

Chair: Cr Ken Keith
Secretary: Mr Alan McCormack
Parkes Shire Council
PO Box 337
PARKES NSW 2870

Tel: (02) 6861 2333
Fax: (02) 6862 3946
Email: council@parkes.nsw.gov.au

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

Dear Sir

INQUIRY INTO THE JOINT USE AND CO-LOCATION OF PUBLIC BUILDINGS

The Central West Organisation of Councils (CENTROC) submits these comments for consideration by the Standing Committee:

Perception

A perception exists in most communities that public buildings cannot be shared. However, this view is changing.

It has been recognised that there would be substantial benefits if communities could be holistically viewed. For example, gymnasiums and indoor facilities are often regarded as beyond the scope of many Councils, and indeed other institutions such as schools and PCYC clubs. If all these parties could unite, the chances of attaining such a facility are improved.

At this point we do not have a mindset which promotes this.

The Good Things

There are examples of good cooperative efforts. In relation to schools, after hours use seems to come down to individual approaches. Some schools seem quite unconcerned about after hours use. Others, such as those reported from a member Council of CENTROC in the case of after school care, do not embrace the concept. Local Government, however, does see the areas of cooperation are increasing.

A barrier which is being brought down is the public liability insurance situation. These claims, which have cost communities dearly, are now coming under control.

Local Government Role

Local Government, at this point in time, is greatly concerned about what is called 'Unfunded Mandates'. This is the undertaking of activities which would normally be the province of other levels of Government.

For years Local Government has provided swimming pools, ovals, tennis and basketball courts, showgrounds etc which are available to a myriad of users, including Government instrumentalities.

Whilst capital funding from the Governments may be readily forthcoming, it is the years of maintenance that are a burden on communities. For example the five swimming pools in Parkes Shire now run at a total loss exceeding \$250,000.00

Some Suggestions

- 1 That an audit of public buildings in each community be undertaken. For example, hospitals may now have video conferencing and the wider community may have no knowledge or access to this. Hence an important community asset is not fully utilised.
- 2 Local Committees be established to consider opening up use of the various facilities. The Committee might comprise a representation of the local Council, schools, hospitals, RTA etc. Perhaps this suggestion could be trialled somewhere?
- 3 Head offices of the various Government departments be asked to adopt common policies on more open use of their facilities.
- 4 Trusts which administer local facilities eg halls be investigated to ascertain if they are active and encouraging usage.
- 5 That the State Government considers the maintenance question. (Parkes Shire Council will not seriously consider upgrading its pools because of its current maintenance liability.)

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Yours sincerely

Alan McCormack
SECRETARY

18 August 2004