

**3<sup>rd</sup> March 2017**

**Submission to:**

The Committee Secretary  
Senate Finance and Public Administration Committees  
Department of the Senate  
PO Box 6100  
Parliamentary House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600  
AUSTRALIA

**Submitting Person:**

Andrew Drysdale  
Chair  
Lake Eyre Basin Community Advisory Committee  
P O Box 4608  
Toowoomba East Qld 4352

Following is a submission to the Parliamentary Senate Committee considering the location of Corporate Commonwealth Entities. My submission is as the Chair of the Lake Eyre Basin Community Advisory Committee which consists of a range of community and stakeholders from or representing the Lake Eyre Basin community. I will draw on my experience from having lived and owned a business in regional Queensland and as the Chair of Rangelands NRM Alliance which represents the 16 NRM Groups that straddle the Australian Rangelands/Outback i.e. 80% of the Australian land mass. For the purpose of this submission I have not distinguished the difference between Corporate Commonwealth Entities and Commonwealth Departments whilst acknowledge they are not one in the same.

I was born and raised in South West Queensland in the Charleville/Augathella district. After completing tertiary studies my brother and I purchased a mulga property outside of Charleville which I operated for 16 years.

Throughout the eighties and early nineties I was involved in local, state and national primary industry peak bodies. In the 1990's I worked for the Department of Primary Industries in Cunnamulla and Charleville as well as owning a small business in Charleville.

In 2000 I became the Executive Officer for the Queensland Murray Darling Committee and in 2006 took up the role of CEO to the Queensland Regional NRM Groups Collective. Along with being the CEO of the Queensland Regional NRM Groups Collective, I Chair the Rangelands NRM Groups Alliance and the Lake Eyre Basin Community Advisory Committee.

The Australian Rangelands, inclusive of the Lake Eyre Basin, is considered to be relatively pristine and in good condition. This summation is supported by the fact that the Lake Eyre Basin community was awarded the International River Award in 2015 in recognition of the efforts to keep the basin healthy. However there are growing threats to this healthy landscape primarily from over utilization, pest invasions and wild fires.

Central to mitigating these threats is to maintain healthy viable communities and to achieve this there needs to be a halt to the population shifts to the coastal cities. There are too many examples of where government services have been withdrawn from our outback communities. Australia was renowned for the depth of Rangeland scientist and researchers stationed in rural communities. This knowledge was not only invaluable to land managers in the rangelands but was also exported around the world to other Rangelands.

Over three decades the vast majority of research stations in Rangelands Australia and other regional areas, have been closed. The latest being the systematic withdrawal of the CSIRO from Alice Springs, Cairns and Atherton. The removal of these researchers and their families have contributed to the decline of many rural communities as well as leaving a major void in essential knowledge being available to land managers to better manage their land. Whilst it is acknowledge the vast majority of research stations are the responsibility of State/Territory governments, incentive mechanisms could be negotiated through COAG.

Other government services have been withdrawn in efforts to gain efficiency dividends or in response to decreasing populations which require reduced government services. However it is a 'chicken and egg' situation where government departments closing or shrinking their offices have contributed to the declining population thus resulting in smaller service centers.

Clearly regional centers would benefit from having Commonwealth and State government departments situated in their towns. Retaining suitably skilled staff in these regional departmental offices is problematic unless adequate incentives and services are available in regional centers. Incentives may be built around things such as reduced tax rates, longer leave entitlements and extensive professional development opportunities.

Outback regions are highly innovative and high level of small business development and ownership and having locally based government agencies will help the communities to survive and thrive, thus driving economic growth based on the natural entrepreneurial abilities. An average outback resident contributes \$80,000 in goods and services per annum; this is 1.5 times the national average. These people are also the most entrepreneurial with one business to every 14 people, compared to a National average of 1 to 32. (Rola-Rubzen, MF. and McGregor M. (2008)).

Relocating of government departments out of Canberra into regional Australia would provide a better understanding of service delivery needs. Having government departments centralized in Canberra, along with all their layers, is providing inefficiencies that are difficult to quantify, but having people locally based will result in programs and projects being tailored for more effective delivery. This may not save governments money but will certainly provide increased value for the investments they do make.

Other options to retain or increase services traditionally provided by governments such as research and extension services/facilities is to resource existing non-government organisations such as Regional NRM Bodies, Industry Organisations and Local Governments

to host and deliver what has been traditionally considered to be government services. These organisations are already embedded in the communities with established networks and knowledge capital which would allow a quick transition of roles and responsibilities from government departments to local deliverers. In many cases this is already happening however under a regime of diminishing budgets to a level where effective delivery is being compromised and viability of these community based organisations under threat.

I would welcome an opportunity to present to the Parliamentary Senate Committee in person. I would recommend that sittings of a committee to look at the viability of relocation of government departments to regional centers being held in regional centers would be well received by those regional communities.