

Mr Neil Watt (NW:CR)
DS/DEV-11 (Folio 1705/99)

27 July 1999

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

Dear Sir/Madam

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

Introduction

This submission has been prepared on behalf of the Australian Capital Region Leaders' Forum. The Forum membership consists of the Australian Capital Territory Government and the Councils of Eurobodalla, Bega Valley, Bombala, Boorowa, Cooma-Monaro, Crookwell, Gunning, Harden, Mulwaree, Snowy River, Tallaganda, Yarrowlumla, Yass, Young, Goulburn, Queanbeyan and Tumut.

On 26 March 1999, the Forum adopted a Business Plan which includes Key Result Areas, Strategies, Actions and Key Performance Indicators. The determined Key Result Areas are the product of discussions held at previous Forums and are the issues which are believed to be of critical importance to the development of the region over the next 1 to 3 years.

The eight Key Result Areas are:

- 1 Memorandum of Understanding
- 2 Employment and Business Development
- 3 Tourism
- 4 Environment
- 5 Infrastructure
- 6 Access
- 7 Community Services
- 8 Community Development

Key Result Areas (Major Issues)

1 Memorandum of Understanding

The development of a Memorandum of Understanding between the three levels of Government is considered to be of critical importance to the development of a co-operative approach to the provision of services in the region.

2 Employment and Business Development

There is a need to further identify actions which will assist to maximise employment and business opportunities in the region. To allow this identification process to occur, economic, business and agricultural strategies are required. Also, there needs to be a regional database of businesses developed.

3 Tourism

The region has benefited from tourism for a number of years, but it is believed there should be an effort to maximise the region's tourism potential related to key events. The events highlighted include the Sydney Olympics Torch Relay, the Centenary of Federation and the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting planned to be held in Canberra. These events will provide the opportunity for widespread media coverage of the region. Also, there is a need for product development and for research on current infrastructure and attractions.

4 Environment

There is a need to identify actions which will assist sustainable forward planning and resource management in the region. It is proposed to do this by continually reviewing the Regional State of Environment Report, support Catchment Management Committees and develop policies which preserve and enhance the environment.

5 Infrastructure

Key infrastructure projects which will maximise accessibility within the region have to be identified and progressed. To achieve this objective, a Road Strategy is being produced by the Australian Capital Region Development Council, a Regional Water Strategy is being developed by members of the Forum and a Telecommunication Strategy has been completed.

The key issues for the Australian Capital Region identified in the Telecommunication Strategy include:

- Utilisation of Infrastructure – the region needs to harness existing capacity and turn it into a commercial operation offering competitive services to customers in the Region.
- Telephony Costs – regional demand may be depressed by an apparently discriminatory pricing scheme in areas outside Canberra/Queanbeyan.
- Mobile Service – the Region needs a service which works reliably and continuously on highways and major roads and in the hinterland surrounding regional towns.
- Internet Access – just like urban areas, regional towns and their outlying areas require lower cost, higher bandwidth Internet access services which can support the development of significant local information based services and content.
- Demand – the responsibility lies squarely on individual regional populations to devise and adopt approaches which demonstrate and build demand for telecommunications services.
- Awareness and Training – a Region-wide approach to awareness and training, especially for Internet related activities such as e-commerce and e-mail, will lay the foundation for the community demand building processes.
- The Role of Canberra – as a major population centre, Canberra/Queanbeyan make an attractive starting point for a regionally based telecommunications operator. Apart from the market already existing in Canberra, the operator could provide cost effective regional electronic delivery of many businesses, Government, health, education and tourism services based in Canberra.
- Telecommunications as Infrastructure – it is now necessary to regard telecommunication infrastructure in a similar light to roads, bridges, airports, etc. It is an essential element for economic growth and prosperity.

Other infrastructure items which the Forum has identified and intends to progress are the Eden Port proposal and the Eastern Gas Pipeline.

6 Access

The projects identified will facilitate and assist the expansion and improvement of key transport systems into the region. Projects include the Very High Speed Train from Sydney to Canberra, the expansion of Canberra Airport, the development of a second Sydney Airport in the region, an upgrade of major highways, in particular the

Kings and Princes Highways, the expansion of telecommunication links into the region and the continuation of the South East Australian Transport Group activities.

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7 **Community Services**

There is a need to identify actions which will maintain and enhance key community services within the region. Some issues, which have already been identified, include the need to develop tele-medicine facilities within the region and the development of a co-ordinated community/social plan to allow the application of Federal/State and regional policies.

8 **Community Development**

It has been recognised that communities within the region require assistance in planning for the future. In particular, the rural industry requires assistance due to long term drought conditions experienced, falling commodity prices and new environmental requirements imposed on the industry. It is proposed to encourage development of community strategic plans for sub-regions, part funded by the Federal Rural Plans Program, to provide some direction to this industry.

Conclusion

Local Government Councils in South East of New South Wales and the ACT Government believe that to progress the development of this part of Australia, a regional approach, with the assistance of other levels of Government, has to be taken to advance major issues of concern. This is the major reason for the identification of the Key Result Areas and the development of Strategies and Actions to bring to fruition these critical issues of concern to the region.

If further information is required on the points raised in this submission, I can arrange for the information to be supplied.

Yours faithfully

NEIL WATT
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REGIONAL LEADERS' FORUM