

SMITHSON PLANNING



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INQUIRY : REGIONAL INEQUALITY IN AUSTRALIA

Dear Sir / Madam – thank you for the opportunity to address the Standing Committee for Economic References on this matter, and I would like to appear before the committee to discuss our evidence if that opportunity presents.

Terms of Reference

On 14 February 2018, the Senate referred an inquiry into the indicators of, and impact of, regional inequality in Australia to the Senate Economics References Committee (SERC) for inquiry and report by the last day of sitting in June 2019. On 30 July 2019, the Senate agreed to the committee's recommendation that this inquiry be re-adopted in the 46th Parliament. On 27 November 2019, the Senate agreed to extend the date for the committee to report to **25 June 2020**.

The Inquiry will report on the indicators of, and impact of, regional inequality in Australia, with particular reference to government policies and programs in the following areas :

- a) fiscal policies at federal, state and local government levels;
- b) improved co-ordination of federal, state and local government policies;
- c) regional development policies;
- d) infrastructure;
- e) education;
- f) building human capital;
- g) enhancing local workforce skills;
- h) employment arrangements;

- i) decentralisation policies;
- j) innovation;
- k) manufacturing; and
- l) any other related matters.

Background

For the benefit of the Inquiry, Smithson Planning is a sole-trader consultancy specialising in regional development, and a registered lobbyist in Western Australia – now based in Perth, but for the past 20 years (1997-2015) operating from Albany, Western Australia ... Mr Smithson has also lived and worked in four states (Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, Western Australia) and multiple regions / cities across Australia.

Mr Neil Smithson as the Principal of the practice holds a Master of Arts in Urban Studies (Curtin University), and has accumulated 37 years' experience in the areas of city planning, business and regional development – more particularly with the NSW Dept Environment & Planning, Kinhill Engineers, GHD Consultants, the City of Melville (City Development Planner) and the Rural City of Mildura (Manager Business Development).

Mr Smithson is an Alumni of the Commonwealth Study Conference (2003); an Associate of Future Directions International; has also held the office of Senior Vice-President of the Albany Chamber of Commerce & Industry; and is a two-time Past-President of the Rotary Club of Albany.

Mr Smithson also contested the seat of O'Connor in the 2010 federal election (as an independent), and stood for the office of Mayor of the City of Albany in 1999 and 2015.

Context

Over the past 20 years, Smithson Planning has made multiple submissions to the State & Commonwealth Governments via inquiry and invitation, all premised around our Rainbow 2000[©] Project, and including :

- HoR SC PIRS - Infrastructure & Development in Regional Areas (1999)
- DoTaRS – AusLink Green Paper (2003)
- Cwth JSC NC&ET – Adequacy of funding for Australia's Antarctic Program (2004)
- HoR SC T&RS – Transport Networks Inquiry (2006)
- HoR SC E&H – Sustainability Charter (2006)
- HoR SC E&H – Sustainable Cities 2025 (2006)
- COAG CIRA – Allen Consulting : Review of Western Australian Ports (2008)
- APH SSC F&E – Securing Australia's Energy & Environmental Future (2008)
- APH JSC C&FS – Aspects of Agribusiness Managed Investment Schemes (2009)
- APH HoR CCWE&A – Managing our Coastal Zone in a Changing Climate (2009)
- Infrastructure Australia – National Freight Network Plan (2010)
- Infrastructure Australia – Major Cities Unit : State of Australian Cities (2010)
- Productivity Commission – Performance Benchmarking Australian Business Regulation (2010)

- Cwth DPM&C – National Commission on the Commemoration of the Anzac Centenary (2010)
- Cwth DSEWP&C – Sustainable Population Strategy Taskforce (2011)
- Cwth RDA Great Southern – Regional Plan 2010-2020 (2011)
- Cwth DSEWP&C – Marine Bioregional Plan for the South-West Region (2011)
- Cwth DVA – Permit to use the word ANZAC (2011)
- APH SSC RRAT – Freight Logistics for the Grains Industry (2014)
- Senate SC RRAT – Future Role & Contribution of Regional Capitals to Australia (2015)
- HoR SC IT&C – Australian Government’s Role in the Development of Cities (2017)
- Cwth Productivity Commission – Australian Airports (2019)
- HoR SC E&E – Pre-requisites for Nuclear Energy (2019).

Briefing Notes

Please find attached our briefing notes for this inquiry, which are a derivation of the briefing notes we have previously and consistently provided to relevant project stakeholders over the past 22 years ... typically, State & Federal politicians, and related business groups. They contain the questions that might be put to the Prime Minister and Cabinet / the Premier and Cabinet, in relation to our research project and corporate investment strategy.

