

## **Submission and Presentation to the Rural and Regional Committee**

### **Regional Centres of the Future:**

#### **Committee for Ballarat**

We facilitate economic and social development within Ballarat and its region to leave a notable and sustainable legacy for the entire community. We are not party-political and work closely with the three levels of government. Membership is drawn from a wide range of business and community leaders from Ballarat and across the region. We identify and work through projects that target priority issues in key areas. Projects are driven by expert task teams.

#### **Context**

- National population growth is focused largely on metropolitan locations which have increasingly compromised lifestyle and infrastructure issues.
- Regions receive focus in cases of (economic) significance, eg mining and energy, yet generally have important infrastructure gaps, eg poor broadband capacity, that reduces opportunity for input to national issues.
- Metro centres, near metro regional centres and peri-urban corridors are experiencing erratic and challenging, rather than planned growth. Their growth may not be 'balanced', eg having economic 'drivers' to foster community cohesion and wellbeing.
- Cities, regional locations and regions will experience 'rapid', challenging change as results of climate change, population growth, and changes in resource availability.

There is an opportunity for integrated national development with regional and metropolitan centres working more collaboratively and developing sustainable regional communities.

#### **Opportunities**

We support State planning for strategic *regional centres* to provide productive and sustainable communities as complementary alternatives to metro centres.

Planning for these centres should be internationally-referenced and collaborative between:

- Regional communities, and regional and metro communities;
- Local, State and national governments and policy makers;
- Quasi-government agencies providing services and infrastructure; and
- Public and private planners.

Regions and regional centres can alleviate or compensate climate change affects that are most notably produced in metropolitan locations.

These new opportunities warrant detailed investigation and early implementation. On present indications Regional Development Australia will not consider these issues. This is also an opportunity to present options to RDA and work collaboratively with them.

#### **Objectives**

- Facilitate Regional Centre initiatives to increase regional and State economic productivity and wellbeing, or eliminate barriers to productivity, and build community cohesion<sup>1</sup>;
- Identify and promote regional initiatives that reduce or eliminate climate change affects.

#### **Specific Aspects of Terms of Reference**

Population growth at present levels in metropolitan Melbourne is likely to lead to even more difficult working and living circumstances. Many Regional Centres are viable, attractive alternatives and should be the focus of initiatives. National and State population and sustainability policies may be required to set the upper limits of national growth in our present contexts. The determining factors would include at least the availability of water, food, clean environments, productive economies and liveability factors. Committee for Ballarat champions creation of the infrastructure necessary for **productive, sustainable economic activity to facilitate liveability**, including social cohesion.

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<sup>1</sup> Priority is on initiatives that create metropolitan-regional synergy and/or collaboration.

1 *On encouraging new and existing businesses, industries and government authorities to establish operations in regional centres:*

**Create proactive policies.** Much of what is required is in place in some locations. Regional Centres that will flourish include those offering a sense of community, social justice, connections with unspoilt natural environments, a vibrant economy facilitating community cohesion and social wellbeing, and effective leadership undertaking strategic planning. Each component is important and probably essential. Policies should champion the maintenance and refinement of each. Some State initiatives will foster a more widespread adoption. Examples include **locating central government functions to regional centres** (eg State Data Centre and Emergency Services in Ballarat), and where State is **supporting visionary partnerships** (eg University of Ballarat's Tech Park including IBM with the State of Victoria's support). **Proactively providing facilitative infrastructure** (examples below) will overcome the present policy 'stand-off'. We know what will stimulate economic activity yet policy presently requires the economic benefit to be demonstrated in a business case, usually with runs on the board, before infrastructure will be supported! This is hampering planning and initiatives, particularly in regional locations.

2 *On developing industrial land to support the economic base of regional centres;*

The State should **support comprehensive development of Ballarat region's Airport Precinct and Ararat Rural City's Sustainable Energy Park**. Each will provide important economic development sites and have Committee for Ballarat's support. We have a project related to the former, working in collaboration with City of Ballarat and the region. We call that project the Ballarat West Employment Zone to focus on the employment opportunities and social cohesion outcomes.

3 *On investing in infrastructure to encourage business and industry development in regional centres, and to support and encourage further population growth in regional centres;*

Water remains a highest priority issue for regional centres of the future, as it is for the nation. Committee for Ballarat also has water sustainability as a Project. **Comprehensive water recycling policies** are an important aspect of **a comprehensive review of water capture, distribution, use and reuse (recycling), and equitability in pricing**.

The absence of high bandwidth ICT connectivity in many regional locations continues to hamper regional centres' participation in the nation's normal business. The State must urge the Commonwealth to **implement an equitable, internationally benchmarked ICT system for all regional and rural locations** as a matter of urgency.

A **national rail freight system integrated with a comprehensive road freight network** – including C class regional roads that feed the arterial network and are not only radial to metropolitan centres – remain a major deficiency. In this respect a high priority in the Geelong-Ballarat-Bendigo corridor remains the **upgrade of the Midland Highway**, particularly between Ballarat and Geelong and **re-routed around Ballarat's CBD (the Western Arterial Road Link)** is a high regional priority. This will permit the interconnection of Midland, Western, Glenelg and Sunraysia Highways/Freeways other than in the centre of Ballarat's CBD! A major part of this priority is Committee for Ballarat's Western Arterial Road Link project, also joint with the City of Ballarat and regional shires.

While much of the other infrastructure is satisfactorily if not modestly provided in many regional centres that will qualify for recognition, there are notable other deficiencies that are lower priority for Committee's members at present.

4 *Promote strong social capital and high quality-of-life outcomes in regional centres*

**Adopt our proposals** to attract high-initiative individuals and businesses to centres. We note the priority to **foster emergent leaders in the region for the region**, and have developed the highly successful **Leadership Ballarat and Western Region** in collaboration with the State for this. We recommend its wider implementation in growing regions. We also recommend a **corporate social responsibility initiative** such as Committee for Ballarat has developed with Ballarat Cares, also with the State's support, for emergent regions and developments.

Doug Lloyd, CEO  
17<sup>th</sup> November 2008