

## INQUIRY INTO NSW TAXI INDUSTRY

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## Northern Rivers Social Development Council

### NSW Taxi Industry Inquiry

#### Preface

Northern Rivers Social Development Council (NRSDC) is a community-based not-for-profit organisation that promotes fairness and social inclusion in the Northern Rivers region of NSW. The Northern Rivers covers nearly 21,000 square kilometres with a population of 283,544 across seven local government areas.

NRSDC represents and strengthens communities and services by:

- Providing opportunities and services to alleviate disadvantage
- Engaging in advocacy and promotion
- Informing and educating people, organisations and government
- Encouraging partnerships
- Undertaking research and planning for future needs.

To support NRSDC's work the organisation has a number of projects that progress a number of regional 'social priorities', transport being one of these.

NRSDC's Transport Development Project (TDP) is a regional initiative to reduce transport disadvantage and improve access to affordable transport options for residents of the Northern Rivers. The project aims to develop relevant, effective, affordable, publicly available and accessible transport services and infrastructure in the region. TDP is funded by the NSW Department of Transport & Infrastructure.

#### Response

NRSDC welcomes the opportunity to respond to this review of the Taxi industry, our particular focus will be on the availability and efficiencies of wheelchair accessible taxis (WATs). As such, NRSDC will be responding to:

- *the performance of the wheelchair-accessible taxi fleet, with special regard to Federal disability discrimination laws and their compliance with the 2002 Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport,*
- *the effectiveness of the Wheelchair Accessible Transport Taxi Driver Incentive scheme in providing better taxi services for people in*

wheelchairs.

In the Northern Rivers there doesn't appear to be a link between numbers of WATs in areas and anticipated level of need. For example the Lismore area has a low level of WATs compared to its population of over 65, over 80 and people with a disability.

Areas	Population	Over 65	Over 80	Disability	WATs
Ballina	40,932	7,528	2,382	2,034	7
Byron	30,866	3,483	1,039	1,178	9
Clarence	50,596	9,302	2,371	3,117	2
Kyogle	9,686	742	363	516	0
Lismore	44,668	5,746	1,696	2,145	3
Richmond Valley	22,471	3,809	1,067	1,374	4
Tweed	84,325	17,606	4,841	4,685	10

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2006) 'Australian Census Data', Australian Federal Government, Canberra.

The TDP has been involved in a recently established group that focuses on the provision and performance of WATs in the Northern Rivers Region. Initial work was directed at establishing concrete evidence on the stated need for better taxi services for people who use wheelchairs or other mobility aids. A small survey was developed by Northern Rivers Community Transport and distributed amongst a range of disability groups and other relevant services and organisations. The survey's initial focus was expanded to include other forms of accessible transport such as buses and community transport. Responses did not cover the entire Northern Rivers but provide an indication of issues pertinent to the review.

Over half of the respondents were from the Lismore area, with almost half of this group commenting on lack of availability of WATs during school times and long waiting times once the taxi has been booked. One Lismore resident who uses an electric wheelchair had to wait two hours for a taxi last winter. This has been one of the most common items of feedback on taxis that the TDP has received over time. Unfortunately, investigation has shown that only one complaint has been received by the taxi complaint line in the last twelve months

on this issue.

Therefore, NRSDC recommends that:

- The Interim Network Standards for rural taxis be reviewed and finalised. These standards need to ensure waiting times for a taxi after booking are reasonable and align with the 2002 Disability standards for Accessible Public Transport.

*Transport Standards compliance timetable specifies the performance measure that average response time for WATs should be equal to the average response time for all taxis.*

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- The availability of WATs needs to be linked to area demographics and projected need.
- The feedback process for taxis needs to be made more available and user friendly.

## Conclusion

Whilst the above focuses on the issues and suggests some possible solutions, it should be noted that discussions have pointed to a generally positive attitude to the taxi industry. The above work will move towards more equitable transport options for people who use wheelchairs or mobility aids.