On-line Reference Material

You will also find extensive background information at Smithson Planning’s website and our Facebook pages, in particular, the PowerPoint presentation that accompanies the Rainbow 2000[©] Project.

https://www.facebook.com/pg/SmithsonPlanning/photos/?tab=album&album_id=154042347988361

The Rainbow 2000[©] Project

The Rainbow 2000[©] Project is a regional planning strategy for regional development in Australia, focusing originally on Albany, Western Australia ... but now also looking at Fremantle & the Perth Metropolitan Region, and there are several regions of Australia now under consideration – it was published under copyright in 1997, and examines the hypothesis ... Is planning the antithesis of politics?

The project specifically identified and proposed the Albany Anzac Centenary 2014-19 commemorations and the forthcoming Western Australian Bicentennial 2026-27-29 celebrations (Albany, Fremantle & Perth), as major 1:100 year international tourism and business development opportunities for the city of Albany, the Great Southern Region and Western Australia ... unprecedented was the analogy in 2014, and those efforts were subsequently rewarded with national and international acclaim.

There is no reason to assume that the WA Bicentennial celebrations will not also herald another new period of growth and development for Fremantle, Perth, Western Australia and Australia.

Part of the regional strategy includes the establishment of an Albany Port Corporation as a public private partnership (PPP), and the development of an Albany International Airport as

one of the major assets of the corporation ... along with Albany sea port relocation, and a toll route ring road / railway for metropolitan freight accessibility, three very attractive commercial propositions that tangibly address the emerging planning, infrastructure, transport and city issues of the region.

If all of that sounds familiar now, it is perhaps testament to how those ideas have pervaded mainstream planning & infrastructure across Australia over the past 22 years. There are also proposals for Southern Land, Southern Power, Southern Gas, Southern Waste, and Southern Telecomvision – in addition to the support infrastructure required to deliver such goods and services to the city, towns and shires of the Great Southern region ... arguably, the very nexus of regional inequality.

In a Western Australian context, I would advocate two appropriately sized nuclear power stations (one in the south-west and one in the north-west), as well as a dedicated export handling and refuelling facility near Port Hedland in the Pilbara Region, serviced by a new 'eastern infrastructure corridor' from Port Hedland to Esperance – again, the inquiry into the pre-requisites for nuclear energy in Australia is also a demonstration of regional inequality. Clearly, energy and environment are major considerations for all urban, rural and remote areas of Australia – particularly now in the context of climate change response and adaptation.

Thematic Analysis

As a function of project research over the past 22 years, Smithson Planning has also documented on Facebook various thematic issues pertaining to project observation, management and implementation, including :

- The Anzac Centenary 2014-19 (Volumes 01-23 & Volume 100 : the Centenary Events)
- Albany Anzac 2014-18 (Volumes 01-10)
- Peak Oil, Gas & Nuclear Power (Volumes 01-17)
- WA Farmers – issues in Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing (Volumes 01-09)
- Rainbow 2000 – a Regional Planning Strategy for Albany & the Great Southern (Volumes 01-18)
- Rainbow 2000 – the Commonwealth Government Response (Volumes 01-14)
- Rainbow 2000 – the State Government Response (Volumes 01-19)
- Rainbow 2000 – the Local Government Response (Volumes 01-08)
- Rainbow 2000 – the Private Sector Response (Volumes 01-18)
- Rainbow 2000 – the Media Response (Volumes 01-24)
- Albany Waterfront Project & Entertainment Centre (Volumes 01-09).

In the context of extant and emerging energy security, transport and environmental issues from a local to a global scale, I could comfortably recommend a further presentation just on **Peak Oil, Gas & Nuclear Power**, alone.

Regional Analysis

The project has evolved as a regional strategy for Australian regional development, and as I indicated at the National SEGRA Conference 2016 held in Albany, now includes planning strategies for several regions and their cities around Australia, including :

- Kimberley 2020 (Volumes 01-02)
- Pilbara 2020 (Volumes 01-04)
- Gascoyne 2020 (Volume 01)
- Batavia 2020 (Volumes 01-02)
- Avon 2020 (Volumes 01-02)
- Perth North Metropolitan (Volume 01-12)
- Fremantle South Metropolitan (Volume 01-13)
- Peel 2020 (Volumes 01)
- Leeuwin 2020 (Volumes 01-03)
- Recherche Goldfields 2020 (Volumes 01-03)

- Eyre 2020 (Volume 01)
- Sunraysia 2020 (Volume 01)
- Riverina 2020 (Volume 01)
- Alpine 2020 (Volume 01)
- Orana Blue 2020 (Volume 01)
- Capricornia 2020 (Volume 01)
- Brisbane SEQ 2020 (Volume 01)
- Leichhardt 2020 (Volume 01)
- Arnhem 2020 (Volume 01)
- MacDonnell 2020 (Volume 01).

