

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

Prepared  
for

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

by  
the Australian Local Government Association

April 1999

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) submission presents a case for investment in regional Australia. It asserts that regional Australia will play an important part in Australia's future. However, the threat from global economic forces, the impacts of structural adjustment and the lack of investment in rural areas requires rethinking on how regional communities become responsive and sustainable.

ALGA believes that efforts should be targeted at setting the preconditions for individual regions to capitalise on their competitive advantage. These preconditions include the provision of both built and social infrastructure.

There is already in place a funding stream for most built and social infrastructure. Funding is provided from all three spheres of government and the private sector for individual programs. While these programs are effective in providing base line services, there are gaps and little coordination between them.

The essence of ALGA's submission is to assert that effective regional development requires a coordinated approach to the provision of built and social infrastructure. There is the need for an over-arching infrastructure program that identifies the inter-sector gaps and establishes their priority from a national perspective.

For local government, the focus on built infrastructure will inevitably be on roads. Councils are increasingly becoming aware of the future liability of their existing local road network. For many rural communities, the prosperity of their local industries is reflected in the condition of their local roads. It would be a mistake to ignore the importance of good roads to rural and remote communities.

Notwithstanding this, the provision of social infrastructure is also critical to sustain and enhance the performance of regional economies.

ALGA makes three recommendations:

1. The Commonwealth should establish a National Infrastructure Program that targets regional development. Consideration could be given to exploring innovative ways of funding the program provided it was not at the expense of the general public good.
2. The Commonwealth should work with local government (as well as the States) in a 'whole of government' approach to regional development.
3. There is a need to gather strategic data on the performance of regions, including infrastructure provision at the regional level.

ALGA takes the view that all regions are worth investing in but any specific investment needs to be considered on its merit. Any process established to implement a national program should be inclusive of all spheres of government and the private sector and afford individual regions the opportunity of presenting their case for specific investment.



# 1. INTRODUCTION

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## Roles of Government

The development of sustainable regional communities is a challenge for governments at all levels. The Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) believes there are two principle roles for government support for regional sustainability and growth. The first role is the provision and management of infrastructure. The second involves providing leadership and facilitation to encourage the attitudes and behaviour changes necessary for sustainability in a complex domestic and global economy.

In particular, ALGA believes that the Commonwealth has a role in:

- setting the global environment for encouraging investment in regional Australia.
- supporting transitional and adjustment strategies for under-performing regions.
- identifying policies that impact negatively on local communities and ensuring adequate compensation for regions.
- removing impediments to sustainable growth.

The Minister for Transport and Regional Services, the Hon John Anderson MP has said:

‘We can’t choose a district or town and declare that it will be developed, but we can help deliver the infrastructure, educational opportunities, health services and communication capabilities that will give people the best shot at finding their own best way forward. This doesn’t mean giving the bush more than other Australians – often it means so far as possible giving them what most Australians take for granted.’ (National Press Club, One Nation or Two? Securing a Future for Rural and Regional Australia, 17 February 1999).

ALGA believes that the Commonwealth should not pick winners in terms of one region against another but set the conditions by which all regions can capitalise and develop their own competitive advantages. This requires a partnership approach between all spheres of government to ensure their individual programs are complementary.

A move towards a partnership approach would recognise and support local governments’ role in promoting development, employment and community cohesion.

## Regional Infrastructure and Services

ALGA believes the Inquiry needs to recognise the strategic importance of regional infrastructure for achieving Australia’s future prosperity.

Built infrastructure, such as transport, telecommunications, water supply and energy etc are important determinants for realising economic potential in regions. Further, social infrastructure such as education, hospitals, health and community services, housing etc also have a significant impact and influence the performance of regional economies.

## **Purpose and Context of the Submission**

This submission has been prepared by ALGA as the national peak body for local government and addresses the broad national issues. No attempt has been made to identify specific investment opportunities or the merits of investing in specific regions. ALGA takes the view that all regions are worth investing in but any specific investment needs to be considered on its merit.

The Inquiry can expect to receive submissions from State and Territory Local Government Associations and from individual Councils. These submissions will collectively provide a view from local government on the need for increased investment in regional Australia.

While the submission will be read mainly in the context of rural and remote communities, the principles are equally applicable to communities in the metropolitan areas.

