

I have had the pleasure of working as a Professional Engineer (P.E.) in local government for the past 40 years, from far north Queensland to Tasmania.

Over the past 20 years or so I have observed, with concern, the decline in the size of the pool of P.E.s (and associates/technicians) that rural councils can access.

The result is that it is almost impossible for these councils to obtain in-house technical expertise; they either 'ignore' the problem or outsource it, at considerable cost and inconvenience.

By ignoring the problem, infrastructure 'whole-of-life' costs are substantially increased.

Small councils are particularly likely to fall into this category. ***

By 'outsourcing' the technical advice, the same 'level of service' is rarely obtained and the cost is almost always considerably more. ***

*** Hence economic development is not nearly as cost-effective and safety is potentially jeopardised.

Medium/Long-term Solution

If the Federal Government financially encourages the training of a sufficient number of P.E.s and associates at Universities and TAFEs, the benefit/cost ratio will be very positive as 'whole-of-life'

costs of development and existing infrastructure will be substantially reduced. The objective should be a slight surplus of P.E.s and technicians; this is far more cost-effective overall than the

current practice of aiming for short-term lower costs without considering the long-term effects of the lack of expertise (Economic Rationalism).

Short-term Band-aid

Attract more experienced P.E.s from overseas.

Conclusion

If we do not take immediate steps to increase the numbers of P.E.s and technicians to be available for all levels of government, we are not being smart; and the overall cost to the nation will be astronomic!

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