

Rural workers dwellings

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The purpose of this Primefact is to help local councils to determine if rural workers dwellings (RWD) should be provided for in their Local Environmental Plan (LEP) and the relevant planning criteria.

All enquiries with regard to workers' dwellings should be directed to the relevant local council. Councils are the local planning and development authority in NSW. NSW DPI's role is to encourage strategic approaches to rural development and to help streamline the Development Application process.



Historic rural workers dwellings. Photo: Glenda Briggs.

Are rural workers dwellings needed?

The standard Local Environmental Plan defines a rural workers dwelling as an ancillary dwelling 'on the same landholding, used as the principal place of residence for persons employed for the purpose of agriculture or a rural industry on that land'.

Providing a principal residence for additional farm workers or a manager can be crucial where the scale and nature of the farm enterprise routinely requires additional employees and it is not feasible for them to travel to the property to work.

The animal welfare and 24/7 management needs of large-scale intensive livestock enterprises may also require more than one on-site residence.

In coastal regions and within 200 km of major population centres, additional rural workers dwellings are unlikely to be necessary. Relevant factors include:

- improved communications
- the accessibility of nearby residential zones and surplus dwellings on other properties
- smaller scale enterprises that do not need additional full-time or resident farm labour
- mobile farm workers / managers able to work on more than one property.

Permanent dwellings which are surplus to the sustainable and productive use of rural resource lands can restrict future primary industry development, conflict with zone objectives and undermine rural zone objectives and planning strategies.

Construction of a second or third dwelling on a rural property inflates property values and can prevent other farmers from purchasing land to start or expand farming operations. Multiple dwellings also create subdivision pressure.

Additional rural dwellings can also increase the demand for services, have adverse environmental impacts and be unsustainable.

Recommended approaches

To identify the need for rural dwellings, councils are encouraged to strategically review their desired planning outcomes, existing rural dwelling densities, current and future agricultural enterprises, and agricultural employment trends.

The next step is to decide the most appropriate dwelling options and develop relevant local planning controls and guidelines to manage the development of rural dwellings and minimise the risk of land use conflict and subdivision.

Demand for multiple dwellings on rural lands may not be clearly related to enterprise needs or the productive use of the land, especially in more settled areas. For instance, smaller properties with a non-resident owner may want a resident caretaker or



manager to provide on-farm security. Also, councils may want to facilitate affordable rural housing or enable tourist development.

To address such needs councils should consider alternatives such as duplex or dual occupancy development, relocatable dwellings, or rezoning.

Developing relevant criteria for rural workers dwellings

Verifying the bona fide need for a resident farm worker requires consideration of complex factors such as the nature of farm activities, the relative isolation of a property, primary producer status and financial sustainability. This greatly increases the cost of submitting and assessing the application and typically requires expert advice. The need for a resident farm worker can also vary over time.

Measures seeking to restrict rural workers dwellings to farm family members have proved ineffective.

Where planning strategies confirm the ongoing need for rural workers dwellings, councils are consequently encouraged to adopt planning controls that avoid land use conflict and resource alienation, minimise the risk of incremental subdivision and prevent de-facto rural lifestyle developments.

To support sustainable primary industry development, all dwellings in rural areas should:

- meet LEP and zone objectives
- be consistent with strategies and relevant development control guidelines
- have suitable site access and services, and
- avoid adverse environmental, heritage and amenity impacts.

Additionally, rural workers dwellings should:

- be situated on the same legal title as the principal farm dwelling
- share the same road access, power and communication infrastructure as the principal farm dwelling
- be located within reasonable proximity to other farm buildings (e.g. within 300 m), and
- be appropriately separated from farm boundaries and potentially conflicting land uses (e.g. intensive livestock operations, livestock yards, dairies, etc.).

Additional Information

The NSW DPI website (www.dpi.nsw.gov.au) has additional information about planning for primary industries and minimising conflict. See in particular [Buffers - planning for sustainable agriculture](#) and [The Living and Working in Rural Areas handbook](#).



Dairy farm dwelling at sunset. Photo: Graham Johnson.

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Disclaimer: The information contained in this publication is based on knowledge and understanding at the time of writing (November 2008). However, because of advances in knowledge, users are reminded of the need to ensure that information upon which they rely is up to date and to check currency of the information with the appropriate officer of New South Wales Department of Primary Industries or the user's independent adviser.

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