

**From:** Lisa King [SMTP:gdl@m150.aone.net.au]  
**Sent:** Friday, March 12, 1999 2:07 PM  
**To:** committee.reps@aph.gov.au  
**Subject:** Inquiry into infrastructure and the development of Australia's regional areas

On behalf of the Regional Development organisation representing five municipal shire councils in Gippsland, I suggest that the Parliamentary Committee re-visit the comprehensive work undertaken for the Commonwealth in 1993-5 by the Kelty Taskforce and implement the key recommendations. Nothing substantially has changed in relation to the issues that constrain development in Australia's regions. It is the lack of will, both politically and within the bureaucracy to deliver directly into the regions, that has failed the Australian society. Federal - State coordination has failed to provide an efficient process where complementary programs channel a "shandy" of significant funds to the "coal face". By the time the structures and guidelines are put into place, the next election cycle begins and all is shelved. The faces change, information and continuity is lost, and the strategic work is mis-placed.

Having contributed significantly to the Federal Regional Development Program policy compilation ( in a purely non-political manner), I am professionally extremely disenchanted with the processes, and personally saddened by the lack of long term committed to developing the non capital city areas of this country.

However, one must live in hope, and I list the following salient points for your further investigation:

- Regional Australia needs infrastructure to lead growth. Infrastructure will never be a viable private sector investment BEFORE the growth/ development occurs - especially if it is to be financed at nil net cost to government/s. Transport links (Very High Speed Trains, and freight to export), and telecommunications are the key drivers. This is a dominant reason why the USA (a relatively "young" nation like Australia) has advanced a such a great rate of regional growth.
- Regional endeavour must be integrated and strategic over a least a 10-15 year time span, in order to achieve the critical mass of productivity required to contribute to Australia being internationally competitive. This must be underpinned by local government being regionally coordinated and strategic ( to provide appropriate community auspice and imprimatur). An endorsed regional strategy should be focussed upon a true partnerships with the private sector. It is the private sector, in partnership with government, that will finance the infrastructure (directly and in-directly) for regional development.
- Industry development is the inter-related link to the on-going viability of infrastructure provision, together with population growth. Both of these elements remain concentrated within the capital cities. The government must agree upon balanced development policies ( of a bi-partisan nature) over at least a 10 year timeframe, that include immigration settlement ( with the

necessary support/integration structures), skills training and tertiary education that is comparable to capital city campuses, cultural & health facilities and residential development that will be attractive to a broad cross section of society.

- The government must support a broadening of vision and understanding in regional areas, and cultivate empowerment, so that grass roots endeavour can be self propagating. Communities, through local structures, must be energised to create and participate in their own futures ( within the Australian AND global context). Bureaucracy must be directed to venture out of its cloistered environment, and delivery directly within the regions, in order to achieve this long term partnership between the private sector, government and the people that they represent. In practical terms this involves quarterly round table meetings with First Assistant Secretary level participation (from both Federal & State), to apply funding assistance for regional projects, with a high degree of immediacy. The Australian administrative landscape should decrease its level of risk aversion, and apply innovative techniques - such as the current taxation reform.

Without these fundamental initiatives as foundation stones, any amount of "spin" policies aimed at votes in the electorate will leave regional Australia short changed, and moreover, an encumbrance upon the national economy.

I hope that these succinct comments are of some impact. I would be pleased to make personal representation, if so requested.

Yours sincerely

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