

Eurobodalla Greens

Submission to NSW Standing committee on public works:

“Inquiry into Infrastructure Provision in Coastal Growth Areas”

1. Key coastal growth and urban consolidation trends in NSW

Parts of Eurobodalla shire are among the fastest population growth areas in NSW. Many retirees are attracted to the region because of its great and diverse natural beauty and central location only one and a half hours to Canberra, Nowra and a short flight to Sydney. Therefore aged care is an important infrastructure requirement for the Eurobodalla region.

Eurobodalla shire also has a growing population of young families and a small but significant Indigenous population both of which require special infrastructure needs, such as early childhood education, health and leisure facilities and employment opportunities.

The Shire has a diverse population of primary producers, Oyster farmers, beef and dairy producers market gardeners etc all of which rely to some degree on environmental inputs and transport infrastructure for there living.

Sadly Eurobodalla Shire also has some not insignificant social problems, high unemployment particularly youth unemployment, lack of affordable housing (even though up to 30% of rate paying properties are empty except for holiday periods). Appropriate infrastructure development can play a part in alleviating these problems If a whole of Government policy is developed and a strategy that is inclusive of the whole community and not just vested interest is applied.

Eurobodalla Shire is predominantly a low wage economy with many of those families who have an income also receiving social security benefits, any attempt to force down wages and conditions of employment would have a very negative impact on the local economy and only serve to exacerbate the social problems of the region.

Eurobodalla Shire has an influx of tourist and rate payers who are regular visitors to the region, this influx of people must be catered for in infrastructure planning and development even though they are not permanent residents. Tourism is an economic boon for the region but it must be recognised that it comes at a cost in terms of infrastructure provision and maintenance.

2. Short and long term needs of coastal communities for basic infrastructure

Eurobodalla Shire has a large land area and comparatively small population; although this is not unique (the same could be said for Australia in general) compared to most city areas the tax base or rates base is a lot smaller and local Government struggles at times to generate enough income to provide the infrastructure necessary for the Shire to compare favourably with larger population centres. As a result a lot of public land is sold of for what is in the view of Eurobodalla Greens inappropriate development that doesn't take into account the long term ramifications for the health of either the community or the local environment.

Short term infrastructure needs of Eurobodalla Shire residents

Water

One of the most pressing needs of the residents of the Shire is a long term solution to water shortages in the region. Eurobodalla Shire Council is currently planning another of stream dam in the region. The major problem with this initiative is that any new dam would rely on the current catchment for its water supply. The catchment is currently being logged on a regular basis by NSW State Forests. As a result of the subsequent increase in silt run off the Shire will have to spend a considerable amount of much needed funds on a filtration system to remove silt that wouldn't be there except for logging in the catchment. Regrowth forest consumes more water in its biological processes resulting in less run off collectable for human consumption. A classic case of what neo- classical economists would describe as externalities. A solution that increases the size of the catchment is a more appropriate long term strategy. In the view of the Eurobodalla Greens a better solution would be to encourage retro refitting of water tanks and appropriate grey water re-use systems coupled with an education campaign designed to discourage water misuse. ESC currently has such a program in place in the form of a rebate which is reviewed on an annual basis.

An expanded scheme with State and Federal Government support would provide an opportunity to provide employment opportunities for local Concreters, Plumbers, and Electricians etc. This scheme could be used in the same manner as a labour market program to provide hands on employment experience to the unemployed, both youth and long term adult. A good place to start would be public buildings Schools Hospitals etc.

In view of the fact that the building industry in the region is markedly slowing this program would be well received at all levels of the community, especially if an inclusive strategy is applied.

Hospitals

Another infrastructure problem that needs urgent attention is that of the situation with the regions hospitals. Although this is a somewhat vexed political problem Eurobodalla Greens is convinced that with community participation consensus can be reached and another opportunity to provide sustainable employment in the region can be realised.

Public Transport

There is a lot of very credible evidence that suggests that global oil production has already peaked or will peak in the near future, effectively what this means is that the human race has used half of the available supply of oil. There is a very real possibility that inflation due to demand and supply problems in the energy sector of the economy will have a negative impact on the economy as a whole. Decreasing our consumption of oil across all sectors of the economy would be a very prudent thing to do. Unfortunately this realisation has not been recognised by government at any level and as a result no adjustment in public policy settings has so far taken place. Within the Eurobodalla Shire oil consumption could be significantly reduced through better public transport policy as is the case in all regions of Australia especially capital cities. In any case public transport in the Eurobodalla Shire is inadequate for the needs

of the community and urgent attention must be paid to what is a fundamental infrastructure requirement in any society. Encouraging the use of public transport would have the added benefit of decreasing road use and subsequently road maintenance costs.

Princes Highway

Given the fact that the railway line ends in Bombaderry, the economy of the whole south coast of NSW relies on the Princes Highway as its major transport artery. In the short term the Princes Highway needs urgent attention and the current situation whereby the State and Federal Governments bicker over who is responsible for the cost of maintaining it is unacceptable. The long term cost to the economy and community are currently being ignored or understated.

