

INQUIRY INTO INFRASTRUCTURE AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF AUSTRALIA'S REGIONAL AREAS

The following response has been prepared by the Perry Shire Council using its own circumstances to highlight deficiencies and possible solutions to the problems facing Regional Australia.

Infrastructure Deficiencies

The following deficiencies in infrastructure are impeding development in Perry Shire which is typical of much of regional Australia

- the lack of all weather bitumen surfaced roads to connecting towns
- the lack of a suitable reticulated water supply
- the lack of a 3 phase power supply
- the lack of a sewerage scheme
- the lack of reasonable access to Government services
- the lack of suitable banking services
- the lack of adequate schooling facilities
- the lack of a cellular telecommunication network
- the lack of local medical/dental/pharmaceutical services

Factors to Enhance Development

Development in areas such as Perry Shire would benefit greatly from provision of many of the services listed above.

Potential for Development

A town and its surrounding area such as exists in Mt Perry would benefit greatly from provision of better infrastructure such as that listed as being an elevated area with highly scenic outlook located less than two hours from the coast provides a very satisfactory alternative lifestyle for both the present and future residents and tourism and recreational opportunities which are alternatives to those available on the coast.

The Shire Council has endeavoured to assist its residents by supporting the provision and upgrading of facilities such as the Heritage Reserve, Aged Persons Units, Home and Community Care program, Community Sports Complex, modernisation of the Shire Hall and Council Chambers, upgrading of the Showground, development of the Wolca Reserve Mountain Bike facility and conversion of the old Hospital Building to house an Art gallery, Library, Tourist Information centre and an outlet for Art and Craft.

Examples of successful transitions in South East Queensland are Mt Tamborine, Mt Nebo, Mt Glorious, Montville, Maleny and Yandina which have each developed cottage industries based around the craft skills of their residents to complement existing industry and this could conceivably also develop in areas such as Mt Perry for similar reasons provided the basic infrastructure is in place to make the tourist visit enjoyable. A town such as

Bundaberg would provide the source of visitors and eventually new business opportunities as infrastructure improvements helped to expand the local attractions however the small local population cannot support the high cost of provision of the missing infrastructure and would need substantial assistance to take advantage of the potential which clearly exists.

Employment Generation

Regional areas such as Perry Shire will always face the prospect of low employment opportunities while there is a lack of low cost infrastructure available to prospective business developments which need both the infrastructure and a pool of skilled workers from which to draw.

These skills are not generally available in lowly populated regions making it almost impossible to attract developments of a size to create the momentum to attract subsidiary business.

The growth in Information Technology and access to the Internet will have a dramatic impact on how business is conducted in future and opens major opportunities to everyone to improve their business life without compromising their lifestyle.

It is possible for major business operations to be run from the remotest location but this will not occur unless basic infrastructure is available to attract residents back to regional areas.

Better basic infrastructure will assist regional areas to expand their population a few at a time which can slowly turn the tide and create business competition in areas where little exists at the present time.

Roles for Government and Private Sector

Successive Governments at all levels have contributed to the demise of regional Australia by failure to recognise and react to the impact of accelerating change in technology and how it has created a private sector totally dependent on access to infrastructure which is poorly provided in regional areas.

Examples of the closure or withdrawal of Government services such as Railways, Law Courts, Agricultural Support facilities and closure of many private ventures such as banks, legal practices, medical practices together with the inability of the financial system to provide improved road access and basic services has led to an exodus of what were previously viable businesses and it will be nearly impossible to attract them back until the infrastructure is provided.

Governments should instigate of rebuilding regional Australia by investing in Infrastructure improvements now rather than wait for the Private Sector which will generally take the best short term economic option rather than the visionary option which is needed to restore the Country to its former status of having the highest living standard in the World.

Planning, Coordination and Cooperation

For a venture such as this to be successful there is a need for it to be driven from the regions with unqualified practical support and funding being offered at both State and

Federal Government levels.

An obvious vehicle would be a body such as the Australian Local Government Association which already has the administrative infrastructure in place to gather the data base needed to identify areas where infrastructure deficiencies exist and opportunities for seed projects are clearly available.

Cooperation is needed at all levels so it would require strong bipartisan political support and be housed in the portfolio of very senior Ministers at both levels of Government for it to have any prospect of success.

Any planning vehicle would need to include a strong representation from the Private Sector as following the initial injection of funding from Government it will require the Private Sector to react to the challenge and this will not occur unless it is part of the project.

Economic rationalism will need to be suppressed as this will require a quantum change from recent history of failed attempts to generate employment not only in Australia but throughout the world.

Such a project will only be successful if the planning and coordination roles are conducted by persons who understand the lifestyle and challenges presented in regional areas

Benefit to National Economy

Benefits which can accrue to the National economy can be identified in a number of areas as follows:

- reduction in criminal and undesirable activity associated with unemployment and its cost to society in both social and financial terms;
- reduction in stress and depression levels in the community associated both with unemployment and lack of opportunity
- better access to public services
- stability in family units as regional areas will be able to provide employment opportunities for children of residents which are generally not available now as a consistent depopulation of rural and regional areas which has been occurring for at least the last thirty years
- provision of opportunities to a range of age groups in the regionals to provide a better demographic mix in areas where the average age is growing disproportionately high compared to the National average.
- growth in GDP derived from community funding of productive employment rather than unproductive unemployment

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