

As a long-term resident of regional NSW with an interest and experience in the economic development efforts of my coastal city LGA, I support in principle the National Party's points above and their policy to distribute more public service jobs across the regions.

Others are better placed to comment on the process, rationale, costs and benefits of the current departmental relocations to Armidale and Wagga in the agriculture portfolio specifically (Inquiry TOR 1, 2, 3). However, my general view is that such relocations to the bush of whole agencies or specialist Canberra and capital city policy and regulatory wonks are unlikely to be broadly beneficial. At best, these relocations might create a small number of lucky "winners" among the regional communities able to articulate a location-specific business case or sway an influential local MP. Less obvious are any benefits that would flow to regional areas generally or to the nation from such an piecemeal approach, especially if agency re-location decisions are influenced by "pork-barrelling" in marginal electorates rather than a compelling cost-benefit case.

I recommend instead that under TOR 4 "Other related matters", the Inquiry consider a proposal to establish in every sizeable rural town - say serving a catchment population of 5,000+ - an integrated C'wealth Govt Service Centre supporting face-to-face services, back-office processing and the locally-generated phone enquiries currently directed to centralised government call centres. Currently only the larger regional centres have a physical Commonwealth Government agency service presence.

Arguably, distributing the physical and human resources of the existing centralised and regionalised service centres and call centres across a wider network of smaller Commonwealth Government front-line service centres is a more fair, feasible and cost-effective way to spread job and economic growth across the regions than adhoc whole agency re-locations. This alternative approach would also provide more regionally-responsive services for those rural and regional people who currently endure hours of travelling, queuing or on-hold to access the Centrelink, Medicare, Child and Aged Care Support, Veterans and ATO (etc...) services they need.

Potentially this broadly distributed reinvestment of Commonwealth agency front-line service resources could stimulate additional private investment in the regional towns where the new service centres are established and, in turn, help spread to the regions some of the benefits of the Government's much-vaunted "jobs and growth" agenda.

Joy Corben