

SUBMISSION TO THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON MIGRATION
Inquiry into Migration in Regional Areas

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Background

The documents I am submitting to the Inquiry and to my following comments relate specifically to supporting refugees and other humanitarian entrants to settle in regional Australia rather than to migrants more generally. This being said, it is fair to say that there are many common elements.

To provide some context to my interest in the Inquiry, it might be useful for the Committee to know that, *inter alia*, I:

- have worked in a range of areas related to refugees since 1986, including as Executive Director of the Refugee Council of Australia from 1991 to 2005, and since then as a consultant, academic and policy advisor;
- conducted the evaluations of three regional settlement pilots (Shepparton, Ballarat and Mount Gambier)¹ for the (then) Department of Immigration;
- chair three Regional Advisory Councils (Murray Lower Darling, Western NSW and Hunter/Central Coast) for Multicultural NSW and regularly chair the Riverina RAC;
- was engaged by the NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet to write the guide *Refugee Settlement in Regional Areas: Evidence Based Good Practice* that I am submitting to this Inquiry;
- sit on the Joint Partnership Working Group that guides the NSW response to refugee settlement and on its regional working group;

¹ Margaret Piper, *Evaluation of the Shepparton Regional Settlement Pilot*,
https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/12_2013/shepparton_pilot_access_0.pdf
Margaret Piper, *Evaluation of the Ballarat Regional Settlement Pilot*,
https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/12_2013/settlement-pilot-ballarat_access.pdf
Margaret Piper, *Evaluation of the Mount Gambier Regional Settlement Pilot*,
https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/12_2013/settlement-pilot-mount-gambier_access_0.pdf

- was a member of the three person panel that conducted the *Review into integration, employment and settlement outcomes for refugees and humanitarian entrants* commissioned by the Prime Minister in late 2018 and which included regional settlement in its terms of reference;
- work closely with the staff of Multicultural NSW on regional settlement issues and have participated, with them and separately, in discussions about regional humanitarian settlement with the Department of Social Services (when they had portfolio responsibility), other state governments and various regional Councils.

Regional Settlement

As can be deduced from the above, I have a strong interest in regional settlement and a firm belief that if planned and implemented well, regional settlement can have a profoundly positive impact on the newcomers and the community into which they settle. The key words here of course are 'planned' and 'implemented'. Successful regional settlement does not happen of its own accord.

Accompanying this submission is the aforementioned guide: ***Refugee Settlement in Regional Areas: Evidence Based Good Practice***. As the name suggests, the brief given to me was to draw on evidence from a range of settlement initiatives to identify core lessons and present them in an accessible form for regional communities to assist them to:

- understand who refugees are and how they came to Australia;
- think through the reasons why they are interested in attracting refugees;
- prepare for refugees coming into their community; and
- support refugees once they arrive.

The guide was written primarily for communities thinking about supporting secondary settlement, i.e. attracting refugees who settled first in a major urban setting, have been through the initial settlement stages and are in a position to make informed decisions about potential relocation. This being said, most of the issues presented are applicable to primary settlement (i.e. where refugees come directly to a regional centre).

It is my hope that the guide will be equally useful for the Committee in so much as it provides a conceptual framework against which to consider the various submissions it will receive.

The second document accompanying this submission is titled *Additional Thoughts on Refugee Regional Settlement*. As it explains, it covers areas that were outside the scope of the report commissioned by the NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet. It encourages those thinking about attracting refugees to their community to consider how refugees can assist them to realise their economic and social aspirations. It also encourages them to think beyond the 'factory and farm worker' stereotype often applied to refugees and recognise that there is a considerable talent pool into which they can tap.

While these two documents cover the substantive information I would like to bring to the Committee's attention, I would like to conclude by highlighting what I believe to be core ingredients of successful regional settlement:

- It should be **place based** and **location specific**: each regional centre has its own character, aspirations and needs which need to drive planning.
- Successful regional settlement requires careful planning which in turn **takes time** and **requires commitment**.
- All **three levels of government and the local community** (including service providers) need to be actively involved in planning and implementation.
- **Local champions** play a crucial role in securing support from the community.
- Having **clear objectives** is critical. There needs to be a collective awareness in the community about what it hopes to achieve from attracting refugees and what it can offer to the newcomers.
- Implementation should be **outcomes focused** rather than driven by pre-ordained key performance indicators (i.e. output driven). This allows for a great deal more flexibility and scope to make necessary adjustments along the way.
- As much as is feasible, the refugees who move (or are thinking about moving) into a regional community should be actively involved. **Co-design** results in more effective planning, as well as respectful engagement.

Conclusion

I am happy to expand on any of the above should the Committee require further information.