## **ALGA's Involvement to Date**

ALGA has been involved in regional development in recent years through a Regional Cooperation and Development Program, supported in part by the Local Government Development Program. Under this program ALGA established a significant network of Regional Organisations of Councils (ROCs). It's commitment has continued by way of an online information service (*Regionlink*) and through the sponsoring of a major national regional development session in conjunction with the National General Assembly of Local Government.

At the recent General Assembly in November 1998, the National Institute for Economic and Industry Research (NIEIR) presented a report on the 'State of the Regions'. The findings of this report are referenced in this submission.

In 1998, ALGA also undertook an inquiry into the transport needs of local government. The major finding was that there was a significant potential shortfall in local government's ability to maintain its infrastructure in the future. This submission also draws on the evidence obtained so far.

## **Structure of the Submission**

Chapter 2 details the conclusions from the NIEIR report on the 'State of the Regions' and expresses a vision for regional Australia. The NIEIR report provides an overview of regional Australia at the present time and is an important context for ALGA's submission. A sense of a future for regional Australia needs to be debated and shared by governments before the specifics of infrastructure and investment can be formulated.

Chapter 3 discusses the different types of regional infrastructure including both built and social form and their relevance to regional economies.

Chapter 4 suggests that there are gaps in the existing programs and arrangements and leads to ALGA's three main recommendation in Chapter 5.

## **2. WHERE ARE WE HEADING?**

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### **State of the Regions**

Recent work by the NIEIR indicates ‘quite dramatic divergences in regional indicators of economic well-being over the past decade’. Despite sustained national economic recovery since 1992, many regions of Australia have not shared in the benefits of economic growth.

Some regions have experienced significant population and employment growth, particularly in the Queensland ‘Sunshine Belt’, the lifestyle regions and metropolitan centres linked to the global economy. This growth has underpinned regional development in these areas.

At the same time, some regions are experiencing long term structural difficulties and in some cases decline. The South Australian and Tasmanian economies are confronted with declining population associated with slower economic growth.

Many regions continue to experience high unemployment – particularly those associated with low value added primary commodities, low skills and traditional manufacturing industries. Causes of high unemployment include structural adjustments through loss of competitiveness in manufacturing, a mismatch of skills between employment and resident workers, and growth in the labour force outstripping employment opportunities.

Clearly, these trends will continue without investment by industry and strategic intervention by governments. The alternative is the widening disparity between regions to the overall detriment of Australia’s economic performance and the community as a whole.

This Inquiry is in the unique position to formulate a new agenda for regional development in Australia. It should promote a positive future and seek to empower regions through a shared national vision for regional Australia.

### **A Shared Vision for Regional Australia**

Regional Australia will play a major role in securing Australia’s future prosperity. While the private sector must generate growth, all governments must provide an environment that allows regions to build on their competitive advantages in global and domestic markets. The vision for all three spheres of government should be to:

***‘work together to establish and support sustainable and vibrant regional communities throughout Australia’.***

Governments must adopt active and positive regional development agendas. Their policy must establish appropriate macroeconomic settings as well as support initiatives that:

- enhance the capacity of regions to compete in the global economy and meet domestic demand,
- strengthen the economic base of regions, particularly through investment of roads, transport and communications infrastructure<sup>1</sup>, and
- attract investment to stimulate traditional industries in region and also to develop new and emerging industries.

Governments must also support the provision of quality education and training infrastructure. Sustainable regions need flexible, appropriately skilled and educated workforce to meet industry needs. In particular, institutional arrangements and educational delivery mechanisms need to foster the necessary skills to build new and emerging growth industries.

The cultural and social values of regional communities must be maintained as well as protection of environmental quality.

Regions across Australia are worthy of support through appropriate funding of initiatives dedicated to regional leadership, cooperation, strategic planning and infrastructure development.

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<sup>1</sup> It is important that appropriate standards for infrastructure be developed having regards to competitiveness, cost/pricing and purpose of use.



### **3. REGIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE**

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ALGA has taken a broad view on regional infrastructure, as it believes the discussion should not be limited to the merits of investing in a built environment. Rather it should focus also on investing in the future of the region, including encouraging and developing a learning skilled community.