Regional Inequality in Australia

For the past 22 years, various levels of governance have listened with great interest to our proposals documented under the auspices of the Rainbow 2000[®] Project, and yet all have failed to act on the principal issue of port relocation and redevelopment to secure regional growth and development, investment & jobs.

Fundamentally, both the ports of Albany and Fremantle face the same freight logistics dilemma – restricted heavy freight access (road & rail) in response to port expansion, growth and development necessitating consideration for port relocation and inner-city redevelopment.

The facts of the situation are that while various State Governments have been canvassing port relocation & redevelopment for the past 20 years in respect to Fremantle & Kwinana (for the Perth Metropolitan Region), it was not until 2015 that the City of Kwinana in association with the other local governments of the Southern corridor (Fremantle, East Fremantle, Cockburn, Rockingham, Serpentine-Jarrahdale and Armadale, but excluding Melville) initiated their call to action, arguably resulting in the Electoral Mandates of 2017 pertaining to the Roe Highway extension and the Kwinana Indian Ocean Gateway. The reality is that process has produced the Westport Taskforce and little more after two years of investigations.

The corollary position applies to Albany and the Great Southern where the Commonwealth Government has also played its role in that process, consistently referring to the ‘problems’ confronting Albany, as a matter of ‘local and state’ significance – that advice has effectively been confirmed by three past Secretaries of the Department of Prime Minister & Cabinet, and those federal inquiries listed above.

The facts are that Infrastructure Australia was brought into existence to address such issues (ten years after our first APH submission), and yet with prior knowledge, was not called to provide a formal assessment relative to the national infrastructure priority program – the tourism program associated with the Anzac Centenary was officially declined by the Office of National Tourism when first proposed.

To date, both the State and Federal Governments have refused to publish the \$175m Albany Ring Road Business Case, and yet are now preparing to fund & construct that ring road to nowhere, that stops two kilometres short of the Port of Albany (west of the Melville Point railway cutting) - seven Prime Ministers, five Premiers and three Mayors have all known this was coming for 22 years (so far).

In advance of the next WA State Election scheduled for 13 March 2021, and the next Federal Election scheduled for 2022 – the question remains as to whether either or both sides of politics will see fit to favour Fremantle / Kwinana (and the Perth Region), as well as Albany (and the Great Southern) – or if they will exclude the latter ... the ultimate expression of regional inequality in the strategic planning process, as Western Australia now prepares for its Bicentennial 2026-27-29 celebrations (Albany, Fremantle & Perth).

We are also acutely aware of the April 2018 SCER Inquiry Submission #110 as lodged by the Regional Capitals Alliance of Western Australia (RCAWA), which includes representation of the City of Albany, and which yet again fails to address the major issue of port access & waterfront development, and yet alludes to all those problems (inequalities) affecting regions & their cities.

There are several very good questions that need to be asked and answered as best possible, assuming the Government does or does not already have a grasp of the situation (like) –

- (A) Is Australia better served by having two international trade portals in the dominant populous south-west of Western Australia – arguably, the monopolistic major trade portals of Fremantle Port and the Perth International & Domestic Airport represent a significant weakness in global trade potential through Western Australia, where each of those RCAWA centres have expressed their desire & intentions;
- (B) Where should Australia be investing in the national infrastructure network, providing links and security of supply to government, industry, business and community; across the network of Australian regions and regional cities, and should those investments be dictated or facilitated by government;
- (C) What is the relative disposition of the transport task as pertains to the distribution of goods and services supported by various vehicles dependent on petrol, diesel, gas, electric, hydrogen; the classic scenario relative to current events would be the response to the bushfires around Australia without those resources, fuels, transport & communications.

Conclusions

Most of our collected evidence is anecdotal, but in the absence of well researched data, academic rigour and independent analysis and verification (and I recommend all of those

pursuits), I would suggest that the heavy crude oil will run out in the 2030s; the light crude oil will run out in the 2040s; gas will run out say around 2110s ... I invite the Government to nominate their considered likely dates.

I had occasion to make our abbreviated Rainbow 2000[©] Project presentation to the Western Australian Planning Commission on 24 October 2018 (most of whom also sit on the Westport Taskforce also considering Fremantle / Kwinana), and now doubt based on the response as to whether there was any real comprehension of the issues at stake – is that inequality.

Suffice to say those discussions stirred very little thought and response, and no action ... what I refer to as the tyranny of regional indifference from Perth and Canberra (we know better) as to the regions of Western Australia.

It is fair to say that our research is unique – I am unaware of any other similar program.

I trust our submission meets with your expectations, and I would be pleased to provide further information / address your questions as appropriate.

Yours faithfully
SMITHSON PLANNING

Neil Smithson
Managing Director

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Smithson Planning - Consultants in National Investment Growth Pathing

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