

**Submission  
No 217**

## **INQUIRY INTO THE CLOSURE OF CASINO TO MURWILLUMBAH RAIL SERVICES**

**Organisation:** Lismore City Council Public Transport Advisory Panel  
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**Telephone:**  
**Date Received:** 04/06/2004

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**Subject**

**Summary**

TS:S135  
Tricia Shantz

Community Services

June 4, 2004

The Director,  
GPSC 4, Legislative Council  
Parliament House,  
Macquarie Street,  
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Sir/Madam

**RE: Submission to the Standing Committee into the Closure of Casino to Murwillumbah Rail Services**

The Lismore City Council Public Transport Advisory Panel (PTAP) wishes to make this submission to the Standing Committee into the Closure of Casino to Murwillumbah Rail Services and express our extreme concern at the closure of this service for our community.

Lismore City Council formed a Public Transport Working Group in 1992. It successfully initiated public transport promotions, documented public transport provision, created and designed infrastructure for bus stops and signage and initiated the planning for a transit centre in the Lismore CBD. In 1995 the Working Group was constituted as a full Council committee known as the Public Transport Advisory Panel (PTAP). Its membership consists of councillors, council staff, representatives of bus operators, taxis and community transport as well as community representation. The PTAP advised on the construction of the Transit Centre in Lismore and on the sourcing of funding, has been responsible for a Public Transport Study of Lismore which the consultants Veitch Lister carried out, have continued to promote public transport and co-ordinated provision between different modes. Increased use of public transport has begun to be measured in Lismore as a result of the sustained promotion by Lismore City Council's PTAP. However there is much more to do and the PTAP has an Action Plan which is reviewed annually of activities to further public transport provision in Lismore. Lismore PTAP has been instrumental in creating policies related to public transport provision with new developments including shopping centre car park access for pedestrians/taxi ranks and for provision of bus services to green field sites prior to housing construction so that availability of public transport is evident to new residents as they move in and the need for second and third cars is negated.

The PTAP has been strongly supported by Lismore City Council itself with provision of a budget to enable the PTAP to carry out its role of identifying and developing transport strategies, in bringing together transport providers and providing a forum for communication between bus operators, taxi operators, community transport etc. Co-operative service strategies have occurred and various conference presentations

have attested to the success of the Lismore PTAP in fostering public transport development and awareness of the issues facing operators and of the realities of local government in providing infrastructure and facilities.

The PTAP speaks from a Northern Rivers area perspective which is a growth area of some significance. Outside of the Sydney Statistical Division (SD) the fastest growing areas in NSW were situated on the coast of NSW. (Lismore City Council Draft Community Profile 2004). The Northern Rivers is unique in being a growth area with urban development as well as a rural area with sections of declining farm numbers and populations. Within Lismore itself there have been some significant developments and further significant developments are foreshadowed. Since the 2001 ABS census there has been increased population growth and interest in Lismore, mainly due to the high cost of housing in the coastal shires. The regional population is approximately 262,216 (ABS 2001 census). Thus many of the pressures created by development exist in the regional area as well as the city area. Traffic counts and congestion reach similar numbers and levels to those in the metropolitan area in specific sections. However the size or area over which this congestion/intense road usage occurs is clearly population related and therefore whilst equal in intensity in places, is not in total. It does, though, create a microcosm of the metropolitan area in limited places.

From the Northern Rivers Regional Profile, A socio-economic profile of the Northern Rivers Region Prepared for the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources, March 2004 it shows the journey to work patterns between the LGAs in the Northern Rivers. The travel to work origin and destination data is created by coding workplace location (for the main job in the last week) and the Census night location. Most residents of Lismore work within the LGA, but there is a substantial influx of workers from Ballina, Richmond Valley and Byron, and a lesser number of Lismore residents travel in the opposite direction. Figure 56 shows that there are 2,673 people who travel from Ballina to work in Lismore, 709 Byron and 984 from Richmond Valley. This totals 4,366 persons travelling, by car mainly, to work in Lismore. This is substantial given the workforce within Lismore is approximately 12,195. According to Table 15: Mode of Travel to work, 2001 only .83% or 619 people travel by train in the Richmond-Tweed, whereas 42,925 or 57.62% travel by car as driver and a further 5,309, or 7.13% travel by car as passenger. The roads that people travel to and from Lismore are two lane, windy, difficult roads, eg. Bangalow to Lismore and the Casino to Lismore roads.

The PTAP has documented significant demand for the use of rail to link Lismore with Byron Bay at times suitable for commuter and leisure travel. The XPT timetable that had been used since the introduction of XPT services in 1990 did not provide service at times that were appropriate for regional travel. The service that the XPT replaced, the Pacific Coast Motorail provided a morning service from Lismore to Byron Bay with a late afternoon return. This was extensively used by young people and others to access the beach at Byron Bay and was colloquially known as the "Surf Train". The XPT service no longer allowed for local travel and was only useful for travel out of the region ie to/from Sydney. Its timetabling reflected the needs of the State Railway operation rather than what passengers desired. Nevertheless, the service was heavily used until its cancellation. It should be noted that the single return service on the line was at times difficult to book a seat on due to the high demand. If a more extensive service had been provided it is interesting to speculate as to what the level of patronage overall would have been. It is the belief of the PTAP that it would have been high.

In responding to the terms of reference for the inquiry the PTAP submits the following.

- (a) the decision by the State government to replace the daily Casino to Murwillumbah XPT service with a coach service, including the accuracy of the Government's claims it will save \$5 million per year.

Observations by the PTAP have been that 200-250 passengers have travelled on the train from Lismore to Casino. The great majority of these passengers had been destined to travel to Sydney. Regional travel to Casino was not likely due to the approximate 11 – 11.30 pm departure time. The majority of the passengers on the train originated from the Casino-Murwillumbah line. Observations by members of the PTAP since the service was discontinued has been that 60-70 passengers leave Lismore destined for the train connection at Casino. This is a significant drop in passenger numbers and is in line with international (Europe, U.K. and North America) experience where trains have been replaced with buses. It is documented in numerous surveys and published transport research that passenger preference is for rail based service over road based service. It was entirely predictable that the drop in passengers would occur. Other than financial outlay, there has been no justification by the Government as to a rationale for the closure of the service. It was described as a loss making service with hints that too many concession ticket holders traveled. If it is government policy that concessions are granted to particular member so the community then those costs should be born directly by the government and not used to justify a well-patronised and therefore well used service as being uneconomic. Government's are designed to provide services not make profits. Therefore financial justification for stopping a service is not valid. The PTAP accepts that had minimal numbers of passengers used the service then it would be appropriate to cease the service, however this was not the case.