This Chapter provides a discussion on the various forms of regional infrastructure including:

- Transport
- Telecommunications
- Water and Energy
- Education and training
- Other Social Infrastructure such as sport and recreation, health infrastructure and public and private services

and concludes with comments on important data issues.

#### **Transport**

Many communities perceive transport (and particularly roads) as one of the most critical aspects of their local infrastructure. This can in part be attributed to recognition of the role that improved access (particularly sealing roads) played in the economic prosperity of the 1950's and 60s.

However, recent research in Victoria, NSW and Tasmania is suggesting that many Councils may not be able to fund the renewal of this infrastructure, much of which will require some form of renewal over the next 10 to 15 years.

Examples of the future liability of several Councils involved in the research are included in Attachment A for reference. Extrapolation of the future shortfall across the entire country is nothing short of alarming. Yet, when confronted with this information, many country people would attest to the veracity of the findings.

The problem is that what might appear to be a local problem on the surface is in fact a national problem if it is replicated across every local government area in the country. Further, if there is a problem with local roads there is also likely to be a problem with State funded roads and to some extent national roads. The solutions need to recognise the linkages between national, state and local roads and their importance to the regional economy.

Effective planning is crucial to addressing this problem to ensure that scarce funding resources are allocated to the best advantage of the region as a whole. This requires regional planning. In some regions air transport is as important as roads to sustaining appropriate levels of accessibility. An integrated transport approach is needed.

The following questions need to be answered:

- How does the rural or industry rationalisation impact on the flow of freight and demand for transport infrastructure?
- What is the renewal cost of local infrastructure and when will it be required?
- What is the capacity of local communities to carry out the necessary maintenance and renewal in a cost-effective way?
- Are there opportunities for a more cost effective way of funding infrastructure?

Councils are at different stages of sophistication in addressing some of these questions and yet the answers are crucial to the effective management of their transport infrastructure.

Attachment B illustrates the continuous planning process for local government advocated by ALGA. The first figure shows that most Councils are currently at a low level of sophistication in their asset management. The second figure illustrates a future target as more Councils move up the continuous improvement path.

Only as Councils move up the continuous improvement path that will they appreciate which industries require improved transport infrastructure and how to fund it. There is no doubt that a greater emphasis will be placed in the future on private sector financing (within a manageable Council debt structure) and on appropriate road pricing mechanisms.

Asset management is a key area for local government but it is not an end in itself. Any road investment needs to focus on delivering sustainable regional development outcomes.

### **Telecommunications**

New technologies, less restricted international capital movements and the growth of the services sector have reduced the importance of national and state borders as boundaries of economic activity. The provision of telecommunication infrastructure is imperative to building and maintaining competitive regions. It is essential that regional communities gain equitable access to online services to ensure that they cannot be classified by the richness (or lack) of information.

ALGA's research indicates that local government, public libraries and key community organisations in rural and regional Australia are acutely aware of the need to gain access to online services. Online services are a channel for financial exchange and services, information and education services, communication and increasingly audio and video communication including news and entertainment services.

The standard telephone service currently provided and guaranteed under the Universal Service Obligation has not proven to be particularly effective to date in ensuring that rural and regional customers have access to modern telecommunications services. Many rural and remote areas still do not have adequate access to proper telephony services.

Many customers fortunate enough to have online access often have difficulty with the

speed at which data is transferred and with their ability to stay online. This means that they have either very limited or no access to services which many city dwellers now take for granted as a relatively inexpensive and efficient form of communication.

Enhanced access to telecommunications infrastructure including Integrated Services Digital Network (ISDN) is essential for residents and businesses to make effective use of available technology. Universal Service Obligations (USO) of telecommunications carriers must be upgraded to ensure these services are accessible to rural and regional communities and at a reasonable cost.

Priority should be given to the provision of mobile phone services to cover all areas in Australia. This may be achieved by either the extension of the digital network or by equivalent new technologies.

While there has been some improvement in access to telecommunications infrastructure and services through *Networking the Nation*, a significant amount of work and funding is still required to ensure that access to services by rural and remote customers comes close to that enjoyed by their city counterparts.

### **Water and Energy**

Australia's regions require a safe, secure and affordable water supply for human settlement, agriculture and industry. The availability of water depends on geographical location, geology and climate. Many poorer regions in Australia have a shortage of water and seasonal fluctuations in both supply and demand as well as greater possibility of contamination of reserves.

