



The Office of the Mayor

27 February 2017

Senate Finance and Public Administration Committees
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

To Whom it may Concern

RE: Australian Senate Inquiry on the Relocation of Government Bodies to Regional Areas

Research on Decentralisation

The Japanese Central Government has for several years been supporting a regional activation program with proven success. Japan, like many nations, is experiencing a significant population shift from rural and regional areas to the large cities. Coupled with an ageing population, this means that many regional communities will not be sustainable without government intervention. The Japanese government has assessed that food security, energy security, national security and cultural identity is at risk without diverse population centres across the country and a strong rural economy to ensure agricultural production is viable into the future.

The Council's CEO and I recently attended the 2017 Japan Local Government Centre (CLAIR) forum in Junee, NSW. We were informed of a range of successful initiatives that the Japanese central government has implemented to activate regional areas. These initiatives included local revitalisation officers, incentives for families with children to relocate to regional areas, co-operation between communities and universities, co-operation between local governments and the Hometown tax.

It is understood that some of these initiatives may not work in Australia with its different geography and culture. However, what impressed me was the commitment by the Japanese central government to experiment, fund, support and then evaluate a range of initiatives to arrest these devastating population shifts and to work in partnership with regional and local partners to make a difference.

NARRANDERA

Narrandera is a regional town of approximately 5000 people. This vibrant centre is serviced by an airport with 3 RPT services a day to and from Sydney with Regional Express Airlines. It is well located on the junction of the Sturt and Newell Highways providing efficient vehicle transport links to Canberra (3.5 hours away), Melbourne (5 hours away) and Sydney (5.5 hours away). Narrandera is also only 1 hour away from Wagga Wagga, 1 hour away from Griffith and 2 hours away from Albury, all major regional centres.

Narrandera is serviced by a TAPE College which is about to be completely refurbished including a digital connected learning centre. Such a facility will provide state of the art communications facilities. The NBN is currently being installed in the Narrandera urban area.

Narrandera Shire Council believes that our shire could host a cluster of small government agencies. There are suitable available buildings and options for building new office facilities.

The staff would enjoy all the benefits of a regional lifestyle (affordable housing, safe environment for families, fresh air, a sense of community, excellent recreational facilities, access to beautiful natural assets, a first class hospital and quality schools). There is ample room for new housing stock.

Narrandera Shire has a significant aboriginal population, approximately 10% of the population. Investment in government services in Narrandera could also mean that the Australian government is meeting its National Aboriginal Action Plan objectives as well.

An injection of government investment through the relocation of a cluster of small agencies to this shire would provide a significant return on investment in the long run.

Consultation in the Regions

Consultation in the regions during this Senate Inquiry is vital to an effective process.

Narrandera Shire Council invites you to hold a hearing in Narrandera at the Council Chambers where key stakeholders, including Council, can represent the views of the community.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to this important Senate Inquiry.

Yours sincerely

Cr Neville Kschenka
Mayor