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Committee Chair
Select Committee on Regional Development
And Decentralisation
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CANBERRA ACT 2600

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Dear Sir/Madam

**Submission for Select Committee on Regional Development and Decentralisation
Intended for Committee's Inquiry into Regional Development and Decentralisation**

Central Highlands Regional Council (CHRC) would like to indicate its strong support for Australian Government agency decentralisation. The Central Highlands provides numerous excellent examples of successful government decentralisation and we would offer our location as a strong candidate to provide these services.

A modern regional services hub located 300km west of Rockhampton, the township of Emerald, with a population of 16,666, is the largest inland centre of the Central Highlands region. It is located at the heart of the state of Queensland and is the business, primary production and logistic gateway between northern and western Queensland and southern regions.

Successful examples of government decentralisation currently located in Emerald include:

- Queensland Government Department of Transport and Main Roads' state-wide call centre is located in Emerald
- Emerald is a central location for the Queensland Government departments of:
 - Agriculture and Fisheries (beef, grains, cotton)
 - the Environmental Protection Agency (mining)
 - Natural Resource Management (vegetation)
 - Queensland Rural Adjustment Authority
 - State Valuation Servicesfor the Central Queensland region extending to the Queensland border.
- Emerald is a regional base for government owned corporation SunWater's operations

- The Cotton Research Development Corporation has a national Research Manager is located in Emerald
- BHP is an example of best practice corporate decentralisation; the office servicing its Bowen Basin assets is located in Emerald, and supported by a Local-Buy Foundation also located in Emerald.

CHRC welcomes the decentralisation of Commonwealth entities, and would be open to negotiation on a variety of incentives and support for agencies considering corporate decentralisation.

A subsidiary of CHRC, Central Highlands Development Corporation (CHDC) has initially identified that the following federal government agencies would gain significant value from the greater stakeholder engagement provided from a permanent office presence in our region:

- Office of Northern Australia
- Meat Livestock Australia
- AusTrade and AusIndustry
- National Disability Insurance Scheme.

We would welcome an opportunity to discuss what the region can provide with these organisations and any others that the Australian Government may also identify.

Advantages offered by Central Highlands Queensland

1. Location

A modern regional services hub located 300km west of Rockhampton, Emerald is the largest inland centre of the Central Highlands region, with a population of 16,666. It is located at the heart of the state of Queensland and is the business, primary production and logistic gateway between northern and western Queensland and southern regions.

2. Diverse Industry Base

The region is underpinned by a diverse and robust industry base including:

- A globally competitive coal mining industry
- Traditionally robust and resilient agricultural and horticulture sectors
- Dynamic small and medium businesses
- A growing tourism market supported by major natural attractions such as the Carnarvon Gorge and The Gemfields
- Professional and government sectors.

3. Connectivity

High speed broadband infrastructure and digital services provide access to social services, education, health care and service all aspects of business operations. An extensive fibre, wireless and ADSL network is operating within Emerald and being rapidly extended with the roll out of the NBN concluding in June 2017. A number of competitive private providers support price and service quality competition in the region.

Download speeds for data on current 4G mobile devices can be in excess of 10Mb/s in the Emerald area and the rollout of 5G technology will occur from 2019, delivering significantly faster download speeds (up to 100Mb/s) to mobile devices.

Emerald is a major air services hub; there are more than fifty Brisbane to Emerald direct return passenger air services per week provided by Qantaslink and Virgin and moving more than 200,000 passengers per annum. This provides excellent connectivity with only two flights to reach all metropolitan centres on the east coast including Canberra.

The region is serviced by the Central Queensland rail line linking Emerald to Alpha, Barcaldine, Winton, Gladstone, Longreach, Mackay and Rockhampton. Emerald is conveniently located at the intersection of the Capricorn Highway and Gregory Highway or Great Inland Way.

4. Cost to operate

The Central Highlands region provides significant annual operating efficiencies for businesses when compared to metropolitan centres. A more detailed analysis of costs can be provided upon request.

5. Housing availability

Modern, comfortable, high-quality, affordable accommodation options are available in Emerald appropriate to house a skilled workforce. A variety of accommodation is available to suit all lifestyles ranging from urban units to rural acreage.

The median house price is currently \$242,500 and \$156,250 for units. Weekly median advertised rent for houses is \$280, and \$200 for units. Current rental vacancies total 164 premises in Emerald and 291 in the local government area.

6. Liveability

Activity around the mining boom has seen Emerald grow in size and population while remaining a safe and positive place to live and work. There is a range of well-equipped and modern facilities for people of all ages including sporting clubs and venues, art gallery, cinemas, shopping centres and the Botanical Gardens.

There is a mix of religious, independent and state school options which provide educational and employment opportunities for students and teachers. Extensive tertiary options are available including the Central Queensland University Emerald campus and the Emerald Agricultural College, plus a large number of Registered Training Organisations. Quality childcare options are also available.

The region has an established healthcare infrastructure including a GP Super Clinic, and a 36 bed public hospital facility providing acute inpatient, accident and emergency, pharmacy, outpatient services and radiology in addition to surgical, paediatric and maternity services. This is addition to an extensive range of allied health clinics and many private providers and visiting specialists.

7. Regional economic impact from successful decentralisation

Despite 26.03% of the Central Highlands workforce being employed in mining, the resources commodity peak and decline did not impact the region to the same degree as other mining regions. This was due to the diversity of industries in the Central Highlands, and the stable income and secure employment provided by Government agencies and related occupations which has cemented the long-term viability and vitality of the region.

Our economic resilience is demonstrated by the low levels of Fly-In, Fly-Out workforce (27.2%) when compared to other mining regions such as the neighbouring Isaac local government area where 51.2% of the workforce choose to live in other locations and commute.

Conclusion

We acknowledge the important work done by Australian Government departments and associated agencies. CHRC strongly believes that having an operating presence from our

region would have provide value for both our regional economy and the agencies and their stakeholders and clients.

The Central Highlands is delivering food, fibre and energy to power not only our regional economy, but also the Queensland and Australian economies. CHRC has identified growth strategies where they seek policy and investment support from governments and commercial partners to build on our commitment to the region.

We welcome the opportunity to provide additional information that will assist your departments and the Select Committee on Regional Development and Decentralisation.

Yours faithfully

Scott Mason
Chief Executive Officer

9/8/17