- (b) the economic and social impact on north Coast communities of the loss of the daily XPT service between Casino and murwillumbah, in particular the impact of the loss of jobs within CountryLink and other State Government departments and agencies and the closure of local stations and Travel Centres.

The PTAP is not directly aware of the job losses in the region. However those who will be displaced will be rail maintenance workers, station staff and train crew as less will be needed due to the shorter time for Sydney-Casino compared with Sydney-Murwillumbah. Against this is the addition of bus driver jobs and bus maintenance positions. However these additions are not local but are sourced outside of the region and the State, being located in Queensland. Kirklands Coaches (based in Lismore) run an existing Lismore-Brisbane service 4 times daily which is well patronised. This company was not approached about providing the replacement bus service for the XPT. Therefore the government decision has directly impacted on employment in the region by increasing unemployment.

Council's are required by NSW Legislation to develop and implement a Social and Community Plan plan each five years. Lismore City Council's Social and Community Plan was first undertaken in 1999 and Council is currently revising this plan. In the 1999 Plan there were six factors that highlighted the presence of disadvantage in our local Lismore community, one of these being

the lack of public transport. This was an issue for each of the seven mandatory target groups required to be addressed in Council's Social & Community Plan: children, young people, women, older people, people with disabilities, Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander People, and people from Culturally & Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds.

In 2002 a major consultation process was undertaken by Local Government Community Project Officers, Northern Rivers Regional Interagency, Northern Rivers Regional Strategy, and Northern Rivers Social Development Council in order to prioritise the social/community issues in each LGA and for the Northern Rivers region. The purpose of this was to present the region's social and community issues in a strategic fashion to the government and commercial sector. The important distinction that this process held is that the information came from workers and volunteers in social and community service provision. More than 700 people contributed to this process. The lack of public transport came up as the second highest issue across the region. (report attached).

The Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care (DADHC) consultations held in April 2004 in Lismore again raised the issue of transport for older people and people with a disability. This issue came up, not just for the Lismore Local Government area (LGA) but the surrounding LGAs as well. At the consultation it was said that "transport is getting worse and worse". (Minutes HACC Development Officer, NRSDC, April 2004)

People with a disability and older people use the train because they can. It is the only way they can move around within the region and outside the region. By replacing trains with buses means that these people are unable to have access. The buses to be used do not have disability access, and have stairs that are not accessible for many older people. It is understood that it has been suggested that taxis could be used to transport people to and from the Casino railway station. Where is the costing and planning for this? The cost and logistics may prove to be prohibitive

The Lismore LGA median individual income is \$236 per week and the median household income is \$514 per week. The proportion of households in the North Coast earning weekly household incomes of less than \$500 was 46.6% compared with 31.6% for NSW, while only 15% of households had an income of \$1,200 or more, compared with 32.7% for NSW. (Far North East NSW Region statistics from DOTARS A Regional Profile June 2003). In Lismore 2,698 families earn \$300/week. According to the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS), in a press release in September 2003, there was a survey by Roy Morgan Research that "asked Australians what is the smallest amount that a family of four – two parents and two children – need each week to keep in health and to live decently." "The average response is \$541 per week." In March 2003 the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research defined the poverty line for a couple with two children as \$29,031 a year and for a single person \$15,456. According to the Australian Senate Inquiry into Poverty Report Overview, *A hand up not a hand out: Renewing the fight against poverty*, March 2004 "Perhaps the most salient example of the prevalence of poverty and disadvantage is the striking finding that 21 per cent of households, or 3.6 million Australians, live on less than \$400 a week – less than the minimum wage." (page xvii). In Lismore 29.6% of households earn less than \$400 a week.

Unemployment rates in the Northern Rivers are well above the state average. The unemployment rate for Lismore as at 2001 was 12.9% compared to the NSW rate of 7.1%, Sydney rate of 6.1%, and Gold Coast of 9.5%. The unemployment rate for the Northern Rivers area was 18.0% in 1991, and 15.5% in 1996. (Tables 21 & 22, DIPNR Northern Rivers Regional Profile March 2004). The age group in Lismore with the highest unemployment rate in 2001 was the 20-24 year olds, with 23.7% followed by the 15-19 year olds with 21.3%. For Sydney, NSW and the Gold Coast it was the 15-19 year old age group with the highest unemployment rates with 14.1%, 16.2% and 17.8% respectively. The 20-24 year old age group had the second highest rates with 9.1%, 11.3% and 14.2% respectively. With high unemployment rates and low incomes car ownership is not high. There is a need for public transport to be increased in the area rather than decreased.

'There has been a structural shift in the Region away from employment in agriculture, forestry and fishing to more people being employed in the tertiary sector. For those with jobs, there has been a shift to part-time employment which has been most pronounced for the younger age groups. Despite growth in the number of people working, the Northern Rivers is also characterised by high unemployment. ...The increasing prevalence of part-time jobs reduces the employment security of the workforce. Compared with people in permanent full-time positions, those in part-time and casual employment often find it more difficult to obtain loan funds to purchase housing and other major assets. As owning a home is a major component of Australians' financial security, those without the ability to access such an asset are likely to be (or feel that they are) less financially secure' (DIPNR Northern Rivers Regional Profile March 2004, pg 90).

Lismore plays a regional role in health facilities as it is host to the Lismore Base Hospital and St. Vincents Hospital, both of which provide specialist hospital services. There are many medical specialists located in Lismore. Legal services, including the Family Law Court and the District Court are located in Lismore. As such, people from the surrounding areas need to get to Lismore to access necessary medical and legal facilities.

- (c) the future of the rail line between Casino and Murwillumbah, including, but not limited to, the present condition of the line, recent and future maintenance programs, options for and the financial impact of future development of the line and the possible extension of the line to the Queensland border.

It is in the future that the PTAP sees strong need for the line and its utilisation for local services.

The Richmond-Tweed region is a growth area and will continue to be. Lismore is a major employment and business centre for the region. It has a major University campus. Traffic congestion in Lismore is increasing with major traffic flows along the Bruxner Highway from Ballina and Alstonville into Lismore in the morning peak with evening return and similarly along the Bangalow Road from Byron Bay and Bangalow. Whilst the Ballina traffic must stay on road, the Byron Bay traffic can be moved to rail to alleviate continuing traffic increases.

