



New South Wales

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The Director  
Budget Estimates  
Parliament of New South Wales  
Macquarie St  
SYDNEY NSW 2000

28 OCT 2005

25 October 2005

Dear Sir/Madam

Please find attached responses to Questions taken on notice during my Budget Estimates Hearing of 16 September 2005

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Tony Kelly".

The Hon Tony Kelly MLC  
**Minister for Emergency Services**

**GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE NO. 3**  
**16 September 2005**

**Questions taken on notice during Emergency Services Hearing**

1. The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: Would I be correct in assuming that there may have been a garden shed erected in an officer's back yard? (following questions regarding staff investigated for credit card misuse)
2. The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Commissioner Koperberg, why was the region north business manager, Katie Clayton-Vincent, relieved from duty for six weeks? . . .and we would like to know whether or not she was suspended and what the circumstances surrounding the suspension might have been.
3. The Hon DUNCAN GAY: Commissioner Mullins, how many times in the past year has the Government radio network failed, requiring or forcing, as occurred last week, emergency services to use their mobile phones?
4. The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: What was the full cost to the RFS for representation, legal and other costs in attending the Canberra fires Coronial inquiry?

**Answers**

1. In relation to the alleged misuse of RFS credit cards there has been no evidence of a garden being purchased.
2. The officer did take leave for 10 days in August which was approved leave. The officer was not suspended from duty.
3. The last unplanned total Government Radio Network (GRN) outage was in March 2002. The NSW Fire Brigades has implemented a GRN disaster recovery capability that allows limited communications during outages. The Brigades has not found it necessary to make use of mobile phones during GRN outages.
4. The Coronial inquiry into the Canberra fires is ongoing, however, I am advised to date \$86,711.68 has been expended to support the RFS' co-operation with the inquiry to date.

*Tony Kelly*

TONY KELLY  
Minister for Emergency Services



New South Wales

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The Director  
Budget Estimates  
Parliament of New South Wales  
Macquarie St  
SYDNEY NSW 2000

04 NOV 2005

24 October 2005

Dear Sir/Madam

Please find attached responses to Questions taken on notice during my Budget Estimates Hearing of 16 September 2005 relating to the Lands and Rural affairs portfolios.

Yours sincerely

The Hon Tony Kelly MLC  
**Minister for Lands**  
**Minister for Rural Affairs**

## QUESTION ON NOTICE

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### Budget Estimates 2005

On 16 September 2005 the Hon Duncan Gay MLC and the Hon Richard Colless MLC asked the following questions at the Budget Estimates Committee hearing relating to the Lands and Rural Affairs portfolios. The Minister for Lands and Minister for Rural Affairs took the questions on notice and the following answers are provided in response.

**Question** – The Hon Duncan Gay to the Minister for Lands and Minister for Rural Affairs—

- (1) What was the cost of mailouts during the negotiations on enclosure permit rents and conversion costs? Specifically, what was the cost of mailouts that were additional to the normal mailout for billing purposes and how many of these occurred. Secondly, what is the cost of a normal mailout for billing purposes?

**Answer:**

The average costs associated with enclosure permit billing mail-outs is approximately \$56,000.

The additional mail-out costs as a result of the reforms to enclosure permits was approximately \$73,861, based on two additional mail-outs and a number of regional specific mail-outs required on account of properties changing hands.

It is anticipated that these additional costs will be recouped, or possible savings achieved, over the next two financial years as a result of:

- (i) the reduction in the number of permits through the automatic amalgamation of multiple permits, reducing the number of enclosure permits from 45,000 to 34,000;
- (ii) the overall reduction in the number of enclosure permits as a result of the Government's reforms encouraging the conversion of unnecessary crown roads to freehold; and
- (iii) the removal of the need to send annual mail-outs to enclosure permit holders for the next two financial years as a result of the decision to charge a one-off \$350 for enclosure permits cover the period up to the end of the 2006-07 financial year.

**Question** – The Hon Duncan Gay to the Minister for Lands and Minister for Rural Affairs—

- (2) For EPs that have been closed and purchased, what is the average purchase price?

**Answer:**

Enclosure Permit Road closures applied for since 1 July 2004 currently total 2728.  
The average purchase price of the Enclosure Permits approved for sale is \$11,626.00

**Question** – The Hon Rick Colless to the Minister for Lands and Minister for Rural Affairs—

- (3) How much did the Government receive from rents on Enclosure Permits prior to the mini budget announcements?

**Answer:**

EP rental revenue for 02/03 was \$2,718,653 and for 03/04 was \$2,521,383.

**Question** – The Hon Rick Colless to the Minister for Lands and Minister for Rural Affairs—

- (4) How much does the Government expect to collect from Enclosure Permit rents in 2005-06?

