

22 November 2013

Committee Secretary

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications

PO Box 6100

Parliament House

Canberra ACT 2600

Submission: Performance, importance and role of Australia Post in Australian Communities and its operations in relation to licensed post offices (LPO's).

Thankfully, our local post office was saved from closure in 2004.

Postcode 3097, peri urban Melbourne, comprises Kangaroo Ground, Watsons Creek and the Bend of Islands. Whilst many of our residents have lived in the district for generations, the last twenty years has seen the large land holdings subdivided to 20 acre lots and rural lifestyle dwellings constructed. We are an eclectic mix of painters and potters, small block farmers, older folk living in place, successful business people and retirees, young families escaping the “burbs” and artisans creating product. We are a **strong community** in every sense; our big test was the 2009 “Black Saturday” bushfires.

Since 2004, our post office has grown from 285 post boxes to 516. Inward parcels to POB's have skyrocketed to more than 1000 per month whilst letter volumes have essentially remained static. The parcel boom shows no sign of abating.

Australia Post survives in our community by virtue of the small in-conjunction business that “lends” floor space for parcels; a very real symbiotic relationship.....the failure of one of the entities will result in the demise of the other.

Moving forwards, the financial viability of our licensed post office will determine the role we play in our close knit community. We intend to invest in our business over the coming years; a cafe and increased capacity for our in-conjunction wine making business and therefore would welcome some certainty into revenue streams for our efforts in the LPO. The Australia Post brand will feature prominently.

I'm sure our story is replicated many times over across the nation, the mum's and dad's of Australia have funds invested in their LPO's. I estimate that with over 2800 LPO's, each with a notional investment of \$350,000 in the license represents a total private investment of \$1billion; and that's just the license. Buildings, chattels, privately owned PO boxes are additional assets so total private investment may exceed \$2 billion.

Two Billion dollars, an investment demanding strong and effective peak body representation.

We are not just letters and parcels. We are much more than that!

We are the community meeting place, where locals catch up and chat, where community information is distributed; the next CFA fundraiser, the pony club event, what's happening at the tennis club and upcoming church fete. Visitors drop by to ask where to eat, where to see kangaroos, where to go for a walk. Whenever there's smoke on the horizon, the post office is where one goes to find out what's happening. Our local post office is part of the fabric of our community, much more than just a big red P.

We acknowledge that Australia Post is aware of its important role in Australian communities. Australia Posts' "Our Neighbourhood Community Grants" is testament to this. It's a commendable program where organisations can apply for project funding, and I quote Australia Post's website "for community projects or initiatives that met the theme of "inclusion" and supported disadvantaged audience groups within Australia." Communities targeted include small business (up to 20 employees). It could be argued that Australia Post LPO's meet these criteria.

An excellent example of how a major corporate can contribute to its communities is the Bendigo Bank. As the major banks retired from Australian communities, the Bendigo moved in with a unique business model based upon revenue sharing. The success is legendary. Community banks branded as the Bendigo are contributing millions of dollars to help communities thrive.

Communities such as ours, need strengthening not decay, so older folk can age in place, more people can work from home, food can again be grown locally, our schools can see rising enrolments.

In many ways, it's back to the future. Town planners acknowledge that the village has returned. It just makes sense!

Australia Post and its licensed post offices are playing an important role in this space.

Ken King

Licensee

