



DELEGATE'S REPORT

13 October 2009

DR4	COUNTRY WEEK FORUM AT STATE PARLIAMENT HOUSE
FILE: 163	KEO (NRN) {FOLIO NO. *}

SUMMARY:

Reporting on the forum held at State Parliament House by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition Mr Andrew Stoner on Thursday 6 August 2009. Minutes from forum tabled for information.

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DESCRIPTION:

This meeting was attended by representatives of country local government councils and state members of parliament including several shadow ministers and was held the day before the 2009 Rural and Country Lifestyle Expo (Country Week). However, the attendance by country councils was very disappointing with 12 councils represented, these being Warren, Bogan, Warrumbungles, Bourke, Kempsey, Griffiths, Boorowa, Armidale, Cessnock, Muswellbrook, Port Stephens and Dubbo.

Each of the councils represented were asked to identify their issues with some input from the shadow ministers attending. While the councils present raised different issues, it would appear that most of those present had similar issues. The difference being the degree of importance to the individual councils.

The issues raised:

- Planning
 - Continual eroding of local input into planning decisions. The lack of clear guidance on what constitutes development to be referred to the minister for approval. Also the continual changes to the planning legislation with limited or no consultation with Local Government, this includes the recent changes which restricts the ability of councils to levy S94 charges on community housing.
 - Continual changes to the EP&A Act and the need for this to be drastically overhauled.
 - Possible overhaul of planning legislation to include all aspects of planning requirements including Native Vegetation Act, Rural Fire services aspects of planning, flooding etc.
 - Length of time the Department of Planning is taking to approve the Standard LEPs (several have been with the department for two

- years or more which is impacting on their land release and development plans).
- State Plan inconsistent with local 10 year plans (no consultation).
 - Conflict between Department of Planning and DECC (DECCW now).
Review of Floodplain Manual without consultation with Local Government.
- Roads
 - Need for increased funding to bring all roads up to standard.
 - Rail branch lines closing forcing more heavy vehicles onto roads
 - Problems associated with increased heavy transport mass limits and the impacts on roads throughout the shires without any recompense to councils.
 - Timber bridge replacements.
 - Classification of roads (national, state, regional, local).
 - Armidale-Kempsey road requires funding to upgrade.
 - Improved highways to and within the central west region.
 - Transport
 - Continual withdrawal of air and rail services which is leaving some shires without any means of transport other than private vehicle. Some shires have no air, rail or bus services.
 - Infrastructure
 - Need to maintain airports with no regular passenger services and the costs falling to councils.
 - Grants need to be strategic in their distribution and fit in with local government plans for their shires.
 - Water
 - Issues of water allocations. Need for more water storage (dam), problems of evaporation and loss of unused allocations.
 - No weather radar between Moree and Wagga Wagga.
 - Need for water security. Need study on long term impacts of current water activities and proposals for local areas.
 - Telecommunications
 - Poor or no mobile coverage, slow internet download speeds. Satellite not always available or appropriate.
 - Local Government
 - Diminishment of active involvement in planning and other activities.
 - Need for local government Act to be reviewed and updated
 - Need for formal MOU between state and local government.
 - Continual cost shifting and reduction in local government powers.
 - Rate pegging
 - Constitutional recognition of local government.
 - Assessment and implications of all government legislation on cost shifting to local government.
 - Amalgamations and strategic alliances.
 - State shows leadership in co-operation between state and local government.
 - Other

- Refusal of State Rail to transfer disused rail corridors to local councils.
- Government services disappearing from rural towns.
- Mining and the lack of appropriate royalties back to local councils to maintain infrastructure, including roads.
- Failure of local health services to meet financial obligations to local providers (goods and services).
- Closure of hospitals and hospital departments.
- Mental health: no co-ordination of services.
- Government agencies guarding their own territory; reluctance to work with others.
- Delays in natural disaster funding along the Mid and North Coast.
- Economic development should be a core service of Local Government.
- DECC appears to be running the government.
- Undermining of local government by some government agencies.
- With the recent state government re-organisation Local Government should be under the Premier's Department.
- Councils need to work in groups (Country Mayors, regional groupings) and speak with one voice on matters which impact on them.
- Issues of climate change causing problems for smaller councils with increased costs being borne without any assistance.
- Government departments ignoring the advice of local organisations established by government to protect the interest of the local communities.
- Concern that Police are being hampered by government in carrying out their duties at local level.
- Improved Funding for weed control.
- 24 hour Police availability locally.
- Land being taken over for stage significant development additional to 70% mining and loss of land for agricultural use.
- Waste Levy

RECOMMENDATION IMPLICATIONS:

- **Environment:**

Many of the issues raised have implication for the environment especially those associated with water allocation and use.

- **Social:**

Many of the issues raised identified that social dislocation is occurring due to changes in services, especially those of transport and telecommunications, to rural areas.

- **Financial/economic:**

Many of the issues raised have a significant negative financial impact on rural shires.

- **Policy or Statutory:**

Nil

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. That the information be noted.
2. That Kempsey Shire Council continue to attend these forums when called to ensure that our voice is heard and our issues clearly articulated.
3. That Council continue to lobby for the services and resources which our community requires.
4. That Kempsey Shire Council continue to be involved in local government organisation which will support our voice being heard, in as many forums which are required, for us to obtain the resources which we require.

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