**Answer:**

Based on the new \$350 fee to cover the period from 1/7/2005 to 30/6/2007 and the current number of EP's (34089), the projected revenue per year would be \$3,977,050.

**Question** – The Hon Jon Jenkins to the Minister for Lands

- (5) Will the recent crown land reforms force local councils to make similar reforms?

**Answer:**

The recent Crown land reforms only apply to leases and licences held directly with the Department of Lands. Councils, as reserve trust managers, hold Crown land in trust, and are responsible for the day to day management of these reserves, including the setting of rents and other charges.

**Question** – The Hon Duncan Gay to the Minister for Lands and Minister for Rural Affairs—

- (6) What is the membership of the Regional Communities Consultative Council (RCCC)?

**Answer:**

The Regional Communities Consultative Council is made up of fifteen (15) rural community members. An independent Chair and Deputy Chair and thirteen (13) ordinary members nominated to represent the diversity of community interest in rural NSW.

| Interest area                    | Member                      | Nominated by                          |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Chair                            | Diana Gibbs<br>June Reefers | Independent                           |
| Deputy Chair                     | Lynda Summers<br>Table Top  | Independent                           |
| Health interests                 | Dr Jock Fletcher<br>Orange  | Representing Area Health Councils     |
| Aboriginal Communities interests | Iris White<br>Broulee       | Minister for Aboriginal Affairs       |
| Business & Industry interests    | Tim Sheed<br>Jerilderie     | Regional Development Advisory Council |

|                                    |                                 |  |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|--|
| Local Government interests         | Jenny Bonfield<br>Coffs Harbour | Local Government Association of<br>NSW and Shires Association of NSW         |
| Women's interest                   | Ruth Shanks<br>Dubbo            | NSW Country Women's Association  |
| Workers interests                  | Mick Madden<br>Orange           | Unions NSW   |
| Social Services interests          | Peter Quarmby<br>San Isidore    | Council of Social Services of NSW  |
| Farmers interests                  | John Ainsworth<br>Macksville    | NSW Farmers Association  |
| Education interests                | Lyall Wilkinson<br>West Wyalong | Federation of Parents & Citizens<br>Associations of NSW                      |
| Youth interests                    | Simon Davies<br>Denilquin       | Minister for Youth – past member of<br>the NSW Youth Advisory Council        |
| Religious communities<br>interests | Fr Tim Cahill<br>Wellington     | NSW Ecumenical Council   |
| Environmental interests            | Mike Schultz<br>Leeton          | Nature Conservation Council of NSW   |
| Ethnic Communities<br>interests    | Rashmere Bhatti<br>Woolgoolga   | Ethnic Communities Council of NSW<br>& the Community Relations<br>Commission |

**Question** – The Hon Rick Colless to the Minister for Lands and Minister for Rural Affairs—

(7) What are the last 6 issues that the RCCC provided advice on?

**Answer:**

**Skills shortage - the Social and Economic impact on rural areas**

The RCCC highlighted within their submission to the recent skills shortage inquiry that it is important to understand that communities are not only made up of paid workers, there are also many volunteers with remarkable skills contributing countless unpaid hours to a community.

A job loss in a rural area can often mean a loss of a community volunteer resource when people move elsewhere for employment. Although the socio-economic impact of skill shortages on communities in rural and regional areas will vary the impact it is felt by a whole community.

Often the inability to attract skilled staff is due to the lack of other services. A perceived lack of health services in a town can lead to other skilled professionals such as accountants and engineers declining employment opportunities in that town. This can have a compounding effect, leading to a wider loss of services, loss of income and inability to attract other services and residents to the community.

Some of the other issues raised were the significant delay in filling vacant high skilled positions. Poaching of locally trained staff by larger new industries or business and limited access to training for rural and regional students and workers.

One other major issue for rural workers has been the shifting of costs of up skilling or further training being passed from employers to employees since the abolition of the training guarantee levy.

## **Baradine, Gwabegar and Pilliga communities.**

In 2002 the RCCC met with a range of community members involved with the South Brigalow bioregional assessment. This was in response to community concerns about the inclusiveness of community in the processes.

In 2005 the same community members have raised their issues with the Council about the impact of the assessment decision, possible new industry opportunities and ways to ensure that all of the communities will benefit.

The loss of a number of timber mills within the region will shift the economic and skill base of the area and the communities want to ensure that they linked into any support, assistance and opportunities that might be available.

Through the Council's links to Government they are raising their issues with appropriate agencies and working through the Office of Rural Affairs to facilitate outcomes that the communities want. The Council is also linking the communities issues into appropriate programs, supports and funding opportunities within the Non Government sector.

With the wealth of information that each Council member has about their particular area of expertise it is often apparent that similar issues have been dealt with by other groups or communities. Sharing information, skills and knowledge is invaluable for communities and as the Council has a state-wide perspective they are well placed to provide this vital link for these communities.

