



WEST COAST COUNCIL

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House of representatives Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration	
Submission No:	127
Date Received:	26/7/02
Secretary:	Bardell

The Secretary
House of Representatives Economics, Finance
and Public Administration Committee
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Secretary

INQUIRY INTO LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND COST SHIFTING

I write in relation to the House of Representatives Inquiry into local government and cost shifting that was referred by the Hon. Wilson Tuckey MP, Minister for Regional Services, Territories and Local Government.

Firstly may I take the opportunity to invite the Committee to conduct a public hearing on the West Coast of Tasmania to allow the members to appreciate the issues that are included in this submission by visiting the area during the inquiry.

The West Coast Municipality is situated in the west of Tasmania and covers an area of 9,200 square kilometres. The West Coast Municipal area is predominantly a large remote area with five distinct and separate residential areas and a small number of seaside and other settlements. With a population of approximately 5,500, the main industries are mining, fishing, forestry and tourism. A significant portion of the area is made up of crown land reserves, including the magnificent World Heritage area. The West Coast area is resource rich; however, rate and royalty poor.

The issues facing local government and cost shifting in this area include:

- Health
- Financial Assistance Grants
- National Competition Policy
- Communications

- Environment

Health

Health services in this area are currently in need of integration, as the clawing back of services over the last ten years has left various service providers funded and/or managed by local, state and federal government, as well as a number of private community organisations. The local government authority in this area now has the responsibility of providing some medical and community services that have traditionally been the responsibility of state government, with barely sufficient funds to allow it to manage the services appropriately.

Financial Assistance Grants

Whilst Council appreciates the Financial Assistance Grants that are provided through the State Grants Commission, there is concern with the apportionment of these grants. As this area has had a drastic decline in population over the last ten years (from 8,075 to 5,600), it has found it difficult to maintain the infrastructure in the area. As the guidelines for the distribution of Financial Assistance Grants place a significant weight to population, this Council has found it difficult to raise sufficient income from other sources to match the declining grants over the last ten years.

National Competition Policy

The State Government has required local government in Tasmania to meet certain obligations under the National Competition Policy. This Council has either met or are working towards meeting these obligations; however, the State Government does not provide financial incentives. It is understood that the State Government does receive financial incentives from the Commonwealth Government as it meets its obligations, and it is this Council's view that these should in turn be passed onto local government.

Communication

Communication is a responsibility of the Commonwealth Government, with a significant percentage of the Australian population receiving at least four free to air television channels, including SBS. This area finds itself having to contribute \$25,000 towards establishing an SBS service to the area, whereas the majority of Australian receives this reception at no cost. It is felt that the Commonwealth Government disadvantages the people in rural areas who can least afford to make a contribution of this magnitude. The provision of public telephones at Granville and Trial Harbour by local government is problematic and should be the responsibility of the other tiers of government. Both mobile and two-way radio communication in outlying areas is of concern in relation to the need for emergency services access.

Environment

With representations from the environmental movement over the last 30 years, the Commonwealth and State policies have seen a drastic shift to sustainable development and conservation of our natural resources. This Council is not against this shift in

policy, but has found itself heavily involved in environmental issues without the appropriate funding to assist in their management. The State Government in recent years has introduced the *Weed Management Act 1999*, that places certain responsibilities on local government without any financial contribution.

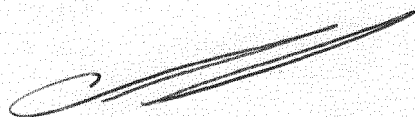
Other Issues

Other issues that Council would like to discuss during the public hearing include:

- Environmental Health Officers
- Airport operations and management
- Zone allowance
- Public transport
- Ageing infrastructure
- Mt Lyell remediation
- Fishing industry control
- Animal control
- Parking infringements
- State Emergency Services
- Banking industry
- Non-rateable leases and licenses

Council would like to thank you for the opportunity to make comments in relation to the Inquiry, and looks forward to meeting the members during the public hearings later this year.

Yours sincerely



Andrew Wardlaw
General Manager