During public transport promotions, the PTAP has received many comments about the lack of public transport to Byron Bay from Lismore. There are 5 daily return bus services provided by Kirklands Coaches. However these are

not seen as a viable alternative to use to go to work or University and in many cases are not known about. When pointing out to people the existing bus services it is always replied that “these are for schoolchildren and in any case I don’t like buses and will not use them however I would use a train service”. An estimate has been that over 3,000 passengers daily would use a Byron Bay – Lismore rail service.

It is accepted world-wide that rail is the preferred route for travel where bus is the alternative. It is seen as more reliable, is more visible and regarded as more comfortable and attractive as a public transport mode.

The PTAP would like to see a local rail service provided from Lismore to Byron Bay especially, although a local service over the whole line should be provided.

#### EXTENSION TO THE QUEENSLAND BORDER.

(d) Any other matters arising from the Government’s decision to terminate the rail services.

The decision to terminate the rail service has had a negative impact upon public transport in the region. It is difficult to provide public transport to the scattered villages in the region. The cessation of the XPT service has rekindled the view that the region is ignored by the State Government and that public transport is not a viable proposition.

Whenever projects are being submitted to various Federal/State funding bodies for community/social services they are developed with the provision of transport as one of the main items to address within the project. Eg. Can the person who the project is targeting access the proposed service? Often, a transport component is included in the budget so that people will be able to access the service, which they otherwise would not be able to. For example, in developing a project to provide living skills for new young mothers, in order for the project to succeed the clients have to be able to get there. So, transport is a component, along with the provision of lunch and child care facilities.

Anecdotally, it has been brought to the attention of the Chairperson of the PTAP that it appears that insurance funds contribute to the maintenance of the line at North Lismore so the government is really paying for maintenance, albeit in a roundabout way.

The PTAP supports recommendations made by the Northern Rivers Regional Organisation of Councils (NOROC) in their submission to this inquiry, which are reiterated here:

#### **Immediate priorities**

- Re-introduce the XPT services on the Casino-Murwillumbah line, accompanied by a re-invigorated marketing campaign and better schedules to encourage increased patronage;
- Introduce a daylight light-rail service on the existing line to satisfy local demand for a commuter and tourism-oriented service, including a link with the Sydney/Brisbane service;

- Enhance existing rail infrastructure (including lines, bridges and stations) by the guaranteed expenditure of funds to achieve a minimum 80 km/h standard along its entire length;
- Pending analysis of the Federal Government's (Sustainable Regions) feasibility study, support a further study being undertaken into extending the rail line to Queensland;
- Encourage transfer of road freight to rail by establishing rail freight depots;
- Expand State-funded public transport in the region by providing additional bus services;
- Develop an Integrated Northern Rivers Transport Blueprint that incorporates rail services as an integral part of services into the future.

**Medium-term priorities**

- Establish a rail link between Murwillumbah and the Gold Coast, enabling commuter services to connected with Brisbane services.

The Public Transport Advisory Panel would like one of its representatives, being the Chairperson, Dr. Robert Weatherby, to be able to make a personal representation to the hearings into this matter being held in the region next week. Dr. Weatherby can be contacted at Southern Cross University on telephone 02 6620 3671.

Regards

Tricia Shantz

**Community Project Officer**

**On Behalf of the Lismore Council Public Transport Advisory Panel**

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**Social and Community Service Priorities  
as determined by the  
Northern Rivers InterAgency forums**

Northern Rivers, New South Wales



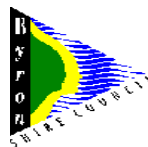
Interagency Forums  
held by Local Government Area  
**Northern Rivers Regional Report**

July 2002

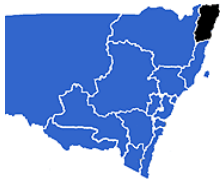
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Prepared by Jane Oliver, Footprint Directions



Tweed Shire Council



**Interagency Forums by Local Government Area Regional Report Summary: July 2002.**



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This work is copyright. It may be reproduced in whole or in part for study, charitable planning and training purposes, subject to the inclusion of an acknowledgement of the source but it may not be sold or used for commercial purposes. Photograph of a local sole parent selling his produce (grass mulch), outside his "house" in the Lismore district taken by James Webb, 2001.

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## Contents

Introduction .....	3
Terms of Reference & Consultants Brief.....	8
Methodology .....	11
Executive Summary.....	15
Key Issues Table .....	16
Forum One: Lismore City .....	22
Forum Two: Tweed Shire .....	24
Forum Three: Clarence (Grafton, Pristine Waters, Copmanhurst & Maclean).....	26
Forum Four: Richmond Valley.....	28
Forum Five: Kyogle .....	30
Forum Six: Ballina Shire.....	32
Forum Seven: Byron Shire .....	34
Suggestions towards solutions.....	36
Acknowledgements & Next Steps .....	37

### What is the Northern Rivers Regional Interagency?

The Northern Rivers Regional Interagency (NRRIA) has been meeting since 1996 with the aim of representing social and community issues on behalf of the North Coast Region. Its informal membership is derived from the General Interagencies that meet in the Local Government Areas (LGA) of :

Byron, Ballina, Tweed,  
Lismore, Kyogle, Richmond Valley, and  
The Clarence Valley Councils (Maclean, Grafton, Pristine Waters and Copmanhurst).

The members are regional workers, community project officers (CPOs) from each LGA, State government representatives and representatives from other regional groups, eg Northern Regional of Councils (NOROC), Northern Rivers Social Development Council (NRSDC), and the Northern Rivers Regional Strategy (NRRS).

Some of the members are volunteers representing several organisations in their local communities.

Combined membership representation is estimated above 700 (organisations).

At the commencement of this process, the InterAgency process aimed to:

- ❑ have social and community issues raised directly from the people in the community who are providing day-to-day services and bring them to the attention of State government agencies who fund such services;
- ❑ operate as a co-ordinating group to provide a stronger link from the face-to-face services – sometimes referred to as “the community coal face” with government department workers and elected politicians.



## 1. Introduction

This report concerns the social development and community services priorities and solutions that were discussed at seven Interagency Forums held across the Northern Rivers during Winter, 2002.

The report signals the end of the second stage of four stages, in a process of determining longer-term social capital improvements (a strategy) for the Northern Rivers Regional Interagency with the Northern Rivers Social Development Council (see page 8 for details). It is also indirectly reports on the work of our Region's Local Government Community Project Officers (CPOs) efforts in collaborating and collecting information from their constituents over a four-month process. The issues presented were gathered within a regional perspective. They were also gathered to report on the range and scope of issues in our region.