This is a clear demonstration of the role that the RCCC plays within rural NSW linking community to community, the NGO sector and Government. The Council also uses this information to explore the broader implications for communities when there is a significant industry adjustment that changes the economic and social structure of a town.

## **Telecommunications.**

In 2005 the RCCC has advised the government on the exciting opportunities being developed by the Murray Regional Development Board through the CountryTell project in Albury which is predicted will have great benefits for the people of regional New South Wales.

This exciting project not only will provide alternative telecommunications and high speed broadband infrastructure for regional and remote New South Wales, the infrastructure will be community owned! The CountryTell governance model is all about enabling communities, increasing community capacity and growing local skills. It will empower local regional businesses to do business with the world.

Best of all, the CountryTell project will leverage off the significant investments already made by the government in its state-wide regional roll-out of high speed broadband to all our government assets in NSW, such as hospitals and schools, maximising the community benefits.

The CountryTell model enables communities to design a Broadband solution to fit their own social and economic development needs over the all important 'last-mile', from the government points of presence, to every home and business. The communities design it, they own it, they manage it and they have the capacity to manage their own destiny come the sale of Telstra.

This government is working closely with CountryTell to grow the model state-wide.

## **The selling off of geographic names by the au. Domain Administration Ltd (auDA).**

The Council was very concerned in June 2005 about the .au Domain Administration selling off of every town name across Australia. This allowed business to purchase any town name that ends in .net.au or .com.au. with no constraints on what can be posted on these sites. Misleading, inappropriate or damaging material could be linked to a community because it is posted on their town name site.

Communities are proud of their town name and want it protected from commercial exploitation. Many town names have historic links to local families, sporting and cultural history of the district.

A towns name on the internet should not be treated differently than if it was printed on a sign. Under section 61 of the Trademarks Act 1995 geographic names are protected from misuse in respect to trademarking. And, within the auDA constitution it states that the internet domain name system is a public asset. I will read you a section of the preamble:

*Taking the view that the Internet Domain Name System is a public asset, and that the .au ccTLD is under the sovereign control of the Commonwealth of Australia, auDA will administer the .au ccTLD for the benefit of the Australian community.*

The RCCC was rightly concerned that there can be no benefit to community by commercialising their heritage, their pride and their legacy 'that is their town name'.

## **Mental Health – Depression**

Even though the drought has eased in some areas across the state the RCCC is concerned about the increased numbers of people experiencing depression in rural areas. The levels of financial stress within farming families, rural businesses and communities will not decrease overnight because some areas have had rain.

There are a range of issues in relation to rural mental health services but the RCCC feel that equitable access should be the priority. A mental health worker should be available in every town. Though this is a significant cost the economic and social cost to a community and to a state through lost work time and increases in all other health service areas should be looked at.

It is recognised that there is a significant difficulty in recruiting and retaining the existing mental health staff in rural NSW and additional staff appointments may encounter the same difficulties. Alternative staffing options of up- skilling or multi- skilling existing local staff could provide part of an alternate option. There also needs to be a greater emphasis on supporting the workers within this field. In areas where there is a lone worker the support may be possible through a local community NGO group or individual in the town.

There is also recognition that many rural people who require mental health services will not walk in the door of the local mental health worker (if they had one) so alternate placement options need to be explored on a location by location basis. What will work in Bourke may not work in Delegate.

There also has to be a coordinated approach to providing services and supports between Government and the NGO sector. Many community based groups are providing support services and information yet they are not linked into the mainstream service providers.

Government must take the lead within this area, provide additional funding (equitably distributed to rural areas) to ensure equitable access to services, better coordination of services and supports and greater emphasis on supporting the workers.

The Council is working closely with the Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health to explore ways to address these issues.



## **Refugee settlement issues in rural communities**

There is a growing trend for humanitarian refugees to move to country areas across the state. Some communities have already experienced an increase of African refugees quite often within a short period of time.

The RCCC has spoken to a range of service providers and community members in the Coffs Harbour area in relation to their experiences, issues and concerns in relation to refugee settlement.

Issues that have been raised are mainly around coordination of the services for the refugees, misunderstanding about who or what agency or group provided particular services and service providers not being ready with the appropriate mechanisms to deliver to these new community members.

Service providers, NGO groups and communities need to be ready so that refugee settlement is a seamless process with all involved aware, coordinated and resourced to support these new community members.

Each town should undertake a process where they have a settlement interagency that is inclusive of all service providers and NGO support groups within the town. This group then can look at projected timelines of arrivals, housing requirements, education needs, health needs, language needs etc and ensure a more coordinated process is undertaken.

The RCCC is currently exploring and documenting the process, resources and links that will be required within a town to make it a settlement ready community.

Tony Kelly MLC  
**Minister for Lands**  
**Minister for Rural Affairs**