



GK: JC

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Committee Secretary
Senate Economics References Committee
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Dear Mark

Thank you for your invitation to make a submission to the 'Inquiry into the Indicators of, and Impact of, Regional Inequality in Australia' inquiry.

Following is Council's submission:

TRANSPORT

- Road Funding for all state roads that improve economic viability, communication and lifestyle. Industry and Tourism need good roads to connect our many wonderful outback Queensland attractions
- Greater priorities given to road projects west of the great divide range
- The Commonwealth changes to the method of funding road damage under the NDRRA has been greatly welcomed throughout Queensland as it now allows Council day labour workforce and plant to be used for restoration works. This same approach should be adopted more widely for federally funded road works where Council can demonstrate value for money in delivering road construction. Flinders Shire Council is full accredited to undertake Federal road works over \$4M in value. Where this is the case Council should be offered "Sole Invitee Status" as a right without having to compete in the open market for such works

COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT FUNDING

- Commonwealth Financial Assistance to Local Government – A detailed review of the National Principles governing the distribution of the Commonwealth Financial Assistance Grants is required. A copy of the resolution #3 adopted at the ALGA conference 2017 is attached
- The Commonwealth's grant programs need to be reviewed to ensure that the guidelines reflect conditions in remote areas for example the Regional Growth Fund will provide grants of \$10M or more for major transformational projects which support long term economic growth. However for remote areas the \$10M benchmark may be too high and therefore projects promoting economic growth and creating jobs would be ineligible

- Commonwealth Drought Support programs over recent years have had a very significant impact on helping community organisations and Council to continue to provide services. The Australian Government should continue to play a vital role in this regard to help maintain community life and infrastructure through drought times
- Flinders Shire Council has been undertaking significant economic development projects such as attracting a Beef Processing Plant to its area and developing a high value irrigated agricultural project. Currently there is no government support either at the Commonwealth or State level to Council for the preliminary costs that Council has to incur before private investors can be attracted. This area of funding also needs to be considered

HEALTH

- Requirements for rural and remote areas is more opportunity for funding and telehealth, more mobile health vans such as Heart of Australia to provide specialist services on a rotational basis to many rural communities

The Commonwealth Community Care Programs, changes in the delivery model to a user pay system has had significant implications for Flinders Shire Council who has been the provider of these services for many years. Changes in the guidelines has meant that previously authorised program expenditure is no longer eligible (for example traveling cost, which rate payers are now currently subsidising these costs), this is not sustainable into the future and a review of how Commonwealth Health Care Products in rural and remote area has become urgent)

- The MPHS is federally funded for the beds in existing health facilities. The beds are taken off the existing beds in the facilities and as such they can be private rooms, verandas, acute beds in wards or walled off hallways. The areas have no recreational areas or kitchenette facilities and need to share toilets and bathrooms with hospital patients. Consideration needs to be given for the provision of funding to supply purpose built bedrooms for aged patients who qualify as MPHS clients. We would like to see purpose built modular units attached to the existing hospitals and health centres so that these MPHS clients can live out their final time in a positive, comfortable environment.

Most rural and regional towns have an ageing population and consideration needs to be given to aged Care accommodation and secure Dementia units. There is no such facility on the Flinders Highway between Charters Towers and Cloncurry in the townships of Hughenden, Richmond and Julia Creek. These facilities could also be supplied by way of specifically built modular units that can be attached to existing facilities.

COMMUNICATION

- NBN has not filled the gap for communication requirements, many smaller companies are filling the gap and this does not cover all areas, there needs to be a much better communication system that brings rural and remote areas into the 21st century. A review by Telstra is also considered necessary into the time taken to fixed land line services

TOURISM

- The economic benefits of tourism to remote communities are very significant. The Australian Government needs to become directly involved in funding the development and or improvement of tourism product. Council is not aware of any funding opportunities to assist Council's in tourism development

EDUCATION

- The delivery of education services in remote areas needs review to ensure that students particularly in the later stage on secondary education are not disadvantaged compared to their urban counterparts. It is noticed that senior students struggle to complete senior subjects required for University entrance as these subjects are largely only offered via the internet and in some cases not offered at all, this is creating a second class system for the deliver of education services.

COMMERCIAL

- Banking opportunities. The four big banks have been progressively pulling their services out of the bush, we need to have access to smaller banks to cover the needs of financial viability of our business and private sectors

RENEWABLE ENERGY

- Major projects such as the Copper String Project should receive greater funding and priority to improve energy requirements in rural and remote areas of Queensland

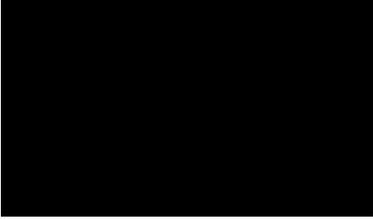
AIR TRANSPORT

- The cost of airfares in remote areas is becoming a significant issue for residents in these remote areas. There is current Senate enquiry into this issue and Council supports ways of making airfares more affordable to ensure that this is not another incentive for people to relocate out of remote areas of the state.

POPULATION DECLINE

- Outback Queensland represents some 60% of the state and has approximately 2% of the states population. Recent Census data indicates that many communities within outback Queensland are reducing in population, including Flinders Shire. It is becoming crucial that both the state and Australian Governments address the declining population and conduct a review of its policies and programs to ensure there is positive action taken.

Yours faithfully



Graham King
Chief Executive Officer

Resolutions from the 2017 National General Assembly

Resolution Number: 1

Uralla Shire Council, NSW

That the National General Assembly call upon the Federal government to hold a referendum to amend the Commonwealth Constitution to formally recognise 'local government' and further that the National General Assembly seek bi-partisan support for the proposal.

Carried

Resolution Number: 2

Moreton Bay Regional Council, QLD

That the Australian Local Government Association call on the Australian Government to reallocate Commonwealth taxes to achieve at least a 1% share for local government throughout Australia.

Carried

Resolution Number: 3

Flinders Shire Council, QLD

That the Australian Government undertake a review of the intrastate distribution of Financial Assistance Grants (FAGs) under the Local Government (Financial Assistance) Act 1995. with focus on: - the inconsistency of the National Principles between distributing the funds on a full horizontal equalisation basis and the Minimum Grant Principle (namely 30 per cent of funds being distributed on a per capital basis); and - the effectiveness of the current intrastate distribution of the Financial Assistance Grants in ensuring that each local governing body in a State/Territory is able to function. by reasonable effort. at a standard not lower than the average standard of other local government bodies in the State/Territory.

Carried

Resolution Number: 4

Leeton Shire Council, NSW

That the National General Assembly call upon the Federal Government to investigate the payment of a "claw back" provision to regain lost indexation funding from the 2014-15, 2015-16 and 2016-17 periods.

Carried

Resolution Number: 5

Lake Macquarie City Council, NSW

That the National General Assembly call upon call on the Australian Government to review the amount and method of indexing Financial Assistance Grants to ensure that funding is commensurate with increases in the costs of efficient local government service delivery in 2017-18 and beyond.