The process was designed to:

- i) assist in clarifying both old and new priorities, and
- ii) add specific local or district issues in determining regional priorities,
- iii) address draft solutions proposed by agency members, and
- iv) test the capacity of the NR Interagency Working Group to commence building a Regional Interagency "social capital" strategy.

It should be noted that the various InterAgency groups function in different ways between the seven LGAs of the Northern Rivers.

### 1.1 The Northern Rivers Region (as represented in this report):



The Northern Rivers (NR) is located on the far North Coast of NSW, and covers an area of approximately 24,500 square kilometres. It extends from **Nymboida** in the south of the Clarence Valley, north to **Woodenbong** and **Tweed Heads**, West to Baryugil, Urbenville, and **Tabulam** in the Richmond Valley, and includes several towns and villages on the east coast, the most easterly being Byron Bay.

Some of the region's local government Annual Reports and websites fail to mention their many constituent villages<sup>1</sup> and towns. However, it should be noted that the InterAgency members and the LGA Community Project Officers are required to service the needs of more than their base towns.

The pictorial map picture (left) highlights the Pacific Highway in **blue**. The total population of the region is approximately 261,412<sup>2</sup>. This statistic does not include transient or tourist populations. Such transience is a marked social phenomenon of the Northern Rivers.

<sup>1</sup> NR Regional Strategy: Framework for a Sustainable Future (1997), Discussion Paper: Region of Villages (Feb,2001): Appendix 2

<sup>2</sup> ABS Census Data Summary 2001: [Local Government Area \(LGA\) populations for each State and Territory](#)

## 1.2 Local Government Areas of the Northern Rivers region:

The local government council areas addressed in this study are found in the three valleys of the Northern Rivers: Richmond, Clarence and Tweed. These 10 LGAs are located in two Federal electorates, Page and Richmond. Population statistics are from the 2001 ABS Census. The total of 261,412 is .04% of NSW's total recorded population.

### RICHMOND VALLEY LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS:

1. **Lismore City Council** (based in Goonellabah 5 km east of Lismore with more than 15 villages or smaller communities including Bexhill, The Channon, Clunes, Coffee Camp, Dunoon, Eltham, Goolmangar, Jiggi, Modanville, Nimbin, North Woodburn, Mountain Top, Mt. Nardi , Whian Whian and Wyrallah).  
**POPULATION: 42, 849**
2. **Richmond Valley Council** (based in Casino, also covers the villages and smaller communities including Bentley, Broadwater, Evans Head, New Italy, Rappville, Tatham and Woodburn).  
**POPULATION: 20,328.**
3. **Kyogle Council** (which covers Kyogle itself, and many smaller communities such as Afterlee, Bonalbo, Old Bonalbo, Grevillia, Barkers Vale, Mallanganee, some of Tabulam, Urbenville and the Border Ranges town of the Upper Clarence: Woodenbong). **POPULATION: 9,596**  
**Byron Shire Council** (based in Mullumbimby, also includes the towns and villages of Bangalow, Brunswick Heads, Byron Bay, Federal, Goonengerry, , Ocean Shores, Suffolk Park and several smaller communities such as Main Arm, Coorabell, and Wilsons Creek). **POPULATION: 29,556.**
4. **Ballina Shire Council** (based in Ballina includes towns and villages of Alstonville, Fernleigh, Lennox Head, Newrybar, Teven, Tintenbar, and Wardell).  
**POPULATION: 37,534.**

### TWEED VALLEY LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS:

5. **Tweed Shire Council** (based in Murwillumbah with offices in Tweed Heads) also services the communities and villages of the Tweed Coast such as, Cabarita, Cudgen, Chinderah, Fingal, Hastings Point, Kingscliff, and Pottsville, with Pacific Highway villages of Burringbar, Condong, Crabbes Creek, and Moobal, then inland areas such as Tyalgum, Chillingham, Uki, and on the outer western rim of the shire, Kunghur and Mount Burrill.) Like residents in the border village of Woodenbong, many services have cross-border issues with Queensland services to consider in planning and delivery.  
**POPULATION: 72,942.**

Local Government Areas cont.:

CLARENCE VALLEY LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS:

The Four Councils are Grafton City, Copmanhurst Shire, Pristine Waters, and Maclean Shire. **Total population for these four councils is 48, 607.**

6. **Grafton City Council** (based in Grafton) includes the city of Grafton, South Grafton and the village of Clarenza.  
**POPULATION: 16, 837.**
7. **Maclean Shire Council** (based in Maclean) includes Yamba, Iluka, Gulmarrad, Lawrence, Wooleweyah, Angourie, Woombah, Chatsworth, Harwood Island, Ashby, Southgate, Brushgrove, Tyndale and Brooms Head.  
**POPULATION: 16, 991**
8. **Pristine Waters Council** (with offices in Grafton City), including the villages of Ulmarra, Nymboida, Sandon River, Minnie Water, Diggers Camp, Wooli, Red Rock, Corindi, Tucabia, Cowper, Glenreagh, Swan Creek, Coutts Corssing, Dundarrabin, Jackadgery, Waterview Heights and Eatonsville.  
**POPULATION: 10, 631**
9. **Copmanhurst Shire Council** (based in Grafton City), and includes the villages of Junction Hill, Copmanhurst, Baryugil/Malabugilmah, Southgate and Whiporie.  
**POPULATION: 4, 148.**

### 1.3 Geographic Factors:

This report should be read in the context of supplying services and meeting the needs of communities based on some clear geographically and socially determined factors expressed at the Interagency forums:

- a) That there appears to be a significant transient population who do not report as residents but who require support services to survive;
- b) That solutions suitable for “rural” towns, may not address needs of “regional” towns and villages;
- c) That regional towns must outreach to their significant outer-lying village communities, some of which are more than a half-day’s drive to access.

Significant other non-geographical “barriers” impacted by the geography were expressed from the forums. These concerned the difficulties involved in communications, the cost of travel and consultation, and the difficulties of accessing information and/or service in a way that could be described as equitable, particularly during peak tourism periods.

