

ARAMAC SHIRE

Cost shifting enquiry

- Local Government has, over the last decade had to assume additional roles in order to ensure the sustainability of their communities. These roles have seen Council move from their traditional operations into new areas of need. In the Aramac Shire, for example, Council has had to purchase the town bakery and then lease it out to a baker in order to ensure a continuation of bread supplies. This has often led to Council staff having to perform the role of baker when lessees have left and whilst waiting for another baker.
- The gradual reduction of both Government and private sector enterprises in rural and remote areas has also seen Local Government assume responsibility for the provision of what are seen essential services. Once again Aramac Shire has assumed a lead role in the development of an RTC that provides banking and over 400 additional services to the community on behalf of all sectors of Government and the private sector. Whilst there has been financial support given to establish this service and limited financial support from government agencies it has fallen upon local government to fill the unavoidable gaps in service delivery.
- As Governments rationalise services and concentrate them in areas of high population so rural and remote local governments are forced to take on new roles in order to ensure their communities maintain basic services.
- Traditionally Queensland Councils have had a responsibility to provide road infrastructure, water and sewerage, planning and development etc. They have also had the role of being major employers and hence as the economic driving force in small communities. Together with the Department of Main Roads councils have ensured that local expertise and employment is retained in local areas and so have been major providers to the local economy.
- Local Government used to be able to concentrate on local issues to the benefit of their local communities. Increasingly Local Governments are being used as regulators for other agencies with little, if any, financial compensation for their efforts on behalf of these agencies. Take, for example, the issue of stock routes and their use. State Government legislation place the burden of stock route management and maintenance firmly in the hands of local government. This legislation requires the Local Authority to utilise ratepayers funds for the upkeep of stock routes which are to be utilised by anyone with travelling stock. Obviously there is little, if any, advantage to the local community yet these small communities are required to expend their own funds in the maintenance of these facilities. Admittedly some capital funding is given to Councils however this funding is by no means sufficient to adequately maintain, the often vast network of stock routes. Fees collected by Local Government for travelling stock, have until now, had to be passed on to the state government rather than being retained in the locality to offset costs incurred by the Local authority.
- Roads – there is some degree of confusion with regard to the funding of roads as far as the average motorist is concerned. There is probably a general perception that “Government” provides and maintains all roads in Australia. This perception is obviously incorrect as roads are unequally distributed across the three tiers of Government. Whilst both the Federal and State Governments, and to a lesser extent the larger Councils, have the ability to raise significant revenue there is little or no opportunity for rural councils to raise sufficient

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revenue to maintain or improve the road networks under their direct control. Large Councils, in terms of area, tend to have sparse populations yet are expected to maintain vast road networks. These road networks are the lifeblood of outback residents as they provide the arterial networks required to move agricultural product to and from market. Without these road networks both the local and national economy are likely to suffer.

In recent times the Federal government has shown some initiative in this regard by providing additional funds towards the maintenance of local roads networks by providing funds under the roads to recovery program. The Federal Government has also shown initiative in the release of the Auslink paper and the State Government has also shown initiative in it's encouragement of Regional Roads alliances between the department of Main Roads and Local Government however these measures are not considered to be sufficient to deal with the massive infrastructure problems that Local Authorities face.

Following the drought many of the gravel roads in the control of Local Government require major work to get them back to a serviceable standard. This funding however is not available and as such there is a reliance on Local Government to use it's limited resources to restore roads to a trafficable standard so allowing the free movement of agricultural produce both to and from the farm.

During flooding episodes Local Authorities are eligible for financial assistance towards repairing damage caused by the flood event. In times of prolonged drought these or similar financial resources are unavailable and Council must try to repair damage at their own expense to enable normal economic activity to take place. Drought often creates conditions far worse than flood as flood damage is, more often than not, localised whereas damage to infrastructure caused by drought is more widespread and often difficult to repair.

Roads and transport therefore have to be considered more as a regional or national infrastructure problem with regional or national solutions found to deal with the problems. Admittedly the employment opportunities given to local Government in respect of road construction and maintenance should be retained however it is suggested that all roads should be centrally controlled by a national or regional roads authority rather than retaining the current status quo and leaving roads in the hands of the three spheres of Government.

- As has been mentioned earlier the withdrawal of both State and Federal agencies for rural areas has meant that local Government has been forced to assume a much larger role than previously existed. Increasingly Council is being forced to provide health and associated services within our communities. Aramac Shire currently provides a range of HACC services is the provider of disability support services and is the auspicing body for meals on wheels. Due to the lack of aged care facilities Council has sought (and obtained funding) for the provision of a retirement village. This has enabled aged persons to remain in an area where they have support mechanisms as well as a family and friends rather than having to move to a facility which is

not only distant from their network of friends and relatives but, which supports a lifestyle alien to both them and their needs. Whilst funding has been sourced to build this facility responsibility, once again falls on Local Government to manage and maintain the facility.

- Emergency Services – Increasing reliance is being placed on Local Government to assume responsibility for the provision of emergency services. Smaller communities are virtually being forced into downgrading/ amalgamating their fire brigades, SES operations, and ambulance services. Local Government is having to collect a voluntary levy from ratepayers to support these services and is likely to have to make up any shortfall in operational funding for these emergency services.
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