Long term infrastructure needs of Eurobodalla Shire residents

Transport

In the long term the transport needs of the south coast of NSW are the same anywhere south of Bombaderry. Any long term strategy should include the continuation of the rail line south, perhaps as an additional loop of the mooted Melbourne- Sydney line or down the coast to Eden and then back up the escarpment to Bombala as planned by Ben Boyd many years ago. The latter option would tie in well with an expansion of the port facilities at Eden. As stated earlier Transport cost are likely to rise as a result of oil supply and demand problems on a global scale, rail and sea transport are much more energy efficient per tonne of cargo than road transport at current fuel cost so it is logical to conclude that as road transport cost increases as a result of higher oil prices rail and sea transport will become more attractive. As will public transport over private motor vehicle ownership.

Infrastructure development planning of this nature should commence immediately, the longer governments' dither the more expensive construction cost will be since oil is the energy source most necessary for projects of this nature and magnitude.

Sewerage Infrastructure

Australia is the only developed nation on earth that still has ocean out falls to deal with sewerage wastes even though sewerage treatment technology exists to completely recycle human effluent into water clean enough for most house hold uses and topsoil (technology developed here in Australia). A national strategy to convert sewerage treatment systems to more modern technologies, implemented on a long term basis would create thousands of jobs encourage innovation and help preserve precious natural resources for future generations. Some treatment systems are still in the experimental stage and Government at all levels should encourage there development.

Here in the Eurobodalla sewerage wastes treated with modern technology could be used in local agriculture, landscaping etc. In short the application of the most modern technologies can create long term employment and help to decrease our environmental foot print a win win situation for the community and the environment.

Agriculture-Aquaculture

Local primary producers are currently predominantly mono-culturalist in their approach to farming. There is certainly an opportunity to encourage more diversity in this sector of the local economy. The benefits would be broad ranging, consider for instance the establishment of an experimental fish farm somewhere in the Eurobodalla Shire or perhaps located so as to involve participants from a wider area. Currently no local Oyster grower or even group of Oyster growers would be able to afford the Environmental Impact Statement let alone start up cost of fish pens etc. With the help of Local, State and Federal Government agencies and a contribution from local business a small experimental concern could be established with out much fuss. Considering the fact that Australia imports more than \$500 million dollars worth of fish and seafood every year the potential benefit to both the local and national economies is significant to say the least. Not to mention the long term benefit of taking the pressure of wild fish stocks, giving them room to recover from many years of over exploitation.

Local beef and dairy producers could similarly be encouraged to diversify; currently there is no local commercial free range egg or market gardening done in the Bateman's Bay area. Eurobodalla Greens is highly confident those local farmers given a little practical help, be it courses in market gardening for instance, would be inclined to give diversification a go. A simple task for State and Federal Departments of Agriculture to organise and fund.

This kind of education should be recognised as infrastructure and planned and budgeted for.

If local farmers can be helped to find ways to make a decent living of their land then the agricultural flavour and feel of the rural environment can be protected from urbanisation and suburban sprawl. Produce consumed locally keeps wealth in the local economy, creates local sustainable employment and has a positive follow on affect in terms of infrastructure maintenance, the less heavy traffic on the Princes Highway the less damage done.

Aged Care

By the year 2011 25% of Australians will be retirement age. Given that the Eurobodalla is a retirement haven so to speak then it follows that aged care facilities will before long be stretched, especially when consideration is given to the fact Australians are living longer lives. More consideration needs to be given to ways of helping families remain together in their homes. Helping people cope with looking after an elderly parent or relative should be a high priority for all levels of government now. More often than not this falls on the local health system via Community health as does, mental health, substance abuse, suicide prevention etc. Funding for the good work done at the coal face by community health workers needs to be significantly increased now before the system becomes too stressed to cope.

Funding for this kind of infrastructure should be recognised as a means of creating employment rather than as a budgetary black hole.

Childcare

The Eurobodalla Greens believe the most important job in society is that of parenting. In modern industrial society parents come under a lot of different pressures. Balancing work commitments, when both parents find it necessary to work just to make ends meet and parental responsibilities can for some become a monstrous task. Families need more from Government than a fortnightly payment and a pat on the back. Child care facilities and early childhood education are as important for healthy individual families as they are for society in general. Adequately funded family day care and community child care centres are necessary infrastructure in modern industrial economies and should be recognised as such and supported by both Governments and the business community which draws so much indirect benefit from there continued existence. Child care and early childhood education are valuable employment opportunities and should be recognised as such.

Affordable Housing/ High Unemployment

Eurobodalla Shire has a severe shortage of affordable housing, as mentioned earlier the Shire is predominantly a low income economy. Those residents lucky enough to have purchased their own home before the real estate boom have benefited greatly while those caught in the rental market have seen rents increase dramatically with little or no increase in wages except those won through national wage cases. The same can be said for the long term unemployed, many families struggle to make ends meet and rent is a large impost on the family budget.