#### 1.4 Strategic capacity of the NRRIA

The Northern Rivers Social Regional InterAgency (NRRIA) commissioned this brief report during the determination of a strategic process to:

- i) Prioritise social and community issues locally;
- ii) Draw these prioritised issues into a regional perspective;
- iii) Give encouragement to the Interagency groups to contribute and determine strategies, (despite difficulties associated with collaboration);
- iv) Decide what strategic direction to take with the solutions supplied (if any);
- v) Test the ability of the NRRIA to facilitate the development of a regional leadership role through worker & volunteer collaboration & effort;
- vi) Initiate the development of a regional identity from “regional solutions” based upon the reported social development and community services needs;
- vii) Examine a new lobbying and leadership capacity, to include broad regional communications between regions and between State and Federal departments towards improved decision-making criteria for funding, based on issues reported from the Interagency process and the regional workshop;
- viii) Incorporate the “regional identity” to successfully initiate resource allocation changes and other strategies, from senior government and other sources towards the Northern Rivers.
- ix) Highlight the value that the NR InterAgency can have as a significant informal regional organisation that has membership representing over 700 organisations across the region.

#### 1.5 Northern Rivers “Interconnectedness”

The report presents a range of “interconnected trends” raised in the forums, so that the Northern Rivers Regional InterAgency (NRRIA) can assist with the development of a collaborative process to determine regional social priorities and solutions. This would be best accomplished using the knowledge and skills of practitioners, planners and those involved in program and funding development.

A key aim has been to identify a relevant regional strategy in collaboration with appropriate organisations, and this is an initial step to achieve this goal.

## 2. Terms of Reference and Consultants Brief

### 2.1 Terms of reference

In response to increasing difficulties encountered in providing and prioritising services in regional and rural areas by several services, the NRRIA sought to present our region's social and community issues in a strategic fashion to the government and commercial sector. The important distinction that this process holds is that the information is coming from workers and volunteers involved in social and community service provision. In the past, the NRRIA has not been able to achieve successful lobbying capacity without a definitive Northern Rivers "identity" of social and community issues. It chose to achieve this change in four stages:

#### STAGE ONE

- 1 collaboration with the Community Project Officers of the seven district Local Government Areas (LGA) of the Northern Rivers, [with reference to the Northern Rivers Regional Strategy and the Northern Rivers Social Development Council] and they in turn with their local Interagency groups;

#### STAGE TWO

- 2 facilitation of Interagency groups by LGA, to determine local problems and solutions with a regional perspective on the solutions;

#### STAGE THREE

- 3 presentation and strategic planning of the local social and community issues into a regional perspective with emphasis on Northern Rivers needs to Statewide co-ordinating groups, regional initiatives etc., ( such as the Premier's Department "Regional Managers Co-Ordination Group").

#### STAGE FOUR

- 4 work towards the determination of a regional goal: through integration with various organisations, (including the NSW Council of Social Service, Regional Manager's Coordination Group and Northern Rivers Regional Strategy), to achieve some basic community solutions, funding and resource allocation strategies for the Northern Rivers.

This strategy was dependent on the following actions to achieve its goal:

CPOs to formally undertake community consultations with their Interagency groups	between March and June 2002;
Stakeholders to be advised about the emerging strategy to achieve greater understanding of NASD's objectives and foster increased community support;	May and June concerning July Forum
Interagency forums facilitated to examine the issues, and propose basic regional solutions;	June 2002
Local "identity" confirmed based on the issues and solutions, that would feed into a regional perspective;	July 2002



It is anticipated that following this report's dissemination, the next stages of the strategy would be achieved:

Present and seek input to the current issues affecting the quality of life for people living in the region to a regional forum, chaired by the NSW Council of Social Service with regional leaders and stakeholders present;	July 2002
Preliminary identification of budgets and other concrete plans to regional solutions with finite outcomes; research, strategy refinement; other strategic planning.	September 2002
Report to Stakeholders on the outcomes from the regional forum.	October 2002

## 2.2 Frailties of the NRRIA process

As many "reports", strategies, forums, consultations and consultants studies have highlighted the difficulties this sector faces, the project is based on interagency consultations alone. The industry workers that participated in the InterAgency process, reported some level of scepticism of the processes' design and capacity. On this basis, this report is also designed to **use forum participants' feedback** to challenge the overall strategy, to include a significant emphasis on the NRRIA members input towards:

- **Recommended community-driven and "grass roots" strategies** in the region to the stakeholders that might
  - Highlight "glaring" service delivery problems that had no obvious solutions;
  - Improve dialogue about access difficulties to a full range of services;
  - Reduce need for one-way consultation;
  - Address inadequate coordination and inadequate integration of services;
  - Potentially draw attention to barriers that prevent community-driven solutions;
  - Learn new planning skills in each InterAgency; and
  - Propose values-based strategy (people focused) in response to endemic and complex solutions.
- **Describing** where the needs for services relevant to the key funding providers are inadequately determined, misunderstood or mis-matched. (Strategic Analysis)

## 2.3 Strengths of the NRRIA process

- Continue sustainable ongoing consultation between the community and the funding sources on a regional basis;
- Encourage the 2003 Northern Rivers Regional Interagency framework for improved service, lobbying and representation Australia-wide;
- Contribute to a strategy over a longer period of time that would address solutions using a values-based cultural system, rather than merely an economic system.

## 2.4 Limitations of this report and consultant's brief

Limitations of the process and report are highlighted throughout this report. The report was not funded to research information unavailable at the seven InterAgency meetings. It was written by an independent facilitator who lives and works in the Northern Rivers, with input from the Local Government CPOs and the Project Officers of the NRSDC and the Northern Rivers Regional Strategy.

The consultant facilitator was expected to present budgeted solutions to the process based on the forum data researched by the Local Government CPOs. It was anticipated that those attending the forums would be past-participants to other General or InterAgency meetings and be familiar with the InterAgency issues and solutions. This was not always the case. In the case of the largest forum (Lismore) the majority of participants had not attended such a process prior to their forum.

An allocation of just one day was afforded for the compilation, writing and layout of this report.

In four cases, the CPO's were not able to present information from InterAgency consultations in a timely manner to ensure consistent reporting of issues and adequate briefing for the facilitator. This difficulty is reflected in the forums by having to highlight issues during time when criteria for prioritisation, barriers to implementing solutions, and solutions discussion were on the agenda.

The Consultant was expected to table a regional listing of priorities with solutions in a report and give a presentation at a regional forum to be held on 24<sup>th</sup> July, 2002 in Ballina.

The strategy for the overall development of the project has since been clarified in writing.

This report is only a summary of the first two steps of the NRSDC emerging strategy.

