

**Submission  
No 8**

## **TECHNOLOGY AND THE AGRICULTURE AND MINING SECTORS**

**Organisation:** Narromine Shire Council

**Date Received:** 3 February 2022

Dear Committee,

As a Mayor of over five years experience and living in an area currently experiencing unprecedented growth I welcome the opportunity to bring to your attention my perspective on the limitations surrounding development due to both Technology and legislation.

Narromine Shire lies in the geographical heart of NSW. It is perfectly located to take advantage of a range of initiatives that require a strategic location. We have connectivity to the Newell Highway, the Mitchell Highway, the NSW State Rail network and the coming Inland Rail project. Located just 430 kms west of Sydney and 35 kms from Dubbo , we have , above all an abundance of water and reasonably priced land.

We have access to the Narromine or Lower Macquarie Aquifer that can supply significant water for many pursuits. The limiting factor in the most prospective of these, feedlots , is the process forced upon proponents in NSW. The legislation is cumbersome, over reaching and cost prohibitive compared to Queensland where the industry flourishes. It is also unchanged from 2006. The Commissioner for Agriculture, Darryl Quinlivan , in a report to the former Minister for Agriculture made the point that NSW is deemed to be an unfriendly environment for intensive agriculture. To establish a 50,000 head feedlot in NSW will cost proponents \$150,000 and take up to 24 months with absolutely no guarantee of success. In Qld the exact same outcome can be achieved by spending \$20-30,000, take 4-6 months and it is rare to have the project knocked back. Narromine has some of the most suitable land available for feedlots but no takers due to this restrictive legislation and uncertainty.

Both the previous Minister and the current one have been made aware of these circumstances with no action under way.

The other legislation that is curtailing development , investment and job creation across all of rural NSW is the devastating Bio Diversity Offset Scheme.

I will list some examples of how this poorly thought out legislation is impacting rural and regional areas in the worst possible manner. Narromine Shire, my shire has experienced this act on three occasions that have shown just how impacting the Act is. We have had a new gravel quarry that has been hit with a Bio Diversity bill of over \$1,000,000. On the other side of the Macquarie river we have another quarry that will also be a major supplier to Inland rail . This major infrastructure project, Inland rail , will use in the vicinity of 12-16 million tonnes of gravel from local quarries. The second quarry has just been given a \$1.3 million bio diversity offset bill. This is to compensate for the 5.7 hectares of light pine that needs to be cleared and is in abundance across our shire.

The stupidity of all this is that now this quarry has been limited in it's further development , much of it's proposed production will need to be shifted to the south of the river. This will add over 50,000 heavy vehicle movements through the streets of Narromine to make up the shortfall. The bulk of the gravel on Inland Rail will be used on the northern side of the river and hence the loss of amenity, environmental destruction due to these truck movements and the general disruption occurring due to this very poor legislation. It is not just poor but discriminatory as it targets rural and regional areas. The Sydney basin has been developed over the past 200 years with no imposts such as this and now the cost burden for the environment and bio diversity is being thrown back to rural and regional areas.

A major grain receival depot at Nevertire, 100 kms NW of Dubbo hoped to establish a new 30,000 tonne bunker on the paddock next door to the existing site only to be assessed as in

need of paying over \$1 million in bio diversity offset costs. This is in a paddock. It is not a pristine rain forest or even Lane Cove National Park. It is a bare paddock. There cost is exorbitant , disproportionate and discriminatory against a regional operator wishing to invest development dollars and creat regional jobs.

Bourke Shire Council developed a number of 6 and 12 hectare commercial bocks to generate interest in development and job creation in an area of 9.5% unemployment , much of it indigenous. The blocks were made available at the attractive price of \$48,000. DPIE assessed the Bio Diversity offset costs at \$480,000 per block. No development occurred , no investment in a rural town and the unemployed remain so. It is an insidious tax that simply puts a halt to regional development and administered by an uncaring city based bureaucracy.

There are many more examples that I can quote but the point is made. This tax has to be amended to allow the development of Regional NSW when we are facing the best opportunities of a life time. It is unforgivable to think that the Captains of free enterprise would impose such a stultifying and damaging piece of legislation on Regional and Rural NSW.

The lack of technology and digital connectivity across the state is also limiting the development of vast areas of NSW. Only 20% of farmers across the state agree they have satisfactory digital connectivity. Whilst largely a Federal responsibility it is incumbent upon government at all levels to ensure the rollout of this technology in the shortest possible time. Narromine Shire recently committed \$150k to help expedite this rollout only to witness the excruciating speed at which government operates and the delays that are the only continuing theme. This leaves farmers and rural dwellers unable to conduct business banking, unable to pay staff via a computer and with the very ordinary level of mobile coverage adding to the lack of rural infrastructure provided by government. It is noted that for every city based person the investment by government is \$12,000 and in rural areas that capital investment is only \$2500.

The lack of basic health care , of decent transport links in rural areas and a reasonable communications network are also impeding the development of the rural areas. Much of this is obvious to the those of us who chose to live in the bush where life expectancy is 8 years less that in major urban areas. It is long past the time that governments of all hues started to rectify this discriminatory behaviour and started treating rural and regional people equally.

Craig Davies

**Regards**

**Craig Davies**

Mayor

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