

The Committee Manager
Standing Committee on Public Works
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Sir/ Madam

I am writing on behalf of a number of North Coast Area Assistance Scheme (AAS) Community Project Officers (please see the end of this document for a list of the names of these officers and the relevant Councils where they work). We are a group of professionals that undertake Social Planning, Community Development and the administration of Area Assistance Scheme Funding in the North Coast. We work on behalf of the Local Councils and the Department of Community Services respectively. We come together once a month for information exchange, planning and networking and are responding to your inquiry with this submission specifically in relation to the following terms of this enquiry:

2. Short and long term needs of coastal communities for ... human services infrastructure (such as hospitals, schools, aged care centres and sporting facilities);
3. Coordination of commonwealth, state and local government strategies to deliver sustainable coastal growth and supporting infrastructure;
5. Management of social ... considerations associated with infrastructure provision in coastal growth areas.

Our submission is based on:

Council Social Plans which are recently updated and developed after broad community consultation. Legislation and the Department of Local Government requires councils to produce and update these documents. We have provided URLs for each of the Social Plans below and a summary of the major inquiry-related concerns arising from these documents.

**Experience in the implementation of the Area Assistance Scheme (AAS) across the region.
The purpose of the AAS is to improve community infrastructure in local communities.**

"Community infrastructure is defined in the review report as the sum of the social structures and systems contributing to the effective functioning of a neighbourhood or other place-related community . This concept includes the idea of social infrastructure (buildings and services) as it is used in much planning practice, but is more comprehensive."

Summary of the major inquiry-related concerns arising from Social Plans

In response to your inquiry we make the following recommendations:

Outside of the Sydney Statistical Division (SD) the fastest growing areas in NSW were situated on the coast of NSW. In the year to 30 June 2001, the north coast SD of Richmond-Tweed experienced a population increase of 1.2% (ABS NSW Year Book). There is an ageing population

that may/will result in impacts for infrastructure, eg older people who don't drive will require more public transport options than currently exist.

Properly resourced and accessible community meeting places are essential to the well-being of the community. Unfortunately in the North Coast there is far too little planning underway to develop new facilities and many of the facilities that currently exist are in such a state of disrepair that there are legal implications for any group that continues to use it. In particular halls and community centres are crucial to community life, many are already in a state of disrepair with very little currently available for their upgrade.

Most Community-based/ Not-for-profit organisations in the North Coast already face major infrastructure challenges for their premises. Many of these community groups provide vital and successful services that reduce crime, increase access to technology, service Aboriginal people, the Aged, Youth and Children. Many of these organisations (for example CTC's and Neighbourhood Centres) are placed in a situation where they are forced to seriously consider closing because their building does not meet Standards set by government (including OH&S and building code requirements) or the costs for rent cannot be met by the organisation - yet there is no money available to upgrade the facilities to the necessary level or to pay the rental costs of more appropriate buildings.

People need to get access to services in their local community. The ongoing centralisation of both government and business has resulted in loss of access for the most vulnerable groups in community. Many of these community members have issues that need face-to-face contact, they are not able or willing to utilise technologies that have been put in place to replace face-to-face services. This increases their social isolation. We need to be expanding villages and creating work within villages.

Funding offered by State and Federal government departments to non-government organisations rarely takes into consideration the infrastructure costs that must be met to put a program into effect. Usually the community or local council is then placed in the position where it is required to cover these costs (rentals costs, for example are often quite high) - which often then results in substandard or minimum standard infrastructure for the project.

Public Transport is in crisis already in the North Coast, public transport is currently not being utilised by the community because operators are not subsidised in the same way as city services. This, then, results in fewer options for public transport, more people utilising private vehicles which in turn reduces the viability of existing services. All of this ultimately leads to traffic congestion, parking problems and increasing social isolation of persons who do not have private vehicles at their disposal (for example many young people are unable to get to Higher Education and places of employment).

There is a severe shortage of affordable housing options for people, particularly in coastal areas. Planning guidelines need to be improved to encourage developers to create more affordable and aged housing options. Failure to do so is already resulting in high levels of pressure on emergency housing and increased risks of homelessness.

We need more and better footpaths/ bikeways. Very few people in the North Coast have access to footpaths and walkways. Even fewer people have access to ones that are appropriate for scooters, bikes, prams etc. Passive recreation activities, such as this, need upgrading rapidly as the population ages and as obesity increases.

There is a severe shortage of appropriate playgrounds in the North Coast. Many playgrounds no longer meet Australian standards and are/ should be removed. However, the need for appropriate playgrounds (ones that are planned to reduce crime, encourage families and provide opportunities for recreation for elderly people for example) are in more demand than ever.

Higher rates of unemployment and greater numbers of pensioners mean that any strategy to improve infrastructure on a "community/ user pays" model will inevitably fail.

Critical Social Issues in the North Coast and their relevance to this inquiry

We would like the inquiry to be aware of an Area Assistance Scheme Project, currently underway under the auspice of the Northern Rivers Social Development Council. It is a ten month project focusing on prioritising working through the top five social/ community issues that were identified through a six month consultation process a few years ago. Five top critical issues are:

1. Housing/Accommodation
2. Community Based management
3. Transport
4. Young people
5. Inter-related issues that affect families, viz., mental health, domestic violence and alcohol and other drugs.

Attached is further information about this project, its background and consultation methods. However the comment must be made that many of the issues for these groups are intrinsically bound with or caused by lack of appropriate infrastructure (for example limited youth "space" such as skate parks, limited signage for transport, limited affordable housing options and limited appropriate community facilities to service these needs.

Sincerely,



Joanne Petrovic
Community Projects Officer
Richmond Valley Council
joanne.petrovic@richmondvalley.nsw.gov.au
(02) 666 00225

Appendix A: A list of Social Plans (and relevant URLs) that this submission is based on:

Ballina Shire Council, Roberto Kenk (Community Projects Officer)

Ballina Social Plan 2004

http://www.ballinacouncil.com/cmst/ballina002/view_doc.asp?id=90&cat=39

Bellingen Shire Council, Josephine Robinson, (Community Project Officer)

Bellingen Social Plan 2004

http://www.bellingen.nsw.gov.au/files/1260/File/Social_Plan_04.pdf

Byron Shire Council, Robyn Masters (Community Projects Officer)

Byron Social Plan 2004

http://www.byron.nsw.gov.au/pdfs/social/Social_Plan_2004_2009.pdf

Clarence Valley Social Plan, Tim Sherman (Community Projects Officer)

Hastings Council, Maya Spannari (Community Projects Officer)

Kyogle Shire Council, Margo Rutledge (Community Projects Officer)

Kyogle Social Plan 2004

<http://www.kempsey.nsw.gov.au/council%20documents.htm>

Lismore City Council, Trish Shantz (Community Project Officer)

Lismore City Council Social Plan

http://www.lismore.nsw.gov.au/content/uploads/social_community_plan_web.pdf

Nambucca Council, Coral Hutchinson (Community Projects Officer)

Nambucca Social Plan

<http://www.nambucca.nsw.gov.au/report/Social%20Plan.pdf>

Richmond Valley Council, Joanne Petrovic (Community Project Officer)

Richmond Valley Social Plan

http://www.richmondvalley.nsw.gov.au/cmst/rvc003/view_doc.asp?id=621&cat=62

Tweed Shire Council, Jenni Funari (Community Development and Project Officer)

Tweed Social Plan

<http://www.tweed.nsw.gov.au/stpuweb/index.htm?socialplan.htm>