Does your issue & solution demonstrate:

1. Evidence of need
2. Fundable
3. Fundholder is available
4. Community Support evidence
5. Solvable with less than \$500,000

### LEFT:

This sample "Hypothetical criteria" was used in the forums to force participants to reach consensus on priorities. In many instances this criteria was useful to focus on specific problems of issues and solutions associated with their daily work. In more complex issues such as Transport and Housing, these criteria encouraged forum members to think in a bigger picture context – regionally, and within Statewide priorities.

### 3. Consultation Methodology

From Lismore City Council's CPO, Tricia Shantz, concerning the **process**:

- “Community Project Officers (CPO) located within Local Government have been required to meet with Local Interagency groups from February 2002 to determine 5 key issues/possible solutions/budgets for their group. A common proforma is being used to make the process as simple as possible and reasonably quick.
- A Facilitator has been engaged to prioritise issues at each Generalist Interagency in each LGA throughout the Northern Rivers in June 2002. The Lismore General Interagency is the first on June 6<sup>th</sup> at Lismore Council. One representative from each Local Interagency is to be at the June 6<sup>th</sup> meeting, along with any other representative of the community that does not have an interagency, eg. For Lismore, housing, children.
- Information gathered at both the Local and Generalist Interagencies will be reported on to a regional meeting scheduled to take place on July 24<sup>th</sup> 2002 in Ballina. The main purpose of the regional meeting will be to set regional priorities, to inform the Northern Rivers Social Development Council, NSW Council of Social Service, State and Federal Government of social priorities in the Northern Rivers region.

From this process we hope to have identified issues, with identified solutions and budgets attached. The aim is to increase services in the North Coast. As a region it is to our advantage to have a direct input into the budget planning processes of State and Federal Governments. We talk about the issues here all the time. But, we want to move beyond the talk and really put the issues and solutions forward. We want to influence policy and get more and better services here.”

#### 3.1 Forums

The forums were set for just 3 hours including breaks in 7 LGAs. These were the culmination of CPO consultations described above.

Participants were asked to consider their local needs in a regional perspective, and comment on the difficulties similar strategies had previously aimed to address. Where practical, participants were also asked for written input. Each forum was built on the effort of the CPO's consultation with his/her local interagency groups using pro-forma reports on issues and strategies. In the case of Ballina, consultation with the Ballina & District Services Association took place (BDSCA co-ordinates the Ballina Shire interagency process).

Where there appeared to be lack of consensus on the prioritisation of issues and solutions, participants were invited to vote using indicators against charted issues. Participants were also invited to comment on the criteria proposed to prioritise the issues and solutions.

Participants supplied written information where requested, and were also invited to supply further data following each forum.

## 3.2 InterAgency Participation at the Seven Forums:

The statistics below, do not include those who had attended any Interagency meeting during the first half of 2002 (and were therefore presumably familiar with the Issues/Solutions collection process).

Approximate membership is estimated based on the size of participating attendees during 2002 information gathering:

Local Govt Area	Total Participants on the day	Membership Estimates	Notes
Lismore	34	140	Includes State Govt reps
Tweed	14	180	Council personnel well represented.
Clarence	16	160	Includes Centrelink specialist officers, State Govt reps
Richmond Valley	9	45	Strong indigenous representation
Kyogle	9	28	"Kyogle Can Do" includes business participants.
Ballina	4	85	Organised by the BDCSA as CPO not able to participate.
Byron	13	95	Social planning & Chamber of Commerce reps present
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>733</b>	

The Community Project Officers were responsible for encouraging participation at the InterAgency forums of this project. Invitations were issued in all LGAs to a broad range of participants including Emergency Services, Housing, Indigenous, Aged/Older persons, Disability Services, Gambling, Drug & Alcohol, Children's, Youth, Health (Community, Mental), Community, Information & Referral, Legal Aid/Justice, Transport, Police, and Employment services, Domestic Violence, Women's services etc.

In five instances, CPOs expressed disappointment at the participation responses at forums. However strong participation had taken place prior to the forum days in some LGA's clarifying issues and looking at possible solutions. It should be noted that the Ballina Shire co-ordination was taken up by the Ballina & District Community Services Association when the Ballina CPO was not available to co-ordinate the InterAgency forum. CPO's roles, resources or skills do not adequately allow for intensive community consultation with a consistent, planned outcome. Their employers could acknowledge the accomplishment of such collaboration with each other, and with regional organisations in the Working Party, positively.

### 3.3 The forums (continued)

**Attendee variation:** At Kyogle and Byron's interagency forum, representatives from the business community were present. A Council Member was present at Kyogle's forum. At the Tweed forum, an agency representative from Queensland was present. At Lismore's forum, only 11% had previously participated in an InterAgency process during 2002, but the remaining forums had repeat participation of approximately 80% of all attendees.

Of those present, more than 80% had direct service delivery responsibility. Of the 99 participants present, eleven were unpaid workers (volunteers).

The majority of participants stayed for the forum conclusion. However, due to service-delivery demands, 12% of participants left before their InterAgency reached its conclusion. Participants were encouraged by the news of the strategic process and looked forward to positive recognition of their issues and proposed solutions.

### 3.4 Key Problems with the process

Several factors hampered smooth integration of issues with solutions. Most of them resulted from inadequate funding, and somewhat complex expectations from the process.

#### FORUM PREPARATION

Absence of recent reports, updated social plans (only req'd every 5 yrs), statistics and researched data

Budget allocations against solutions had not been researched prior to being suggested

CPOs had not collected data consistently using proforma documentation

Facilitator had not received collected data prior to each forum

Inadequate funding to collect data, organise InterAgency data-collection sessions

Participants were critical of short promotional time leading to the event

Photocopying of CPO-collected data available for discussion was inadequate

#### PARTICIPATION

Participants were unable to fully attend due to part-time nature of work/workload

Indigenous and Youth under-represented

Commencement times were not observed by all participants

Participants were skilled in service delivery, not strategic planning or analysis

Broad representation of agencies was absent

Distances to travel to attend sessions in Clarence prevented full participation

Past "limitations" of InterAgency process resulted in significant non-response to invitation.

## 3.4 Key Problems with the process continued:

### FORUM FACILITATION & OUTCOMES

Anecdotal information dominated the format of issues presentation (issue clarification)

Complex inter-district issues were too time-consuming to detail in forums

Criteria for prioritisation was rejected (for many reasons) in some forums

Facilitator allowed excessive discussion of issues in some forums (particularly Lismore)

Issues-focused, rather than solutions-focused discussion dominated the Agenda as members clarified difficulties in the context of the criteria for prioritisation, and efforts that had been undertaken in the past to address issues.

