

COOMA-MONARO SHIRE COUNCIL
SUBMISSIONS TO THE NSW RURAL AND REGIONAL TASKFORCE

This submission provides a general overview on various issues and five more detailed submissions on specific issues. All the issues are of equal importance and will to varying degrees impede the sustainability and growth of Cooma and the region it serves.

The more detailed submissions are on the following topics:

- Small business and economic development support
- Local education services and facilities
- Health and aged care facilities and services
- Primary industry productivity and sustainability
- Water supply

Other issues include:

- Regionalisation of government services in larger regional towns to the detriment of smaller rural area and township development. The local examples of this are the BAS contract, Trade Schools and Government Services one-stop-shop, being centralised in Queanbeyan for the region with long-term likelihood of reduction in localized service delivery.
- Centralised planning implementation controlled from Sydney that has a lack of local consultation that includes complex regulation, changing rules, inflexibility on spot zoning, etc
- No regulatory impact study provision to ensure that Federal and State-wide decision making, policy and regulation meet rural and regional needs. An example is telecommunications and the consequences of potential privatisation of retail electricity distribution services.
- Sydney-centric, “metropolitan context thinking” decision-making with little understanding of the very different and varied local needs of rural and regional areas. A “one fits all” mentality to policy decision making by NSW Government. A typical example is the policy on youth driving in relation to number of people in the car and time curfews. It has no consideration for the special situations that apply to rural youth drivers that are of no consequence to metropolitan drivers.
- Rural public transport to cater for the growing needs of an aging population.
- Rural roads maintenance that will continue to be an increasing financial burden to local council and regional road funding is under-funded. These create considerable community safety hazards that does not fit with NSW State Plan priorities of “safer roads”
- Infrastructure developments in rural areas have considerable time delays on metropolitan developments that create an inequitable competition for rural communities trying to sustain and grow their communities. The example is rural telecommunications infrastructure never keeps pace with metropolitan telecommunications infrastructure and capabilities
- issues of lack of consultation with, and funding for local government. Local Government needs five year funding commitments and better consultative processes with NSW State government.

Name of Organisation

Cooma-Monaro Shire Council

Title / Nature of Issue

Insufficient funding for Small Business Support and Economic Development Services and lack of localized service delivery for Snowy Mountains and Monaro that is vital for the ongoing sustainable development of Cooma-Monaro and region.

Discussion of Issue

* The 2001 NSW Alpine Region Strategy supported the work of the Snowy- Monaro Business Enterprise Centre (BEC). It states, “Build on the existing infrastructure of the Snowy-Monaro Business Enterprise Centre.”

* The 2006 NSW State Plan supports the implementation of the Alpine Plan. The NSW State Plan Goals for “Growing Prosperity across NSW” include “NSW Open for Business” and “Stronger Rural and Regional Economies” with priorities for “Increased Business Investment”, “Maintain and Invest in Infrastructure” and “Increased Business Investment in Rural and Regional NSW”.

* In 2002, with the help of Federal Government capital funding the Snowy-Monaro BEC established the Snowy Enterprise Centre. It enabled the creation of an Integrated Business Incubator model based on enterprise facilitation principles that were by then embedded in the organisation. To ensure it was sustainable it required to be supported by existing business and industry development programs that included the NSW Government funded Business Advisory Service (BAS).

* In 2004 the NSW State government restructured the BAS reducing from 50 service providers to 18. In South East NSW (Capital Region) four providers became one and the contract stipulated the office had to be in Queanbeyan.

* The current Queanbeyan-delivered service is ineffectual for our region. Few people from Bombala, Cooma-Monaro and Snowy River LGAs have accessed the service. It delivers a telephone small business information service with no face-to-face outreach business counselling and enterprise facilitation, which was the vital part of the original locally delivered service.

* The quality of the business counselling service does not match what was provided locally by the Snowy-Monaro BEC from 1993 to 2004. Such services require a highly-skilled local business counselor with local knowledge and extensive networks that is backed by an organisation with a local profile and “owned” by its local community.

* Snowy-Monaro BEC business advisory service activities and outcomes from 1993 to 2004 provided over 12,000 contacts to nearly 2,500 clients that assisted creation of 220 businesses and retention / creation of 550 jobs. This was a major contribution to our region’s sustainability given 500 government-related jobs were lost from 1990 to 2000.