In 1994 the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreed to a strategic framework for the efficient and sustainable reform of the Australian water industry. COAG recognised the need to address inadequacies in pricing, water allocation, and institutional and regulatory regimes in the Australian water industry. These inadequacies have resulted in significant degradation of the environment and, in many instances, deteriorating water assets.

Economic growth and development also depends on the availability of reliable sources of energy at reasonable cost. International experience shows that underperforming regions in the most are disadvantaged in terms of energy supply. There is a need to develop energy infrastructure and reduce the effects of isolation and dependency on one source of supply.

ALGA notes the importance of the COAG initiatives regarding energy market reforms and to the extent that these may improve better energy outcomes for regional Australia. However, ALGA stresses the need for demonstrable outcomes both in terms of access to alternative sources and supply as well as competitive pricing.

### **Education and Training**

A competitive region is one that is supported by a skilled and flexible labour force. According to the NIEIR, 'successful regions focus on skills development strategies, as a means of stimulating economic and employment growth'.

In Australia, it would appear that the 'knowledge gap' is widening between high and low performing regions. There is growing evidence that Australia's tertiary sector is under financial stress and some are going through a process of rationalisation of campuses from rural areas to major cities. The youth population is required to seek education and training opportunities outside their region.

Regional communities need greater access to education and training institutions. Without the knowledge and skills base, it is difficult to support both traditional and emerging industries within regions. ALGA considers that appropriate measures need to be developed for institutions to fully utilise decentralised delivery strategies.

However, the targeting of these education programs is crucial. There is no point in training people for jobs that are simply not there. Rather there needs to be a strategic focus on education and training to support traditional and emerging industries. Strategies are needed to support linkages between communities and educational institutions.

Some countries have well-established mechanisms for supporting the strategic development of enterprise networks and clusters. A well-known example is Italy where universities and training institutions support and develop the shoe industry through targeted education focussing on technological innovations, design and manufacturing techniques. Another example is Silicon Valley and its links with its universities to build and attract a skilled technology based labour force. In Australia, Monash University has developed linkages with the oil and gas industry of Bass Strait.

Local government is well placed to mobilise regional stakeholders, identify and address current and emerging employment needs, and facilitate cooperative networks and support systems for business and industry.

### **Other Social Infrastructure**

Local Government recognises the critical role and importance of social infrastructure and regional services in maintaining local community cohesion and influence the performance of regional economies, such as:

- hospitals, health and community services, regional sporting facilities and programs, access to housing, and
- access to public and private services eg government information centres, social security offices, banks and other essential local and regional services.

These forms of infrastructure:

- create and support employment within regions,
- influence decisions by employers, employees and their families to live in and/or move to a particular area, and
- support productivity of the workforce.

In recent years, there has been growing recognition of the negative social impacts resulting from the decline of government and private sector services from regional centres. Closure of government offices and the withdrawal of services (by all spheres of government) has far too often decreased commercial and employment opportunities and depleted town populations and local incomes.

The recent House of Representatives Inquiry report *Regional Banking Services – money too far away, March 1999* demonstrated the real community concern with closure and withdrawal of private sector services from local regional communities.

### **Data Issues**

ALGA's research indicates that relevant data sources are generally difficult to identify, scattered among institutions and agencies, organised on a sectorial basis, based on diverse geographic boundaries, and in many cases collected on a sample basis.

Despite these observations, there are a number of research agencies that have the capacity to undertake excellent research including high quality regional analysis. ALGA has worked with the NIEIR to develop a profile on the performance of regions which culminated in the 'State of the Regions' report. However, funding for strategic data collection and analysis of regional data is limited.

ALGA considers that there is a need to increase research funding and better coordinate Australia's research effort to inform decision-makers on regional infrastructure needs. Attachment C provides a discussion on specific areas requiring attention.



## 4. CONCLUSIONS

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There is already in place a funding stream for most built and social infrastructure. Funding is provided from all three spheres of government and the private sector for individual programs. While these programs are effective in providing base line services, there are gaps and little coordination between them.

The essence of ALGA's submission is to assert that effective regional development requires a coordinated approach to the provision of built and social infrastructure. There is the need for an over-arching infrastructure program that identifies the inter-sector gaps and establishes their priority from a national perspective.

