

Committee Secretary  
Standing Committee on Primary Industries and Regional  
Services  
House of Representatives

Parliament House

**CANBERRA ACT 2600**

email: Primary.Industries.Reps.@aph.gov.au

Dear Sir,

**Re: Inquiry into Infrastructure and the Development of Australia's Regional Areas**

Please find attached Wentworth Shire Council's submission to your inquiry. Council's submission has focused mainly on two of your terms of reference.

The first area covers deficiencies in infrastructure which currently impedes regional development such as legal difficulties (native title, Western Lands lease), ageing and inadequate infrastructure (roads and bridges, communications, energy) and diminishing services.

The second issue covers the factors that would enhance development in regional areas. These include the combination of changes to legislation (Native Title Act, Western Lands Act, Crown Lands Act) additional funding and resources, regional government services and provision of additional infrastructure such as road networks.

Please consider our submission and call me on (03) 50273203 if you require further information.

Yours faithfully

**DAVID J McMILLAN**

**GENERAL MANAGER**

**WENTWORTH SHIRE COUNCIL**  
**SUBMISSION TO STANDING COMMITTEE ON**  
**PRIMARY INDUSTRIES AND REGIONAL SERVICES**

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

Wentworth Shire Council thank the Standing Committee for the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry.

1. **BACKGROUND**

Wentworth Shire Council is located in the south-west corner of NSW and covers an area of 26170 square kilometres. The Shire has a population of 7840 and has major centres at Wentworth, Dareton, Buronga, Gol Gol and Pooncarie. The economy of the Shire has historically been dominated by the significant grazing holdings throughout the area with more intensive farming along the Riverland regions in the south now accounting for the major portion of the agricultural revenue for the Shire.

The Shire is characterised by intense horticultural activities, tourism and residential areas scattered along the Murray River. Some areas such as Buronga are dormitory suburbs of the larger Victorian provincial City of Mildura. The area is known collectively as Sunraysia.

There are large grazing holdings surrounding the settled areas, these form part of the Western Division and are regulated strictly by the Western Lands Commission which is headquartered at Dubbo which is outside the Western Division.

The growing importance of the wine industry is shown by the development of and extensions to wineries within the Shire. Private companies are also increasingly becoming involved in the area particularly with regards to mining. A bentonite mine is currently in production and a mineral sands mine being commenced.

Feature films, television series and numerous commercials have been filmed in the area due to the area's isolated appearance combined with our closeness to the major Victorian provincial City of Mildura.

## 2. DEFICIENCIES IN INFRASTRUCTURE

Council has identified the following deficiencies in infrastructure in its region:

- \* Inadequate communication (mobile phone) services to the region.
- \* Insufficient all weather roads.
- \* Insufficient funding to maintain National, State and local roads.
- \* Lack of alternative energy supplies and restrictive electric power monopoly which presently exists.
- \* Insufficient freehold land in the district for commercial and residential use.
- \* Native title procrastination
- \* Restrictive and antiquated Western Lands 'grazing only' leases.
- \* Ageing infrastructure - roads, bridges, drainage, levee banks, water and sewerage plants.
- \* Inconsistent water quality of rivers.
- \* Lack of Government services to the region such as employment and social security agencies, tourism, law and order, childcare services and Aboriginal services.
- \* Closure of banks which, despite still making adequate profits, have become rationalised under a culture of 'less is better'.
- \* Border anomalies.
- \* Insufficient advanced and tertiary education facilities

## 3. FACTORS TO ENHANCE DEVELOPMENT IN THE WENTWORTH REGION

Council believes the following actions would have an enormous benefit to the Wentworth region.

- \* Extinguish native title on Western Lands Leases.
- \* Alter the 100 year old Western Lands Act to allow a 'multipurpose lease' to cover existing grazing only leases in the Wester Division.

- \* Convert unused Crown land to freehold to allow residential and commercial purchases subject to sensible planning strategies for the region.
- \* Development of a north-south road through the Region. Wentworth, Central Darling and Broken Hill Councils agree that the sealing of 173 kilometres of the Pooncarie-Menindee road is of significant importance to the district.
- \* Establish a multipurpose government service centre in the Wentworth Shire.
- \* Restrict the closure of banking services in the district.
- \* Supply a natural gas pipeline to the region.
- \* Allow contestable power supply to the Wentworth district in accordance with national competition policy.
- \* Provide adequate telecommunication services to the municipality for domestic, commercial and emergency service use.
- \* Provide adequate funding for heavy vehicle maintenance of National (Sturt Highway), State (Silver City Highway), and local roads and bridges that cross the Murray River. In particular the Abbotsford Bridge at Curlwaa and the George Chaffey Bridge at Buronga require major works.
- \* Increase resources for police and law enforcement agencies so that facilities within the district are 24 hour operatives rather than an 'after hours' call to a precinct 600 kms away.
- \* Eliminate border anomalies.
- \* Provide tertiary facilities in the Wentworth Shire district to retain the young in the district and build up the academic and skills base.

#### 4. DEVELOPMENT AND EMPLOYMENT AND ECONOMIC POTENTIAL

The Sunraysia region is one of the fastest developing regions in Australia. Wentworth Shire is ideally located close to the borders of NSW, Victoria and South Australia and is a major arterial route between Sydney and Adelaide.

Wentworth Shire has a number of major players in the wine industry (Stanley, Simeon, BRL Hardy) with operators in the district who have plans for major expansion given the infrastructure is there to support them and the

impediments to their development are minimised. The exploration and mining of commercially viable mineral sand deposits is also taking off.

The long term employment prospects of the region can only be enhanced if developments such as these can be supported by increased infrastructure for the region. The potential for additional export income also cannot be overlooked.

Please call Mr David McMillan, General Manager on (03) 50273203 if you have any queries in relation to this submission.