- * The BEC provided a number of training programs during its time as a BAS provider that has contributed to the skill development of the region.
- * The small business advisory infrastructure enabled the BEC to provide support for regional industry, business, community and infrastructure development projects.
- * It played a major role in major projects such as the Monbeef Export Meat Works, the Defence Services Call Centre and re-establishment of Cooma Correctional Centre.
- * Over the past three years it has managed to continue to sustain its operations but with the need for increased Council and ratepayer funding that is inequitable given the current BAS funding and contract arrangements.
- * The BEC has needed to refocus its activities due to funding arrangements forcing more activities into non-local consulting services that, whilst generating income have diverted the BEC's energies from its desired local focus and support for its small businesses.
- * Some limited regional small business skill development and mentoring services have been provided through Federal Government funding. The Cooma-Monaro Country Growth Strategy Program, which ceases in December 2007, has enabled the BEC to conduct some economic development projects for Cooma-Monaro Shire Council through a mix of local and State Government funding.
- * The region's agricultural industry has been in drought, winter tourism is just recovering from previous poor seasons and its timber industry has been plagued by investment issues. Local small business retail industry has increased competition from Woolworths, Coles and retail developments, which whilst welcome, will impact local small business.
- * There is major reliance on enterprises such as Snowy Hydro, SMEC, Monbeef, Cooma Defence Services Call Centre and Cooma Correctional Centre. Recent business diversification and relocation work of the BEC needs to be continued.
- * If the BEC does not gain immediate additional funding, the regional community of Bombala, Cooma-Monaro and Snowy River will lose this organisation. Further erosion of support given current small business issues and various current development projects, which will have an impact on both economic and social development of the region.

Solution

- * Return to a local NSW funded business advisory service for the three shires of Bombala, Cooma-Monaro and Snowy River Local Government Authorities.
- * Immediately fund the Rural Enterprise Centre concept proposal that has been developed by the Snowy-Monaro BEC and provided to NSW Small Business and Rural and Regional Services Ministers. It integrates local small business support and economic development activities within the existing structure of the Snowy Enterprise Centre.

Name of Organisation

Cooma-Monaro Shire Council

Title / Nature of Issue

Maintenance and expansion of local education facilities and services as a major role in the overall sustainable development of Cooma-Monaro and the Snowy-Monaro region.

Discussion of Issue

* The NSW State Plan in its theme “Growing Prosperity across NSW” has priorities to “have more people participating in education and training throughout their life” and “better access to training in rural and regional NSW to support local economies”

* In the workshops that assisted the State Plan development, the South East community highlighted the important role that TAFE colleges play in the region to ensure people are able to access local training and apprenticeships relevant to the local economy. It also had strong recognition for the role that schools play in supporting families and bringing community together.

* The local community has done considerable work in attempting to secure locally delivered tertiary studies. This includes facilitating discussions between TAFE Illawarra
1) University of Canberra on articulation of qualifications across institutions, and
2) Charles Sturt University on articulation and joint delivery of degree courses at TAFE Illawarra Cooma Campus

The long-term strategy of these measures is to retain some of our young people in our smaller rural area longer. This local strategy needs to be supported by NSW government.

* The NSW Government has recently invested in the local Cooma Campus facilities of TAFE Illawarra and the establishment of a Central School in Jindabyne but local schools still have insufficient IT educational resources in comparison with metropolitan schools. This has the consequence of potentially having an increasing disparity in IT skill sets between country and metropolitan populations.

* We have a federally funded Local Community Partnership organisation that coordinates activities across the public and private schools in the region and assists this interface with local business in terms of vocational education and training (VET) and career transition for students. It focuses on meeting the needs of our local economy.

* Strategies such as school-based traineeships will assist the retention of young people and create employment opportunities. The issue is there are barriers to implementation within the rural public school system such as VET course availability and teaching resources.

