



Southern Downs
REGIONAL COUNCIL

1 March 2017

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Senate Finance and Public Administration Committees
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
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Dear Chairperson

Re: The Operation, Effectiveness and Consequences of the Public Governance, Performance and Accountability (Location of Corporate Commonwealth Entities) Order 2016

Please accept this submission put forward on behalf of the Southern Downs Regional Council.

The Southern Downs Region is strategically-located in the high growth region of Southern Queensland, and offers an appealing mix of country and city living backed up by genuine friendliness and charm. All the civic and commercial services you need are at your fingertips and there is no rush hour traffic. Clean, crisp country air, a wide range of community facilities and a safe environment combine to make the Southern Downs a great place to live, work and play.

Modern hospitals and health care facilities are available throughout the region as well as a number of medical clinics, dental surgeries and a full range of specialist medical services. Warwick and Stanthorpe CBDs are home to traditional country stores as well as modern shopping complexes.

The current Council was elected in April 2016. Since the election, the new Council has committed to re-invigorating the Region and is actively seeking investment and residential growth. The Southern Downs Regional Council fully supports the relocation of Government bodies to regional Australian centres and will actively campaign for an agency to be relocated in Warwick or Stanthorpe.

The relocation of Government bodies from Canberra to regional Australian communities can add significant economic and social capital into regional communities. There have been many examples of successful relocation with Regional Cities such as Ballarat, Bendigo and Geelong all attracting a plethora of different public authorities through various decentralisation programs.

It is noted that The Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC) have already been moved to Wagga Wagga. This move has saved the Government money but has also injected millions of dollars into the local economy, and it has ensured that the agency is closer to the sectors with which it is interested.

The Southern Downs has been a premier location for agricultural produce since European settlement in the mid 1800's. Warwick has the oldest agricultural research station in Queensland and has a strong history of innovation in agriculture. The Region produces most of Queensland's summer vegetables, all of Queensland's apples, most of Queensland's stone fruit and is the finest wine region in Queensland.

The Southern Downs always has been and is building on a reputation for value-adding. John Dee is a meat processing facility that has the longest single family ownership of any facility in Australia. The Region has had a dairy co-operative, it still has a grain mill, and recently it has seen investment in a fruit juicing plant and a vinegar manufacturer, both of whom are exporting.

Transport and logistics is strength of the Region. Big W has a large distribution centre and there are a number of national transport operators in the Region. The sector is supported by mechanics and manufacturers.

Warwick has been a service centre for the surrounding district, offering retail, wholesale, financial, health and education services. Stanthorpe has similarly been a service centre for its catchment area albeit on a smaller scale. Stanthorpe is a tourist destination particularly in the winter months although the Council is working to attract more visitors across the year.

The Southern Downs has a relatively diverse economy, steeped in history and tradition and like many rural and regional communities it has a low growth rate and an aging population.

The Southern Downs Regional Council is actively attracting new residents and investment that will create jobs. The Council is supportive of a decentralisation strategy that relocates Government bodies into regional communities, because it will help to grow the resident populations and out economies.

The strengths of the Southern Downs Region make it an ideal location for government agencies such as but not limited to:

- Australian Pesticide and Veterinary Medicines Authority
- Australian Pork Ltd
- Australian Rail Track Corporation
- Centre for Australian National Biodiversity Research and Australian National Herbarium
- Grains Research and Development Corporation
- Meat and Livestock Australia
- Regional Development Australia

Warwick and Stanthorpe both have excellent connectivity via road and air routes to the rest of Australia. Each town is close to both Brisbane and Wellcamp airports, which offer regular flights and they are on the junction of the New England and Cunningham Highways. This high level of connectivity will ensure the agencies are able to operate efficiently and that they will not be isolated from other parts of the country.

The Southern Downs has available office space or zone commercial land that can accommodate an agency. The Southern Downs Regional Council will facilitate the logistics of any move to ensure an agency that moves to the Region is able to perform its function seamlessly.

The benefit to the Southern Downs community is a key consideration of the Council. The Southern Downs can accommodate an agency and the agency will function extremely well.

The Council sees the economic and social advantages as the most important aspect of the proposed decentralisation policy.

There are a number of economic drivers that the Council has considered in this submission. The injection of wages into the local economy; the benefit to local businesses servicing a new office, and the corporate travelers expenditure are all significant.

The social benefits are similarly significant, these include; new school enrollments, activity in the real estate market, more clients for retail and the medical services, more participation in sporting and social groups, and a better utilisation of infrastructure.

The impact of these economic and social benefits is far greater in rural and regional communities; the percentage change is much greater than it is in larger centres. The cost of operation for the agencies is significantly lower in regional communities, without any noticeable decrease in effectiveness; and finally the quality of life for the employees of these agencies will be better in most regional centres, particularly on the Southern Downs.

The Southern Downs Regional Council supports the relocation of Government agencies to rural and regional Australian communities and it is adamant that it wants to be considered as a location for one of the agencies either in part or in full.

Yours faithfully

Tracy Dobie
Mayor