Participants expressed some scepticism over the prioritisation process

Strategic value associated with solutions were difficult to clarify in short timeframe

Process of providing solutions in an inadequate time frame was sometimes rejected

Scepticism over political support (State and to some extent Local) sometimes quashed brainstorming style of solution testing, or simplification of issues to reach consensus.

Solutions supplied by participants were sometimes based on increased funding alone (although firm efforts were made to address co-ordination, governance, etc.)

Solutions were proposed without comprehensive understanding of regional funding & priority directions already in place or currently being developed

Solutions-focused strategies were presented in broad terms only.

### Most significant barriers to achieving neatly organised priorities with solutions + budgets:

1. lack of funding to co-ordinate, promote, plan and deliver the forums. A total budget of \$3,000 was afforded for this process;
2. lack of funding to ensure facilitator gathered solutions with budgets aware of current State-level strategy and funding priorities (research);
3. allowing only 2.5 hours for the forums to discuss, prioritise and develop solutions to upwards of 50 issues in most forums.

### 3.5 Significant strengths of the process:

1. Communication of emerging strategy was positive, uplifting and congruent with the NRRRI Working Party's aim for the process
2. Understanding of the strength of representation from "the community coal face" gave impetus for strongly promoting issues in the face of Local and State Government funding problems
3. Updating of issues, particularly in light of improvements and positive changes, provided a cooperative and strategic approach to address local problems regionally. *The participants are able to articulate the problems and have constructive (albeit often previously unarticulated) ideas towards solutions.*

## 4. Executive Summary

### An emerging strategy from 700 agencies

#### 4.1 Commonalities

The key issues of the seven forums held across the Northern Rivers Region hold significant commonalities. Unsurprisingly, they are complex issues. They are many, particularly as more than 700 workers and volunteers contributed to the process. The issues are concerned with service delivery gaps that are meant to meet community and social needs from those with critical need. Those with less critical, but never-the-less complex or profound need, are reported as being usually “unserviceable”. The service gaps concern serious human dysfunction that none of us can easily address: recurrent mental health problems, endemic homelessness, violence – both in the family “home” and on our streets – destructive addictive behaviours, growing isolation, and increasing patterns of intergenerational crises caused by poverty, unemployment, and racism.

The NRRRIA has compiled the forums content, and determined an emerging strategy for addressing the significant range of issues and solutions raised at seven InterAgency meetings during June and July 2002.

**Trends** appeared in the following areas:

1. **Housing** – government policy to stimulate private sector investment in low-cost housing was seen as being ineffectual in the region in all LGAs. Tourism and gentrification of main towns and villages has seen inordinately rapid increases in rental fees, reduction in available low-cost housing for lease (or purchase), and particularly absent was assisted housing for high-need groups such as those with mental health issues.
2. **New housing approaches** were seen as the connecting solution across other major issues such as mental health support, families support, young people’s needs, single parent families, children with additional needs, and people with disabilities and the frail/aged, and for cultural reasons special needs such as aboriginality, isolation.
3. People affected by cycles of poverty tended to have **acerbated difficulties** due to lack of housing – these ranged in severity from criminal violence and intergenerational abuse to inability to access support or services, because of homelessness or unstable home settings.
4. Solutions from service providers concentrated on being able to **address basic needs first**, before addressing issues such as drug and alcohol use, child abuse, and transport access. Forums confirmed that without secure housing, residents were unable to address more complicated issues, or issues that would alleviate life-long problems of education, employment, and acceptable levels of health.
5. Housing – lack of suitable accommodation – posed chronic delivery problems to InterAgency members whose responsibilities lay outside this area. However, they were expected to service their clients who would **likely present in another area of the region** within a few months, having not had their more complex needs addressed.

## 4.2 Ranked Priorities for the Northern Rivers region

LGA	Priority 1	Priority 2	Priority 3	Priority 4	Priority 5
	Mental Health services	Crisis and short-term housing	Transport	Youth services, include housing & transport	DV-D&A cycle
<b>Tweed</b>	Assisted & community managed Housing	Affordable Housing, esp for <b>aged</b> , youth, disabled.	Community Management development; training	Transport esp for young people to stop <b>Youth drain</b> .	Respite care
<b>Clarence</b>	Crisis Accommodation	Cycle of poverty, particularly employment & training access	Transport access to services, and inflexibility of systems	Ill - resourced part-time workers; no travel funds for region.	Political & divide =no economies of scale; affects youth, et al.
<b>Casino</b>	Transport: public	Youth Services (facilities & worker)	Family and children services re D.V. & D/A	Part-time workers	Crisis accomm. Esp for transient popl. & aged
<b>Kyogle</b>	Community Management development; training	Youth; housing, employment & support	Transport	Mens support: abuse, D.V., D & A services	Crisis accomm.
<b>Ballina</b>	Crisis accommodation	Affordable housing	Transport – public & community	Assisted housing	Part-time workers
<b>Byron</b>	Affordable housing	Employment, esp for Youth.	Transport	Assisted housing	Generalist welfare support services

### Summary:

- 1. Crisis Accommodation (8)** which includes Respite care (1)
- 2. Transport (7)** especially public and community
- 3. Affordable Housing (5)** with equal **Management Support & Staffing (5)**
- 4. Youth, (4.5)** (including employment & training)
- 5. Family issues including D.V./D&A/Mental Health, (4 each), with Assisted Housing (4).**

## 4.3 Issues influencing the ranking process

All forums concluded that poverty, lack of opportunity to learn or work, and access to affordable transport posed the greatest threats to social capital development in the Northern Rivers.

In the case of Lismore (which includes the Nimbin InterAgency), mental health issues dominated the forum prioritisation. (A culture of cannabis tolerance was cited as a factor both contributing to, attracting, and worsening mental health and social dysfunction. This was expressed in the other six forums, but to a lesser degree.) Mental health workers were not always present at the forums.



#### 4.3 Issues influencing ranking process (cont.)

##### **Time allowance**

All forums expressed real concern about issues being too complex to provide solutions in a short forum timeframe. In the Tweed forum, a collaborative, community-managed model was championed. This was suggested in the face of continuous difficulties in secured adequate funding from either government source.

##### **Representation at Forums**

Small forum numbers with industry-specific focus tended to “sway the vote”. Many apologies were received due to the lack of available staff to attend regional meetings. The absence of a broad mix of service delivery personnel was therefore likely to influence the prioritisation process. Indigenous representation and articulation varied between forums, with a total representation of 7%.