* Whilst the establishment of Trade Schools and the Australian Technical Colleges in Queanbeyan, is good, it will have the long-term effect of reducing locally delivered TAFE and School VET courses. The consequences are increased costs through additional travel and living expenses or even worse our young people (Year 11 and 12 students and apprentice / trainees) will relocate from our smaller rural area to the larger regional Centre of Queanbeyan. Local TAFE colleges have to be integrated into local delivery of courses from these Queanbeyan-based facilities.

* We have a TAFE system that adequately covers accredited vocational needs. There are areas of non-vocational, recreational and cultural skill development that add value to the overall skill set of our region. Community Colleges have filled this unique niche in the past which has contributed to the region's development.

* NSW policy now insists that Community Colleges are only funded to deliver accredited vocational training courses. This will have the effect of closing Monaro Community college by the end of 2007 or having it "swallowed up" into another region's Community College, which reduces the control and influence of our community on course delivery. We will lose part of our community infrastructure that builds community skills and community infrastructure that provide our community with a social wellbeing and features that are attractive to new settlers.

Solutions

* Maintain Community College funding for local non- certificate courses

* Integrate any Trade School and Australian Technical College developments in Queanbeyan into locally-delivered courses through TAFE Illawarra Cooma Campus

* Support the use of local TAFE facilities to deliver integrated university courses and MOUs for articulation of qualifications

Name of Organisation

Cooma-Monaro Shire Council

Title / Nature of Issue

Maintenance and expansion of local health and aged care services and facilities in the Snowy-Monaro region.

Discussion of Issue

* The NSW State Plan has goals of “Healthy Communities” with goals of “Improved Access to Quality Healthcare” and “improved survival rates and quality of life for people with potentially fatal or chronic illnesses through improvements in healthcare”

* Cooma and its regional community are lucky to have a high standard local hospital facility. The issue is that its potential is under-utilised and thereby not as efficient as it should be.

* The ACT Government has the country’s worst waiting lists for selective surgery. There is considerable potential for its neighbouring NSW District hospitals to be utilised for day surgery. Unfortunately the dialogue between both NSW Health and ACT Health appears to not include consideration of regional health solutions with the goal being best outcomes for regional patient care but entrenched State / Territory positions.

* There are concerns that NSW Government will continue to develop hospital facilities in Queanbeyan and Bega, which is welcomed by Cooma-Monaro Council but this not be to the detriment of the continued development of Cooma Hospital and local delivery of health services within the Snowy-Monaro region.

* Our community continues to lobby for a permanent oncology and dialysis facility that becomes more important as we continue to support an aging population who cannot continue to travel to Canberra for treatment.

* Long waiting lists for local dental services, overworked private and public medical services and an increasing difficulty in attracting doctors and dentists to rural areas all contribute to lowering of services in the Snowy-Monaro region.

* Local hospital weekend bed closures due to lack of staff resources made available

* At the Shire’s attendance at Country Week Expo in Sydney every year, discussions with migrant and metropolitan-based health workers shows a willingness to move to rural areas. It appears that promotion of the benefits of rural life and rural medical experience are not being explained. Also there needs to be clear incentives to encourage relocation of these professions.

* With an aging population, especially in rural areas, there are not enough resources being provided by federal government for aged care support. NSW Government needs to influence Federal Government

* The reimbursement of transport expenses for people from Cooma and its surrounding region that travel over 100Km for medical treatment is very little even for pensioners and in no way makes an appropriate contribution. This is inequitable to rural communities and their people.

* Crewing of Snowy Hydro Care flight Helicopter based in Hume is only by ACT emergencies services crew, especially ambulance. Given its site in Hume (near to Queanbeyan) and the service area is mostly South East NSW; consideration should be given to also utilising NSW emergency service staff.

Solutions

* Continued incentives for rural doctors, dentists, nurses and health workers to relocate to rural areas.

* Ongoing support by the NSW Government for Federal Government funding of rural doctors training programs, such as the ANU rural doctors program.

* Major government and industry backed promotion to “sell” the advantages and benefits of working within a rural health service.

* NSW Government lobbying and support of continued and increased Federal Government funding support for high care and aged care beds and facilities within the Snowy-Monaro region.

* Review the transport reimbursement criteria and contribution for travel over 100Km for medical treatment.

