

**Submission
No 30**

**INQUIRY INTO ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
IN CENTRAL WESTERN NEW SOUTH WALES**

Organisation: Forbes Shire Council

Date received: 26/08/2011

26 August 2011

The Director
Standing Committee on State Development
Parliament House
Macquarie St
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Subject: Submission to the inquiry into economic and social development in Central Western New South Wales

Dear Sir/Madam

Forbes Shire Council welcomes this opportunity to make a submission to the Standing Committee on State Development's inquiry into economic and social development in Central Western NSW.

Forbes is situated in the heart of the Lachlan Valley, approximately 390km west of Sydney; our Local Government Area covers 4,717 sq/km and has a population of approximately 9,744 people. Forbes is ideally positioned on the Newell Highway with four rural villages located to the south and west of the shire. The town and district is rich in early history and boasts many unique features. Forbes LGA is predominately primary producing area with strong small business and light industrial sectors. Forbes is a member of Central NSW Councils (CENTROC).

Council provides the following response to the terms of reference criteria.

1. The provision of health, education and cultural facilities

Good health, education and cultural facilities are intrinsic components to a good quality of life in small regional towns. Council has been actively addressing the needs of these three key areas, with varying degrees of success.

1.1 Health

Forbes is serviced by one medical practice with five full time doctors, two part time doctors and one registrar on work placement. Incorporated within this facility is a standalone pathology service. The practice also provides regular medical treatment on-site at two aged care facilities; one a 91-place residential aged care facility with 30 high care and 61 low care beds and the other with 30 places.

Forbes District Hospital provides emergency, medical, surgical and maternity inpatient and outpatient services and renal dialysis. The Forbes Health Service also provides a range of community health services including outreach allied health services to surrounding communities. Forbes is serviced by air ambulance for emergency medical air evacuation to either Orange Base Hospital or Westmead Hospital and has a permanent helipad with 24 hour landing capabilities.

Forbes has one privately owned dental clinic with one dentist operating three rooms and a child dental clinic operated by NSW Health, which is open on a limited basis. Waiting lists for both clinics are a minimum of two months.

ABN 86 023 614 567

Administration Centre:

2 Court St Forbes NSW 2871

All mail to:

General Manager

PO Box 333

Forbes NSW 2871

General Enquiries:

T 02 68 502 300

F 02 68 502 399

Mayor and

General Manager:

T 02 68 502 304

F 02 68 502 399

Engineering Services:

T 02 68 502 333

F 02 68 502 398

Environmental Services:

T 02 68 502 344

F 02 68 502 398

Email & Web:

forbes@forbes.nsw.gov.au

www.forbes.nsw.gov.au

Provision of adequate healthcare is a major concern for Council; whilst provision of health care is not one of Council's key service areas, over the last eight years it has increasingly become involved with providing healthcare infrastructure and services to attract and retain health professionals. Examples include:

- i. Council has fully financed a purpose built medical centre to accommodate the medical practice and has been instrumental in developing the 'walk in-walk out' operating model, which addresses a major barrier to many rural practice where doctors do not wish to purchase a rural practice. Our model allows for a doctor to join the practice without a large financial investment.
- ii. Council has implemented a financial incentive policy to help newly recruited doctors and nurses with costs of relocation to Forbes. Since 2003, Council has provided financial assistance to the value of \$48,400 to eleven healthcare workers.
- iii. Council has committed \$11,000 over the next three financial years to Centroc's *Beyond the Range Health Workforce Attraction and Retention Project*; a collaborative marketing approach to attract and retain health workforce west of the Blue Mountains.
- iv. Council successfully gained funding to build two, two-bedroom residential units which are rented exclusively to work placement registrars at below market rental rate.
- v. Council has established the Jemalong Regional Education Centre, Forbes (JREC): a 26 bed short-term accommodation facility for use by visiting medical students to encourage practical work placement in Forbes and district. Council has partnered with University of Sydney's School of Rural Health and Charles Sturt University to promote Forbes as a practical placement destination. The intention is to give visiting students a taste of rural life and show that there are career opportunities available outside of the metropolitan centres. In addition Council is partnering with TAFE regarding the delivery of training, including a clinical nurse course, utilising the newly developed short term accommodation for students and teachers. This facility will benefit not only Forbes but outlying regions including Parkes, Condobolin, Grenfell, West Wyalong and Cowra.

