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House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration.

AT THE CROSSROADS
Inquiry into Local Government and Cost Shifting.
Canberra February 2003

Response from Alison G. Walpole
Grandmother, Farmer, Shire Councillor 1981-1990, Member Ratepayers Victoria,
Member Country Woman's Association of Victoria Social Issues Committee.

The media release for 25th June 2003 re the final Round Table for this inquiry fails to address the difference in the capacity of local governments to provide services, the difference in resources available. It is of concern that the participating representatives at this Round Table held on 27th June included two CEO from Melbourne suburban councils but no representation from a rural council. Over one third of Victorian Councils are rural and have distinctly different needs to Toorak or Port Melbourne. In a rural council the first step to social services is an all weather road to the local school, post office, hall and sports ground. It should be acknowledged that many residents are not paying rates but have voting rights. The discussion paper has acknowledged the differences between Rural, Regional and Urban Councils.

In Victoria the Department of Local Government has been moved into the Department of Victorian Communities Matrix away from the Department of Infrastructure where it was associated with the Department of Planning and Department of Natural Resources and Environment (now Department of Sustainability and Environment and Department of Primary Industry)

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House of representatives Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration	
Submission No:	403.....
Date Received:	16/7/03.....
Secretary:

Should Rural Local Government be classified separately to Urban Local Government giving better understanding of the different functions and finances of the two classifications.

3-51 The Roads to Recovery program acknowledged this difference and should be continued.

3-21 The special needs of rural communities dependent on weather patterns and government policies are discussed in this section. Rates as a property tax as different to income tax.

Chapter 3

3.5, 3.55, 3.6

There are questions about the viability of uniform systems of local government. The development of Multipurpose Health Services (eg Alpine Health Victoria) is in some cases duplicating or complimenting Local Government human services role. Would it be better to hand all these services to a Multipurpose Health Service and allow local government to return to its roads and bridges, planning, environment responsibilities ?

3.7

It has not been proved council amalgamation is more efficient and cost effective. Small can be better especially if it can be linked in cooperative arrangements with neighbouring municipalities as happened previously. The idea of councils sharing highly paid senior staff should be explored.

There needs to be flexibility to accommodate geographical differences, eg 50k on a straight flat road is very different to 50k on winding road through hills and valleys for a school bus, urgent medical attention, a large bookmobile.

3.59

In small communities to reduce overlap and duplication amalgamation of public and school libraries could be considered. Some schools have Commonwealth government funded library buildings. Information Technology has made a tremendous difference to public libraries. IT introduction is being driven by schools. Public libraries have a role as information centres.

3.21

The large areas held in National Parks and State Forestry should become rateable because of increased road costs to service them.

Chapter 4 Option 11

Roads to Recovery model has been a success . The model should be used in other areas.

4.12 4.13

On going viability of smaller councils. This recognises the differences in L G areas and needs research in close consultation with the residents of these areas. Do people expect more than roads and bridges ? Should local government be returning to its core traditional role divesting itself of the role of providing human services, (MOW, Infant welfare, aged care, kindergartens, libraries, tourism development, etc).

In Conclusion

There is need for review of the increasing administration cost of local government, the amount of money paid to consultants, cost of submissions and reports to State government and reluctance of professional staff to accept responsibility for their decisions. The lack of accountability and transparency by councils is alarming. The pressure from CEOs for local government to grow bigger (not better), all things to all people at a price ratepayers can not afford to pay should be removed. Control of local government should be returned to the elected Councillors and Council rejecting the present role as agents and an agency for State government.

Voluntary Regional Organisations of Councils is not a new idea it was developed and used before forced council amalgamation. Each council has its own character built up over time it should be free to consult with its people who expect it to be transparent and accountable. Unfortunately State government direction is preventing this happening.

Alison G. Walpole.

11th July 2003



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11th July 2003

Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee,
Chairman Ben Hardman, MP,
Level 8,
35 Spring Street,
Melbourne 3000.

Dear Sir,

The monopoly status for the Crown Casino disallowing a competing Casino within 150 kilometres of Melbourne ends in late 2005. The Crown Casino development was removed from the public planning process.

The Labor party promised, before the last election, to introduce the requirement that a planning permit be necessary to legally install electronic gaming machines. This has not yet been done.

Wangaratta Rural City Council is applying for a grant of \$1.8 M from the Victorian government and is planning to apply to the Federal government for \$ 15 M to develop a Ned Kelly Interperative Centre at Glenrowan. Twice this council has recorded in minutes of council its commitment to develop a policy on the introduction of electronic gaming machines to the municipality. This has not yet been done.

Has application been made for a planning permit for this proposed development at Glenrowan ? Some private land is involved. Application for a planning permit would provide a formal process for objections. What assurance is there that under the present planning, liquor licensing and gaming legislation electronic gaming machines cannot be installed and the project be developed to incorporate a Casino ?

Yours sincerely,

Alison G. Walpole

Alison G. Walpole.

Reference :- Auditor General of Victoria Report February 2003 (page 136)
Lakeside Community Centre Development, Benalla Rural City Council,
former Shire of Delatite.

Copy to:- House of Representative Standing Committee on economics, finance and
public administration. Inquiry into Local Government and Cost Shifting.
Peter Cohen, Acting Director Office of Gambling Regulation, Victoria.