including:

- Retaining productive agricultural land as RU1 and focusing the RU1 Land Use Table on agricultural activities
- Creating a biodiversity overlay, with further consideration of the needs of farmers
- Updating Development Control Plan buffers chapters to align with DPI guidelines
- Developing a DCP for rural industries
- Appointing an agricultural extension officer
- Education and awareness campaigns and partnerships

However, DPI raised concern about any changes to planning controls that enable additional housing across the rural landscape. DPI raised concerns that such changes could lead to land use conflict that could negatively impact agricultural production and supply chains and could impede agricultural producers from expanding production and reinvesting in the LGA. DPI does not support the reduction of minimum lot size in RU1, and any proposal to make such a change would require a detailed justification report.

DPHI recommended that any investigations done on rural housing form part of an update to the Local Strategic Planning Statement (LSPS) or Growth and Realignment Strategy. It recommended any move to change controls to facilitate housing be done in consultation with DPI.

Next steps

Council staff will use the feedback received to shape a draft Rural Land Use Strategy. This strategy will go on public exhibition and further feedback will be used to refine a final version. The Rural Land Use Strategy will be developed in conjunction with the LSPS and other linked strategies to ensure consistency across the strategies and with Council's Community Strategic Plan.

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Lismore
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