These problems can be tackled together with a little forethought and some assistance from Government and even perhaps local business. A labour market program designed to get the long term unemployed hands on experience through participating in the construction of what would eventually become there own home would give the people involved a sense of owner ship in not only the home but the process itself.

A program such as this would create employment in the building industry, construct affordable housing and help get the long term unemployed foundation skills, increasing their ability to find work and participate in the community and economy.

Power Generation

It is inevitable that Australia will have to ratify the Kyoto protocol or some other international treaty on climate change. Australians are among the worst greenhouse polluters on the planet along with Americans. Climate change is real and for Australia to decrease our greenhouse gas emissions we will have to radically re-think our energy consumption and generation patterns.

It is unlikely that any single generation system will be able to provide us with a magic bullet with which to combat greenhouse emissions and the resultant climate change. Solar power certainly has the capacity to contribute to a significant reduction in Greenhouse emissions, however for solar to be economically viable we must first redesign the building codes, specifically in relation to subdivisions and how buildings connect to the grid.

Currently the technologies exist that allow for any building to be powered by solar panels, done on a subdivision wide scale it is possible too decrease the cost of solar power generation due to economies of scale.

It should be stated that the construction of solar panels requires energy input from fossil fuels the cost of producing solar panels and associated infrastructure will increase with any increase in oil cost associated with supply and demand constraints. The production of alternative energy infrastructure would create long term sustainable employment, encourage innovation in design of energy generation and delivery systems and cut Greenhouse gas emissions. All that is needed is a whole of Government approach and where necessary common sense market interventions. It would be a profound change for a development corporation or company to lead the way on energy production and delivery reform but with some encouragement at all levels of Government it is not beyond the confines of reality.

All alternative energy generation systems such as wind, wave and tidal should be encouraged through market interventions at all levels of Government in a cooperative manner.

Schools

In coastal growth areas such as the Eurobodalla Shire education facilities in general need better funding arrangements in order for the infrastructure to be maintained and expanded. A well educated community can better adjust to change and recognise the value of participation in the community, economy and ecology of coastal centres.

Education infrastructure should not be limited to buildings and sporting facilities but also include well stocked libraries, computers, software and musical instruments etc. Children need stimulation to learn and in the information age learning is everything. At the State and Federal levels of Government education infrastructure should be a higher agenda item than tax cuts.

Sporting Facilities

Good health and exercise go hand in glove, money spent on sporting infrastructure and campaigns to encourage participation in sport is money saved on health costs in future. Participation in sport also encourages a sense community.

In coastal regions more emphasis should be applied to encouraging parents to have their children taught to swim, the cost far outweighed by the benefits.

3. *Coordination of Commonwealth, State and Local Government Strategies*

The elimination of duplication in the planning and construction of infrastructure increases the funds available for a greater variety of projects. Inclusive policies that encourage community participation would help eliminate collusive practices that see funds diverted to the projects of various groups with vested interests in particular sectors of the community or economy and into projects that are in the best long term interests of coastal communities and their supporting environments.

A series of public forums designed to engage the residents of coastal communities where people with expertise in various infrastructure sectors, sewerage treatment systems, public health service delivery, environmental impact etc can answer questions or explain problems directly with residents would go along way to de-politicising the decision making process. Coastal communities could then claim ownership of the processes involved in infrastructure planning and development.

4. Best Practice Methods of Management, Planning and Provision of Infrastructure

Best practice methods of management that are not inclusive, transparent and accountable are only pretence.

Prioritising infrastructure provision with a view to decreasing the ecological footprint of coastal communities has a positive follow on effect for many years. Many coastal communities have a neighbouring rural hinterland that is affected by development in the coastal zone. Down wind desertification and water supply are just one of many natural phenomena that must be taken into account early in the planning process so as to avoid management problems later. Water supply in the Eurobodalla Shire is an example of this.

Provision and management of infrastructure without an environmental best practice model will only create costly re-development problems in the future. Development of coastal zones without long term infrastructure planning and investment will surely result in environmental degradation. Without consideration for environmental impacts of coastal communities we will destroy the very thing that influenced our decision to settle in the region, our local natural heritage.

Development of an environmental best practice model that recognises the role of the environment as the foundation of life rather than as an externality to the economy is essential if planning, management and provision of infrastructure are to be successful and in the long term interest of coastal communities, economies and environments.

5. Management of Social, Environmental and Economic considerations

Social implications of infrastructure provision should be managed in an inclusive manner, behind the scenes decision making leads to suspicion. Transparency of process leads to confidence in not only the process itself but also the decisions arrived at. Accountability to the community should not be at the ballot box only.

Management of environmental considerations must not be done in a manner which is geared towards getting around the reality of the potential damage to coastal environs. Doing it on the cheap or in a manner that allows vested interest to make a fast buck out of infrastructure provision at the long term expense of the coastal environment is not in the best interests of coastal communities.

Economic considerations should not be allowed to over ride the long term health of the local community or environment. Future generations of residents of coastal communities should not be left with a degraded environment and subsequent loss of quality of life, nor should they foot the bill for planning and management mistakes made now. The only way to ensure this is through a management strategy that is inclusive, transparent and accountable.