



3 March 2017

Senate Finance and Public Administration Committees
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

SUBMISSION: SENATE INQUIRY INTO RELOCATION OF GOVERNMENT BODIES TO REGIONAL AREAS (OPERATION, EFFECTIVENESS AND CONSEQUENCES OF THE PUBLIC GOVERNANCE, PERFORMANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY (LOCATION OF CORPORATE COMMONWEALTH ENTITIES) ORDER 2016)

The Northern Rivers Regional Organisation of Councils represents the Lismore, Tweed, Kyogle, Richmond Valley, Ballina and Byron Local Government Areas located on the far north coast of NSW. This submission reflects the broad views of the NOROC councils in relation to the Australian Senate Inquiry into the relocation of government bodies to regional areas.

Councils in the Northern Rivers are extremely supportive of the relocation of government departments, agencies and offices to regional areas as a way of boosting employment, improving local and regional economies and contributing to the future prosperity of regional NSW.

What does the Northern Rivers offer as a location for Commonwealth entities?

The Northern Rivers region stretches from the Tweed Shire on the Queensland border, down to Grafton. It is a blend of diverse communities, environments and cultural experiences that include World Heritage listed national parks, internationally renowned surfing spots, the tourist mecca of Byron Bay, the regional centre of Lismore and traditional towns such as Casino and Kyogle which service agricultural industries such as beef and dairy cattle. Additionally Tweed Heads has been recognised by the NSW Government as a regional city and Ballina, an emerging regional centre.

The Northern Rivers has a wide range of established services and businesses that would complement the decentralisation of government agencies. These include:

- Health services - 13 hospitals including two level 5 referral hospitals (Lismore Base Hospital and Tweed Hospital, and one private hospital (St Vincents);
- Education - Southern Cross University with campuses at Lismore, Tweed and Coffs Harbour and a diverse choice of public and private primary and high schools;
- Close proximity to three airports including the Gold Coast Airport, Ballina Byron Gateway Airport and Lismore Airport. These airports provide immediate connectivity to ports including Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra. The Gold Coast Airport is also the fifth busiest international airport in Australia with flights to ports such as Japan, China, Hong Kong, Singapore and New Zealand. Brisbane Airport is approximately two hours drive away;
- Road and freight connectivity via the Pacific Highway and Bruxner Highway;
- Availability of a wide range of office space and land for development that is significantly cheaper than what is currently available in metropolitan centres;
- Technology via the rollout of the NBN;
- A fantastic lifestyle;

NOROC

A regional voice for the Tweed, Ballina, Lismore, Kyogle, Richmond Valley and Byron Councils

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- Strong, caring communities;
- World famous beaches and national parks and everything in between.

How will the Northern Rivers benefit from decentralising Government services?

The Northern Rivers, whilst a popular destination for retirees and tourists, has traditionally high unemployment rates and considerable social disadvantage. Approximately 4.1 per cent of the population identifies as indigenous (2011 Census). The region also suffers from reduced numbers of people in the 20-39 years age bracket which is indicative of the lack of stable, diverse and permanent employment opportunities. Additionally we struggle with the drain of youth, many of whom leave school and the family home to pursue tertiary or vocational study or take jobs in other areas.

An investment by the Federal Government in the Northern Rivers would see an increased range of professionals move into our local government areas and associated jobs would provide much needed employment opportunities. Decentralisation would stimulate regional growth and business, revitalise towns and villages, and increase demand for services such as education and health.

In 2013 the NSW Government formed a NSW Decentralisation Taskforce to inform its Decade of Decentralisation Strategy. The Taskforce recommended the NSW Government should plan and implement a strategy to relocate appropriate public sector functions and jobs to regional NSW to stimulate regional economic development.

An example of a successful relocation of a State Government agency to a regional area is the NSW Government's decision to move the Office of Local Government to Nowra. This added more than \$10-million per annum via salaries of 60 staff to the Shoalhaven economy.

The decentralisation of government services is not only supported by the Ballina, Byron, Tweed, Kyogle, Richmond Valley and Lismore Councils, but other stakeholders including RDA Northern Rivers, Southern Cross University and the Northern Rivers Business Chamber, which all see enormous benefits for local residents and businesses, providing economic stimulus to our region, attracting highly skilled workers and a strong regional economy.

NOROC is requesting the Senate Committee schedule a hearing at a location in the Northern Rivers to allow all stakeholders including Councils, community leaders and interested organisations and individuals to state their cases for the relocation of government bodies to the Northern Rivers.

Yours faithfully

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