### **Built Infrastructure**

Transport infrastructure and particularly roads, is of particular importance to local government. Investment is needed on existing roads that are under stress because of their age and heavy loading. A significant percentage of the transport of primary industries is heavily dependent on local roads. Some local roads have been heavily trafficked for some time now and are in need of further investment.

There are also roads that are constraining the development of local industries. These need to be identified and the constraints removed to ensure that the local industries have every chance of success.

Some rural and remote areas are critically dependent on road access. Road investment is needed to bring tourists to their area and allow them to explore their natural assets. The Outback Highway from WA to North Queensland via Alice Springs is an example where local, State and Commonwealth support can improve access across our vast country. There are suggestions that the upgrading of the Highway No 1 route from Cairns to Darwin via the Gulf might offer the same type of benefits. There must be many more examples.

The integration of transport policy with regional development is a central core strategy for ALGA and Councils need to be encouraged to progress up the continuous improvement scale.

However, the case needs to be made for improving the transport links and not just funding for roads. The investment needs to be targeted and consistent with an integrated transport outcome for the region. Depending on the nature of the regional development, this may place a greater emphasis on air and rail infrastructure and services than roads.

Councils in some States also provide water supply and sewerage services. The argument for allocating adequate funding to maintain existing infrastructure is the same as for roads. Councils need to test their ability to fund future recurrent liabilities and assess the extent to which any shortfall will impact on regional development.

Only when Councils have an understanding of their infrastructure needs and the linkages to regional development will they be able to articulate their strategy to not

only their own communities but to other spheres of government. The case for increased investment at the regional level is inextricably linked to the case for regional development. Where there is a case for exploring the development potential of a region, there will inevitably be a case for investment in infrastructure.

The Commonwealth has a special responsibility to ensure that processes are set in place for these cases to be presented and judged on their merits. But there is little point in regions presenting their case if there is no hope of receiving the investment needed to make a difference.

***There is a case for Commonwealth investment in the built infrastructure and for regions to be given the opportunity to argue their case.***

### **Social Infrastructure**

The provision of social infrastructure is also critical to sustain and enhance the performance of regional economies. This type of infrastructure includes:

- hospitals, health and community services, regional sporting facilities and program centres, access to housing, and
- access to public and private services eg, government information centres, social security offices, banks and other essential local and regional services,

***Whilst the private sector can play a major role in the provision of commercial services, governments must recognise that they have an obligation where market forces are not the appropriate mechanism for investment.***

Only the Commonwealth has the level of resources required to achieve equity and meet the community services obligation for regional Australia.

### **Financing**

In urging the Commonwealth to invest in regional infrastructure, the discussion would not be complete without reference to where the funding might come from.

***ALGA would support the Commonwealth seeking to fund a National Infrastructure Program from innovative mechanisms such as BOOT schemes with the private sector and the sale of public assets.***

However its support would be conditional on it being in the 'public good' and that there was no diminution of the Commonwealth's commitment to its Universal Service Obligations.

Further, financing infrastructure is not an issue just for the Commonwealth, as it needs to be addressed by State and local governments as well.



## **Role of Local Government**

The role of local government in regional development is unique by virtue of its proximity and accountability to local communities. Councillors are elected representatives of the regional community and have formal responsibilities for local leadership and governance.

Local government is a key stakeholder and is actively involved in all regional mechanisms to facilitate regional planning and community development. It has the potential for supporting practical measures to strengthen regions by encouraging:

- business networks or clusters,
- social and human capital through community based learning networks, and
- co-operation between governments, business and the community.



## 5. RECOMMENDATIONS

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ALGA offers three recommendations. The first is that there is a case for investing in infrastructure in regional areas and the Commonwealth should establish a National Infrastructure Program that targets regional development. However, the investment should be based on sound investment principles, involving both public and private sectors.

The second recommendation relates to inter-governmental collaboration. Local government is a key stakeholder in regional Australia and the Commonwealth needs to work with local government (as well as the States) to achieve the desired outcomes from infrastructure investment

The third recommendation relates to the need to collect relevant data on regional development and the performance of infrastructure and services at the regional level.