Health - issues and factors

- i. Ratio of doctors/dentists to patients - anecdotal research shows there is a six week waiting list for non-urgent medical appointments.
- ii. High turnover of doctors - the medical practice engages registrars through training provider *Beyond Medical Education* for six-month blocks of work placements, which are required to become a qualified GP. Most registrars complete their required time in Forbes without really engaging in community life and then return, primarily, to their metropolitan base.
- iii. Retiring doctors - in the last 12 months two doctors have cut their hours to part time as they start to move into retirement. These doctors have not been replaced. Forbes is classified as an area of need.
- iv. Limited specialists – the hospital's maternity service is supported by two proceduralists who both do obstetrics (including caesareans) and anaesthetics. We also have a GP anaesthetist. The maternity service is available if any two of the specialists are in town; if they are not available,

patients must travel to Parkes or Orange to deliver. Council has resolved to meet the costs to recruit attract additional specialists to Forbes.

- v. Funding is required for facility upgrade at Forbes Hospitals. The refurbishment of the Forbes Hospital was a pre-election commitment given by the State Government.

Health - Opportunities

- i. State/Local government partnership in supporting the Beyond the Range project in attracting Health Workforce.
- ii. Exploring additional educational and health training uses for JREC, Forbes

1.2 Education

Forbes is well serviced by its educational facilities; it has strong preschool and school education services, but limited post school education opportunities.

Forbes has two high schools which both cater from years 7 to 12; Forbes High School is a public school with an enrolment of approximately 550 students, whilst Red Bend College is a Catholic independent, co-educational day and boarding school with approximately 716 enrolments, of which 151 are boarders. Both schools offer a range of academic and vocational courses.

Forbes LGA has five primary schools, three are located inside the town boundaries and one of which is a Catholic independent school. Forbes Public School, Forbes North Public School and St Laurence's Primary School have enrolments of 331, 260 and 256 respectively.

There are two village schools, both small, isolated rural schools surrounded by farmland. Corinella Public School is located approximately 40km south-west of Forbes, with 15 students from Year 1 to Year 6 in 2010. Bedgerabong Public School is located 32km west of Forbes; it caters for students from Kindergarten to Year 6. In the year 2011 Bedgerabong Public School has an enrolment of 38 children with two full time and one part time teacher. Both these schools are the focus for their communities, providing a meeting place when needed and are very actively supported by their Parent & Citizen Associations (P&C).

TAFE NSW Western Institute has a campus located in Forbes; Forbes College offers a range of certificate level courses in access and general education, agriculture, business, computing, welding, carpentry and joinery as well as a range of primary industries and natural resources offerings. The College currently has 700 enrolments.

Forbes has eight child-care and pre-school centres.

Education - issues and factors

- i. Decline in enrolments of village schools - Corinella Public School has seen its enrolments drop from 31 students in 2006, to 18 in 2008, to 15 in 2010. Bedgerabong Public School's enrolments have dropped from mid 40s in 2006 to 30 in 2008, however has increased to 38 in 2010. Population decline can most likely be attributed to the prolonged drought, which saw many families leave the land between 2001 and 2009.

- ii. Post school education - limited vocational training available at the Forbes TAFE campus resulting in students enrolling at the larger campus at Parkes or more commonly Orange, Dubbo and Bathurst campuses.
- iii. Insufficient apprenticeship training opportunities - a high rate of young people leave the area after high school searching for job opportunities elsewhere.

Education - opportunities

- i. Every school, and in particular the primary schools, is well supported by their very involved Parents & Citizens Association.
- ii. Develop relationships with universities and TAFE to relocate block teaching programs to Forbes.

1.3 Recreational and Cultural Facilities

Forbes is well serviced by both passive and active recreational and cultural activities, with many community sporting and special interest groups catering for a range of interests and people of all ages. The biggest problems faced in this area are the provision and on-going running of venue facilities and maintaining volunteers/committee members. Council is increasingly being called upon to financially contribute to assist these organisations in variety of ways including a reduction in land rates; rent relief on Council-owned facilities; funding infrastructure upgrades such as goal post and amenity blocks to provision of Council staff and/or equipment to help run activities.

Rich in history, Forbes has a strong focus on our colonial and gold-rush times heritage; Council has made a significant investment in marketing and promotion to develop this tourism stream.

Forbes has a strong annual program of festivals and events catering to a variety of cultural, hobby and sporting pursuits. Most of these festivals and events are presented by community groups or individuals. Funding for these pursuits is limited and Council is often called upon for financial and in-kind support. Recent examples include:

- Little Athletics Zone Championships Carnival
- Jazz Festival
- Hang-gliding Championships
- Kalari-Lachlan River Arts Festival
- Forbes Motorshow
- Forbes Art Society exhibitions
- Heritage Festival
- Forbes Eisteddfod
- Forbes Show
- Australia Day Festival

Council regularly receives feedback there is not enough "things to do" for children/teenagers; Council has made significant investment in its youth program. Council employs a part-time Youth and Community Coordinator whose primary role is to engage youth in afterschool and vacation care activities. Council also has a Youth Advisory Committee comprising young people and adults who undertake various projects. A recently completed project was the construction of a skatepark; Council, the Youth Committee and a local service organisation partnered to fundraise and construct this facility.

