

**Submission
No 5**

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

Organisation: Community Technology Centres Association

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The Director
Standing Committee on State Development
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We are writing to you in a matter regarding all the communities represented by our network in the Central West of NSW.

You are probably very aware of the existence of Community Technology Centres. Many local Members have spoken strongly in support of Centres in their electorates over time. Although originally conceived as internet enabled centres, CTCs have been seen by their communities as having the capacity to be complete community and economic development hubs for areas where it is uneconomic to provide State or Federal Government services by other means. CTCs provide many varied services to their communities, filling large gaps in service delivery to small remote, rural and coastal towns. CTCs are often in towns with the highest unemployment rates or high levels of disadvantage. Many serve indigenous communities. They have proven to be essential community infrastructure for delivery of a very wide range of programs. Please visit <http://maps.google.com/maps/ms?msa=0&msid=208064482297747211131.000481cf3ac942064eb2e&ie=UTF8&ll=-32.731841,147.98584&spn=8.866933,14.0625&z=6&source=embed> to view the current locations and contact details of CTCs in NSW.

In the original charter all CTCs were funded in full or part for three years with them to stand alone after that. The initial funding was a shared arrangement between state and federal governments at a total of approximately \$15m. In small communities with struggling economies it is not practical or viable for the community to fully fund service delivery infrastructure. Already we have seen some twenty CTCs close due to lack of money and increasing pressure on a small pool of volunteers to provide services beyond their capacity. Without paid staff, it is difficult for CTCs to vigorously apply for funding and grants. They are often ineligible to apply or overlooked for foundation funding because they are seen to be core agencies requiring base funding, not project funding. Local governments tend to see requests as cost shifting. Federal and State Members of Parliament are aware and supportive of local centres, but most federal and state departments neglect to use CTCs for their program delivery on a fee for service basis.

The Community Technology Centres Association was formed in 2005 as the advocate body for the Community Technology Centres. It was funded by the NSW government for \$500,000. It took over

from a government based management body. Due to strict budgeting, planning, and income earned in fees for services and membership fees, the Association has managed to extend a two-year funding budget out to the present. However, the Association will not continue to survive as a significant support service to CTC members without financial support for itself.

We are seeing a gradual decline in CTCs staying open as the financial pressures on them make it unviable to continue. It should be remembered that CTCs were set up in communities where a commercial business providing the same services was not viable. To expect any organisation to survive in these communities without significant ongoing government support is unreasonable.

This will be a huge loss to the communities they service and assist currently, again leaving these remote and coastal small communities the poor cousins yet again to cities and larger towns. Our communities see a pattern of successive governments establishing programs such as Community Technology Centres, Rural Transaction Centres and Telecentres, engaging communities and volunteers to commit to them, then failing to use, support or maintain the investment. This is particularly frustrating when the cost is so minimal to Government, as most centres utilise many local volunteers and are very successful as social enterprises. In most cases the cost to Government would be an average of \$50,000 a year per CTC, allowing each centre to employ a part time paid manager, and to maintain and update their computers and facilities to help meet the needs of educating and services required for their communities. For such a small investment, it would be possible for every federal and state department to have a means to deliver its programs and services economically into these rural and remote communities. The association needs support funding of about \$100,000 a year to continue to assist all the centres and provide a point of contact for the network to all service providers. There are currently about 60 centres of which nearly 50 are members of the CTC Association.

If this funding model was implemented it would cost the NSW Government approximately \$3m a year for the current size of the network. This funding model is one implemented by the WA government and they provide \$10m a year to a network of 100 centres and an association so we are not being excessive in this proposal.

We are not exaggerating the crisis we are facing, and without due and urgent help the CTC network will not survive, and the cost to Government to replace these services will be very much higher than to simply maintain them given the goodwill already invested by communities.

Colin Kemp
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