* Development of a NSW / ACT Regional Health Plan that identifies resource sharing and equitable cross funding solutions that can be supported by Federal Government to ensure more effective utilisation of health facilities from a regional perspective focused on patient care. This could include the shared staffing of the Snowy Hydro Care flight helicopter.

* NSW Government to support the local proposal for the Community Connections project which is aimed at providing a local one-stop shop electronic (telephone / web) contact point for crisis needs be it information or referral

Name of Organisation

Cooma-Monaro Shire Council

Title / Nature of Issue

Reducing Primary Production Productivity of Agriculture as it relates to weed control, investment and land use on the Monaro

Discussion of Issue

- * Weed control is a major issue for primary production productivity in our region. Cooma-Monaro Council has been very supportive of a number of very successful landcare projects that have integrated Council, agricultural enterprise and community implementation of weed control projects. The issue is ongoing funding to a capacity to ensure we retain the gains and continue to deal with further issues.
- * Major weeds for the Monaro that impact rural production are Serrated Tussock, African Love Grass and Fire Weed which are an expanding problem.
- * Roadside, crown and state land weed control is under funded to deal with the increasing problem, especially in an area that has increasing visitation.
- * There appears to be a lack of NSW Government support in Pine Forest Planning. There are areas in the Snowy-Monaro region where highly productive agricultural land is being lost to investment schemes that are supported by planning processes that do not provide an equitable solution for competing land use needs for sustaining both local agricultural and forestry industry. The planning process is purely a State Planning responsibility that does not include any local decision making from a Council / Community perspective. The continued State Government approval of plantations has other concerns in terms of fire hazard and management and water run off.
- * Stock losses from wild dogs are a major issue with more control of the issue within National Parks. More importantly farmers are de-stocking due to the issue by not running sheep, with the consequence of over 10,000 hectares of de-stocked and thus unproductive grazing land in the region.
- * With introduction of Catchment Management Authorities (CMAs), macro issues are being resourced to the detriment of localized issues. An example is the Murrumbidgee CMA has a focus on salinity which may be a major issue for a large part of its catchment area but unfortunately it has little relevance to the Monaro which has a major weeds issue.
- * The Monaro is split across two CMAs, which, as pointed out some years ago through the then Monaro Agricultural Partnership, the focus on Monaro Farmers needs within the catchment are diluted.
- * The funding of CMAs in the long term is of major concern with the ability for them to impose their own rates at any stage on local property owners.

Solutions

- * Fireweed needs to be placed on the Register of Weeds of National Significance.

- * More resources need to be made available to implement more weed eradication and control programs.

- * More local input in the decision making process for pine plantation approvals

Name of Organisation

Cooma-Monaro Shire Council

Title / Nature of Issue

Water issues for Cooma-Monaro Shire

Discussion of Issue

* Whilst Council welcomes the decision to provide Cooma-Monaro Shire Council with a seat at the ACT Water Taskforce, there is still concern that the needs of Cooma-Monaro Shire may be overlooked in catering for needs of the ACT and Queanbeyan population. Decisions on external water usage from the Cooma-Monaro water catchment need to have the local council views supported by the NSW Government

* Various villages, for example Nimmitibel, within Cooma-Monaro Shire, have major water supply issues that are holding back development or creating living conditions that are far from acceptable.

* Concern that the Snowy Hydro focus, especially on water security is unaligned with local priorities

* Should there be a call on Tatangara Dam water for the ACT, then Cooma-Monaro Council would prefer the water to be delivered from the Murumbidgee River not a direct pipeline.

Solutions

* Cooma-Monaro Shire Council to have continued support from NSW Government to ensure that the Shire's water allocation is not used for external sources that will have detrimental long term water supply and environmental issues for the Shire

* A cooperative agreement between Council and Snowy Hydro that ensures an ongoing information flow on the status of intended inflows to the Tatangra Dam and its capacity, especially when its levels are about to reach lower than 40 megalitres so that Council can prepare community plans for reduced water availability

* More resources provided from NSW State government to affect drought proofing planning and implementation and provide alternative water supply solutions to enable continued development of these areas.

* Federal, State and Local Government to jointly fund an appropriate solution for Nimmitibel water supply.

* A long-term storage and control plan to be developed for the Shire's catchment