Often in a small town you have to make your own entertainment, a case in point is the Youth Committee's "movie night". Forbes lost its cinema in 2009 when it closed due to poor attendance numbers; the cinema has been sorely missed. To fill this gap, Council, via its Youth Committee recently purchased an inflatable, mobile, large format movie screen and projector for "movie nights" at Council's Youth Centre. The proceeds from movie night and miscellaneous hire of the screen will go towards future youth-orientated projects.

The Forbes Library is an important recreational facility, providing a sanctuary and learning space to many people in the community; the library also hosts one of the Federal Government's Seniors Internet Kiosks. Like most public libraries in the NSW, its state government funding has slowly been eroded over the years, placing more of the funding burden on Council. The limited funding received is not only insufficient to meet annual operating costs; there is no allowance for facility maintenance and upgrade. Consequently the facade of Council's library is in need of major capital works.

Recreational and Cultural Facilities - issues and factors

- i. Many of the sporting venues located in Forbes are designated Crown Public Reserves Trusts with Council as the trust manager, therefore Council is often called upon by the primary tenant when they need financial assistance. Recent examples of Council's significant financial contributions to sporting infrastructure over the last 12 months include:
 - the golf course - irrigation system, on-going mowing
 - the racecourse - upgrade of amenities blocks
 - the rugby league oval - new goal posts, allocation of grant funds for refurbishment to dressing sheds.
 - the soccer oval - new goal posts
 - the water ski area - new amenities blocks and bank stabilisation
- ii. There are limited spaces available for cultural/performance/art pursuits with the most suitable space being Council's Town Hall. The Hall is well patronised and Council is invariably asked to waive its hire charge; and
- iii. Limited access to funding for cultural infrastructure - particularly by non-profit community groups.

Factors restricting development

- i. On-going operational funding;
- ii. Increasing expectation the private sector will support cultural activities (very limited pool in regional areas);
- iii. National Broadband Network - cannot address the developing needs of the creative industries sector without high speed broadband; and
- iv. Fragmented cultural and arts funding and support.

Recreational and Cultural Facilities - opportunities

- i. Increased State Government funding for public libraries;
- ii. Working with community champions;
- iii. Increased funding for sporting and recreational facilities; develop water recreational facilities to take advantage of our lake and river systems for boating, water skiing and fishing pursuits;

- iv. Focus on tourism and small business support in cultural programming;
- v. "Main street" type programming that values heritage and culture in the town centre; and
- vi. Increase in small public events and activities so the town always looks alive and busy, which might encourage the passing-through highway traffic to stop, and stay.

2. The reasons for population decline or grow in different areas

Forbes is currently experiencing the "two speed economy"; Forbes is located within the employment catchment of three mine sites and benefits accordingly. It also has a strong building and construction sector, however its retail economy is suffering with many vacant shopfronts visible in the main street. Our agricultural sector is starting to rebuild after the nine year drought broke in 2010.

According to Australian Bureau of Statistics' population estimates from the 2006 census, population projections indicate population decline of 0.1 to 0.4% year of year from 2005 - 2008 and population growth of 0.5% for 2009.

The population decline in the mid to late 2000s can be attributed to the prolonged drought with many farming and farming-related businesses closing; anecdotal evidence indicates that whilst some people have moved off the land into town, more have migrated to the major towns in the region, the coast and to West Australia, to take advantage of the mining boom and increased job opportunities.

Reasons for decline or growth include:

- i. Ageing population seeking certainty of medical care and aged care facilities - based on ABS 2006 figures, Forbes population includes 37.2% in the 35-64 years range and 17.8% in the over 65 year range;
- ii. Outflow of young adults to Sydney and other major centres in search of more diverse education, employment and social opportunities;
- iii. The closing of the abattoirs;
- iv. The relatively lower growth in the region reflects the social trend that has seen a shift of people migrating to live in cities and coastal regions in comparison to inland areas;
- v. Enduring nine years of drought; and
- vi. Communities reaching "critical" drops in service levels for example in health and banking lead to out-migration

Factors restricting growth:

- i. Meeting the demand for public and private housing (owner-occupiers and rentals); there is shortage of good quality rental housing;
- ii. Water supply security across business, farming, mining and urban sectors - this cannot be underestimated, it is such an important

component of development. It is imperative this is recognised in the outcome of the Murray Darling Basin review which is presently underway;

- iii. Youth opportunities for education, skills development, employment and social development;
- iv. Skill shortages and retention of skilled people;
- v. Declining health services in smaller centres;
- vi. High demand for aged care services;
- vii. Recovery from drought;
- viii. National Broadband Network;
- ix. Lack of public transport services; and
- x. Energy supply stability and high cost.

