



**MID NORTH COAST (NSW)  
AREA CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE INC**

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The Secretary,  
Standing Committee on Infrastructure, Transport,  
Regional Development and Local Government,  
House of Representatives,  
Parliament House,  
CANBERRA. ACT. 2600.

Dear Mr. Crawford,

We thank you for your invitation to provide a submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government for the Inquiry into a new regional development funding program.

The Mid North Coast Area Consultative Committee represents a broad cross-section of the community, both by location and community involvement. We have membership from each of our eight Local Government areas, with Members having skills and experience in Councils, economic development, youth, environment, the arts, unions, business, agriculture, health, not for profit sector, education, transport and Indigenous issues.

We have sought the opinion of over 90 of our regional stakeholders to submit a truly regional response to the Inquiry. These stakeholders are from Local and State government, economic development and community groups, previous grant applicants – both successful and unsuccessful, tourism managers, arts coordinators, educational and employment agencies. It was astonishing that such a diverse group had such similar beliefs in the way regional programs should operate.

Our community believes the growth of regional Australia is and will continue to be, hampered by the restrictive funding applied via the traditional methodology of administering funds to local communities.

Currently there is no true focus on regional Australia or the potential development of this part of our economy. A “warm expansive concept of regional Australia” exists for government at both State and Federal level. The continual focus on urban areas and major cities around Australia will limit our diversity and economic base due to a lack of government expenditure in true future growth in regional Australia. The challenges are to ask for and respond to community requirements in real terms of financial investment and takes resolve and commitment by government.

There are cheaper or more efficient options for growth than the continued expansion of major centres such as our capital cities. Regional and rural Australia needs support to develop and support its current and future population. With the rapid arrival of the baby boomer retirement point of some 1.2-1.5 million people potentially exiting major cities within the next 5 years, major challenges to regional centres will and are occurring. This will be especially apparent on the mid, north and south coasts of NSW. These are proven key destination points for exiting city-based baby boomers.

There are definite links to semi-retirement and better health prospects for retiring individuals who want to scale back to part-time or less “hectic” life styles – which are highly likely to be based in regional Australia. Longer life expectancies will also add to these phenomena. This will be more likely when lessons learnt from cities are hopefully applied to regional centres. Tree and sea changers and down shifters – whatever you prefer to call them – they are all real people exiting major cities and often moving to regional areas. We have to support the financial development of these areas until they reach a stage of development that is basically self supporting - probably a population of 60,000 in a local government area.

There is a need for business and community representation that looks at and focuses on future growth and development that is not tied to a bureaucratic process but is directly linked into growth and development. By reporting to, but not being tied to, a process of delivery of services, true vision and critical thinking can occur. Strategic focus by community members combined with on-ground action and outcomes is critical and healthy for maintaining interest in the democratic process by a result of becoming involved for *“improvement of their community.”*

Successful funding programs for the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government have to be tied to community expectations, future visions, and population increases. There is a need to encourage the growth of balanced communities covering a broad range of socio-economic groups including ethnic diversity and diversity of all age groups.

We can only hope that the voice of our community will be heard.

Yours sincerely,

Don Phillips  
Chairman  
Mid North Coast (NSW) Area Consultative Committee  
(Also Chairman of the Interim Board, Regional Development Australia)