

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE TO COONAMBLE SHIRE COUNCIL

Responses provided:

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Has the council or any other body that you may be aware of conducted research into how much it has cost since the Coonamble community lost its air service? What was the dollar impact? Is it quantifiable?

Mr KEADY: Unquantifiable. It would be hard to quantify. Council has not conducted any research on the impacts. We are a small remote Council and do not have ready access to the skills or resources to undertake this kind of additional research.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Was there an impact?

Mr KEADY: Absolutely, and the impact is economic growth. It has stifled things as simple as teachers or professionals who would normally have come to town. If they can see that there is a good school, good health services and flights out of Coonamble then they are more likely to stay and bring their families. If they see that they are in a town where there is no regular air service then all of a sudden they are thinking about if they are critically ill and cannot get to Sydney or they cannot get to see their grandmother when she is crook in Eastwood or somewhere. We know anecdotally from employers who find it more difficult to attract or retain staff. This includes Council itself when recruiting engineers and other professionals. People prefer locations where they have the basic services and infrastructure, plus connectivity to the outside world through access to capital cities or the east coast via air.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Have you got any evidence to back those comments?

We have anecdotal examples, not quantitative research. Does this Committee investigate whether any research has been done in relation to the impact of loss of air/transport services on small remote communities in Australia or overseas?

Mr KEADY: Not on me. It is hard to quantify. It would take quite a few resources.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: We understand that that is certainly what has happened around the area. The relocation from Sydney, which is on the Government's agenda, seems to be conditional on good air services being available in these areas. It would be great to quantify that in a more formal way through survey or some situation?

Mr KEADY: It is certainly something that we should do. Council would be happy to conduct research if funding were available to assist, however, to assist government decision-making a regional research approach would be more beneficial. To assess impacts thoroughly, it would be necessary to survey people and businesses who are considering relocating to a regional area as well as surveying local users.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Thank you. It is critical to have comments on the anecdotal evidence of the impact of losing an air service in a regional community on the transcript.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: What is your ratepayer base?

Mr KEADY: Our population is 4,700.

Ms L. O'CONNOR: Our population is 4,700 but that would not be the rate base. We would have to check.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: If you could check and get that figure to us, that would be helpful.

Mr KEADY: Yes, I can get that figure.

Ratepayer base: There are almost 3,000 assessments and a total rate income of approximately \$4.3million.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: In your submission you refer to the daily freight services and their potential for use as passenger services. That has been raised previously with the inquiry. I am just wondering if you have pursued that issue at all.

Ms L. O'CONNOR: I have spoken to the country New South Wales manager at Toll Aviation. At the moment the freight run, which Coonamble is part of leaves Bankstown airport and goes via Mudgee to Coonamble, Walgett, Brewarrina and Bourke and then back again later in the day. The volume of freight after Mudgee is quite low. If it were not for the bank mail, which is predominantly paper, then there probably would not be much of a service. He did indicate that if there was a regular passenger service then they would probably utilise it.

CHAIR: What size aircraft does that come in on? Is it a two-seat aircraft?

Ms L. O'CONNOR: I will have to get back to you on that. I do have notes on that.

Toll Air have advised that they use a small Chieftan which has 2 seats & a cargo bay. (ie. rear seats have been removed.) for the Mudgee, Coonamble, Bourke run.