Opportunities supporting future growth include:

- i. Land values and rents are lower than the metropolitan regions and many other parts of the country;
- ii. Lower cost of living;
- iii. Great lifestyle;
- iv. Good range of quality schools;
- v. Relocation of retiree - increase in provision of aged care facilities;
- vi. Diverse and resilient economy;
- vii. Central location readily accessible by road to Sydney and Canberra;
- viii. Strong road and rail connections - including two intermodal facilities. Airports in Orange and Parkes facilitating connections to Sydney and beyond;
- ix. Business friendly investment environment. All three levels of Government work together to support economic development;
- x. Employment opportunities supported by growth in mining, health, education sectors; and
- xi. Proactive Council keen to facilitate economic develop - Council has developed two industrial estates; and offers economic incentives to encourage new businesses to town.

3. The adequacy of transport and road infrastructure

Roads

Local Government is responsible for more than 80% of the nation's road network. Council has 1810 km of roads under its care and control, excluding the

286km of national highway and state and regional roads within the LGA under the control of the Roads & Traffic Authority. While Federal funds make an important contribution, local roads are predominantly funded by Council from its own revenue sources.

Much of the LGAs industry and prosperity relies on sound road infrastructure - the local roads bring the crops and livestock from the farm gate to the grain silos and the saleyards. The Newell Highway and the five state and regional roads then disperse our goods to the rest of the country. These same roads bring visitor dollars to town in the form of travellers and freight transports passing through. Roads are the lifeblood of our community.

Council is proactively managing its road network; it is currently constructing new road to allow B-Double access from the west to the Newell Highway, bypassing the built up areas of town.

Forbes has always had a good reputation for the quality of its local roads; however gradual decreases in funding makes it hard to maintain a satisfactory and safe standard. Exposure to road quality related risk claims is becoming an increasing issue faced by Council.

Like many other councils west of the Blue Mountains, Forbes is in favour of an upgrade of the Bells Line of Road to ensure a safe and swift link between the communities of Central NSW and Sydney, and beyond, for both road freight and personal use.

Rail

Forbes has no passenger rail service; there are two rail-bus links to service Melbourne, Brisbane and Sydney destinations.

Air

The Forbes Aerodrome lost its passenger transport route status in 2001 when Country Connections ceased its service. Council continues to maintain the aerodrome for private users, aero-based business (ie. crop spraying) and essential services including:

- *NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS) – aerial fire fighting*
The RFS use fixed wing aircraft for aerial water bombing during fire-fighting campaigns; the aircraft use the airstrip at the Forbes Aerodrome for landing, they then taxi to the water storage tank (located within the Forbes Aerodrome) to fill up their water reservoirs before taking off. During major fire-fighting operations, the RFS take over the aerodrome's terminal building to use as their operations base.
- *Ambulance Service of NSW - Aero-medical and Medical Retrieval Services*
Aero-medical and medical retrieval services deliver a range of critical services through their helicopter operations (mostly used for major accidents, emergencies and neo-natal cases) and fixed wing aircraft operations (the 24 hours a day air ambulance services) which operates out of the Forbes Aerodrome to service the Forbes and the surrounding regional area. The air ambulance service is contracted to the Royal Flying Doctor Service of Australia.
- *Recreational flying*
The Forbes Flying Club has been based at the aerodrome for over 40 years and currently has 80 members. Club members house their various aircraft and gliders in the Council-owned hangers.

- Aero-based business
There are two businesses currently operated from the aerodrome; one is a crop spraying enterprise and other a flight instructor training business.

Public Transport

Forbes has limited public transport - it has a limited service town bus used primarily by aged people to get into the town centre during the day. A country link bus service operates six times a week from Forbes to Sydney.