### **National Infrastructure Program**

*ALGA recommends that the Commonwealth introduce a National Infrastructure Program that targets regional development.*

The Commonwealth has a number of options with regard to such a program. It can pursue a built or social infrastructure program or it can develop a program that encompasses both. ALGA contends that it should be inclusive of both types of regional infrastructure.

The program should be additional to existing programs but focus on the gaps and lack of coordination between them.

Funding for the program may require exploring innovative ways of raising revenue by all three spheres of government. However, local government's support for specific measures would be conditional on it being in the 'public good' and that there was no diminution of the Commonwealth's commitment to its Universal Service Obligations

### **Inter-governmental Collaboration**

Mechanisms are needed to identify gaps in existing programs that are constraining growth in a region. Regions should be encouraged to develop a 'whole of region' strategic action plan that identifies the benefits from additional cross sector funding. Councils should be encouraged to take a leadership role in the process.

Constraints will vary from region to region. In some parts of the country, there may be a need for sealing a key road whereas in other regions the constraints may be one of training unemployed youth for a particular industry.

Each region needs to be given the chance to present their case. State and Local Governments should be involved in reviewing the merits of individual proposals. These submissions should be based on integrating existing programs and where appropriate, to leveraging private sector funding.

Partnership agreements should be used as a means of arriving at terms favourable to all stakeholders, including the three spheres of government and the private sector. This would allow the Commonwealth to move away from centralised decision making and empower regions to develop their economy within a shared national vision.

***Governments will maximise their contribution to regional development by targeting public funds to achieve mutually agreed outcomes. Government's should maintain a 'whole of government' approach to regional development.***

### **Data and Information**

The reality is that there is not a great deal of relevant data on the performance of regions and its infrastructure.

***If the Commonwealth is to introduce a National Infrastructure Program, the benefits need to be measured over time.***

This will provide the framework for reviewing and adjusting the funding strategy by the Commonwealth and the regional strategy by the local communities.

Attachment C gives an overview of the data required to monitor the performance of regions and their infrastructure.

# ATTACHMENTS

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- A. Typical Future Funding Liability for Councils  
(Figure 1 shows the liability for a small rural Council)  
(Figure 2 shows the liability for a large rural Council)
  
- B. Continuous Improvement Process  
(Figure 3 shows the current situation)  
(Figure 4 shows where Councils need to be in 5 years time)
  
- C. Future Information Needs

# Attachment C

## Information and Data

In preparing this submission ALGA has not had the time nor the resources to commission new research to inform the Committee of the specific needs and requirements of individual regions.

ALGA's research indicates that relevant data sources are generally difficult to identify, scattered among institutions and agencies, organised on a sectorial basis, based on diverse geographic boundaries, and in many cases collected on a sample basis.

Despite these observations, there are a number of research agencies that possess the capacity to undertake excellent research including high quality regional analysis. However, funding for strategic data collection and analysis of regional data is limited.

ALGA's experience indicates that there are major inefficiencies in publicly funded research. In many instances research is conceived and commissioned by central state or commonwealth agencies without consultation with major regional and local stakeholders, or in many other cases, by local or regional agencies without adequate reference to relevant state and commonwealth policies or funding priorities.

This lack of coordination and consultation often results in driving central agency policies further away from expressed local and regional needs or raises expectations which cannot be met by government.

ALGA believes that there is a major need to increase research funding and better coordination of Australia's regional research effort to inform decision-makers about regional infrastructure needs. For instance, there would be significant benefit derived from strategic research into issues such as:

- diminishing residual life and technological obsolescence of infrastructure;
- feasibility of existing infrastructure renewal;
- infrastructure financing and management;
- net benefit of development of multi-modal transport infrastructure; and
- national competition policy issues.

Committee Secretary  
House of Representatives Standing Committee on  
Primary Industries and Regional Services  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

15 April, 1999

Dear sir

**INQUIRY INTO INFRASTRUCTURE AND  
THE DEVELOPMENT OF REGIONAL AREAS**

I refer to your recent public advertisement inviting organisations to make submissions to the subject Inquiry.

I am pleased to enclose a submission from the Australian Local Government Association for consideration by the Committee.

Should you have any queries, please contact Peter Rufford at ALGA on 6281 1211 extension 32.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John S. Ross". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J'.

**John Ross**  
**Senior Vice President**