Opportunities

- i. Road funding needs to be given to preserving the existing asset over creating new assets;
- ii. Intermodal hub at Parkes;
- iii. A more detailed asset management plan will be developed as part of Integrated Planning and Reporting requirements which will detail the levels of service required by community and identify any gaps;
- iv. Undertake a regional airport strategic plan with a view to growing business associated with airports in the region;
- v. Expansion of the aerodrome facilities and upgrade of runway to attract and develop aero-based businesses.
- vi. Upgrade regional roads to enable access for high performance vehicles (B-Doubles, HML, AB – Triple etc.);
- vii. Development of additional overtaking lanes on the major highways throughout the region to enhance user safety and reduce driver frustration;
- viii. Undertake widening on regional roads;
- ix. Installation of appropriate signage to reinforce the need for regular breaks
- x. Maximise access to black spot funding;
- xi. Continuation of the road safety and roads to recovery program in each LGA;
- xii. Develop appropriate legislation that provides blanket coverage for high performance vehicles (HPV) across the state at appropriate locations with the highest priority being crossing the Blue Mountains;
- xiii. Build the capacity of local engineering staff in the assessment of routes for HPV utilising the guidelines published by the RTA;
- xiv. Implementation of an appropriate fee to cover the costs associated with assessing routes for HPV; and
- xv. Structure road safety improvements that meet the demands of the ever-increasing freight task.

4. **Ways to encourage development of local enterprises and the potential of the region overall**

Whilst the agricultural sector has traditionally underpinned the Forbes economy, there is so much potential to develop and expand its small business, tourism, transport and industry sectors.

Potential of the region

Forbes is approximately half-way between Brisbane and Melbourne on the Newell Highway; 4.5hrs west of Sydney, 3hrs from Canberra, 1.5hrs from both Orange and Dubbo. Forbes has access to 80% of the Australian population inside a 12 hour transport trip; Forbes is 25 minutes from the Intermodal Hub (trucks and rail) at Parkes, making it ideally suited for a manufacturing or industry base with quick and easy access to a wider transport distribution network.

The main freight rail line from Melbourne to Brisbane runs through Forbes enabling freight to be shipped from Forbes to a variety of locations including Sydney. Economic development opportunities exist for accessing land along this line.

Forbes LGA is favoured with a strong agricultural rate base; Forbes has approximately 410,000ha of agricultural holdings surrounding the town, with 124,000ha used for cropping and 271ha for orchards. Council's saleyard operation trades in excess of 1.3 million sheep per year and upwards of 90,000 cattle. Council's investment in a state-of-art livestock exchange will see this sector go from strength to strength.

Forbes is centrally located between Lake Cowal Mine, Cadia Mine and North Parkes Mine.

Forbes is ideally located within the region to drawing on a labour force of over 65,000 people within 100km radius.

Council is currently developing the Central West Industrial Park, located on the Newell Highway and adjoining the Livestock Exchange. The park is capable of holding 35 blocks with an average size of 2.5ha. Stage I will be well serviced by first-class telecommunications, high speed fibre optic cabling, 3 phase power and town water supply.

Opportunities

- i. Affordable development opportunities;
- ii. A proactive Council; and
- iii. Affordable, quality farming and industrial zoned land.

Initiatives and policy that would to help grow the Centroc region

- i. Review of tax structure under a business enterprise zone model to encourage growth outside metropolitan areas;
- ii. Decentralisation;
- iii. Investment in agricultural education and research in the region;
- iv. Reduce red tape and resource compliance agencies including local government
- v. Ensure water security of the region;

- vi. Roll out the NBN;
- vii. Ensure health services particularly in smaller communities – solutions include the use of technology, flexible workforce options, supporting growing our own health workforce and supporting the Beyond the Range project;
- viii. Flexible work based training options;
- ix. Working with our strengths – mining, health, agriculture;
- x. Better transport links;
- xi. Supporting and building on initiatives like Evocities and Beyond the Range; and
- xii. Working with Local Government to maximise the benefit from wind and other renewable energies for the communities of Central NSW.

5. **The comparative level of government business activity located within the region**

Forbes Shire Council is the largest employer within the LGA.

State Government has headquarters and branch offices located in Forbes, including:

- i. Lachlan Catchment Management Authority (head office)
- ii. Lachlan Health and Pest Authority (head office)
- iii. State Water (branch)
- iv. Forrest NSW (branch)
- v. National Parks and Wildlife (branch)
- vi. NSW Roads & Traffic Authority (branch/shopfront)

State Government business is not a major business sector for the Forbes economy.

Conclusion

Forbes Shire Council's mission statement is "*For the whole community to grow and prosper through effective leadership, provision of sustainable services and promotion of economic development opportunities*". Council is committed to this vision and is proactive in its actions to achieve a prosperous rural community where residents and visitors enjoy a clean, safe environment enhanced by our unique heritage and country lifestyle.

Whilst Council has much responsibility to its community we hope this inquiry delivers means for both the State and Federal governments to help Council support its community.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to make this submission and I would be pleased to expand on any aspect of the letter.

Yours faithfully

Carissa Bywater
GENERAL MANAGER