##### **Political process**

Scepticism over capacity to influence State-wide criteria determination, priorities and budget input in the Liberal/National Party seats of the region was also expressed. Issues that are currently predominately funded through Commonwealth Sources featured as lower priorities, given the context of the forum (eg. Aged Services, some FACS). **The frustrations expressed by InterAgency members over the political, funding, resourcing and data collection processes discussed was high. Most common problems revolved around the impression of being over-consulted, but gaining little news of effective change as a result of participation. The lack of feedback from participation over a period of years resulted in low morale, ineffective communication, increased stress with reduced efficiency in the workplace etc.**

That effective State government research, development and change initiatives might be in place was generally perceived as “not noticeable” or “not valuable” to the majority of forum members whose principle duty was service delivery. Collaborative efforts of State driven human services working parties were not understood or well communicated at this “community coal face level”. Communication issues between various levels of management were raised with less emphasis than service delivery problems.

##### **Other issues**

A myriad of issues were tabled for prioritisation included resourcing youth, working with children, addressing chronic social dysfunction particularly concerning drug and alcohol abuse, and for special needs of aboriginal people alienated from their families. Mens health and well-being, access to services, and patterns of hidden health problems were prevalent discussion topics.

While searching for objectivity in the decision-making process, (including calling for specific and valid evidence of service need), the facilitator determined high levels of anxiety and stress from constituent members. This behaviour, along with the reported summaries from the CPOs demonstrated a region experiencing chaos, not necessarily due to the systems in place, but the increased volume of need with inadequate resources to partially address them. Increases in service demands of more than 50% since 1996 (particularly in housing, youth crisis, domestic violence, drug & alcohol/mental health, transport problems and isolation, evidenced by worsening repeat referrals) when sorted collectively, showed a consistent trend. This trend made it difficult to prioritise each issue against each other.

#### 4.4 Workplace liability

Of the issues raised, a hidden, or indirect service gap or barrier was highlighted. A trend concerning the quality of **workplace life** for the members who attended the forums across the Northern Rivers emerged. Participants reported that their own day-to-day work crises (resulting from inadequate resourcing and the inevitable lack of up-skilling, planning, administrative accountability and communications) meant that the majority (75%) of the day is spent dealing with highly stressful situations, with the impression that no likely improvements for service workers are available within a reasonable period of time. An interagency member reported that she was attending to up to 40 homeless people a day at peak periods in her workplace. She is a well-regarded senior community centre co-ordinator, not a generalist welfare worker, nor a social worker, and definitely not a psychiatric nurse - all of whom may be required to handle this volume of need.

#### 4.5 Training in the workplace and for management

Lack of specific skills-based training featured in all seven forums. These included service delivery training such as disability service training, which remains unfunded. Extending training into other services to assist with specific needs was suggested, particularly in relation to police service recruits handling domestic violence issues, Training for youth to take up community initiatives featured prominently at Kyogle, Clarence and Byron Bay.

Extensive change management need, and community management support, was cited as problems in most of the forums. The need for volunteer training and volunteer management raised issues of volunteer exploitation and dependence on unpaid, poorly skilled personnel to deal with increasing numbers of seriously disturbed or critical need clients.

Additional training was suggested for service workers to learn improved teamwork, communication, conflict-resolution and mediation skills. Further developmental training services were suggested for management committees with industrial relations and human resource development and management responsibilities. Planning, business analysis and data collection skills were also cited as poorly developed in most service-delivery staff.



## REGIONAL IDENTITY

### 4.7 How is this region different?

Participants were asked to describe their LGA or combined LGA (per the Clarence) so that a comparison between the Northern Rivers and other regional areas of Australia could be made.

The responses were varied, but had some commonalities. Participants reported that, unlike many regions of Australia, the Northern Rivers attracts a significant transient population where there are negligible employment opportunities. Visitors don't arrive to harvest and work as much as they might in the Riverina or in Northern Queensland. This transient population may report as residents for a census collection, but usually they don't. The implications for this region in working with transient people are significant, and most of them revolve around basic survival needs.

Additionally, with three geographical divisions (rivers/valleys), the "tyranny of distance" prevails, especially when funding for co-ordination, communication and travel is, at best, scant. Some areas of our region have high information technology uptake, but the gap between the IT literate and the "IT-inaccessibles" reportedly continues to widen, particularly when primary needs are not met. Travel between valleys, between villages and towns, remains acute. Fees for public transport are basically unaffordable for people relying on Commonwealth government subsidy for survival.

Transport access for people across the dilapidated inland road network, without reliable vehicles, remains a critical issue. This is a particular barrier to service access for the young, disabled, frail and isolated living in villages across the region. Incidents of mental-health related violence are increasing; young people hitch-hiking between villages or to larger towns such as Lismore, Kyogle etc., are at risk of harm.

Participants also highlighted that the region suffers extremes of climate – from flooding and deluge rains, through to drought and extreme freezing conditions. While we have a large rural town network, many people can now only afford to live in more isolated village communities as the "gentrification" of the townships grows. These physical location issues combine to demonstrate a tough place to live on a small income.

We have .04% of the State's population recorded as living in the Northern Rivers<sup>3</sup>. However, in our coastal areas tourists and transient residents place inordinate pressure on services funded by resident population data alone. Many of the "tourists" that arrive do not bring adequate financial resources to support their stay. Other new residents are attracted by the climate, the drug-tolerant community, the "life style". With

<sup>3</sup> ABS 2001 Census data shows total population is 261,412.

one of the lowest populations of working young people in Australia (aged 20 – 35) our career-based strategies are very under-developed. The new residents settle without adequate income-earning plans. Our business communities receive on average two requests a week to sponsor or support community/charitable exercises, and many are struggling to survive – therefore we do not have a culture of extensive private support for those in need.

Participants agreed we have no significant manufacturing base to create the demand for technical training and hope for people to train, apprentice or re-train as they leave school or the workplace. While we have a growing interest in environmental concerns, we do not have a housing boom to encourage new eco-friendly development practices across the region. Some forum participants highlighted that Councils are unable to enforce responsible development options (such as transport to new developments) etc.



We have a significant aging and disabled population, whose needs are suppressed.

We have one of Australia's highest single-parent cultures, and one of the State's highest populations for children with disabilities and "commonplace" health problems such as recurrent asthma. We have the State's highest mental health reported incidents. It would appear – from the issues reported at the 7 forums and their planning sessions, that this region is "bursting at the seams".

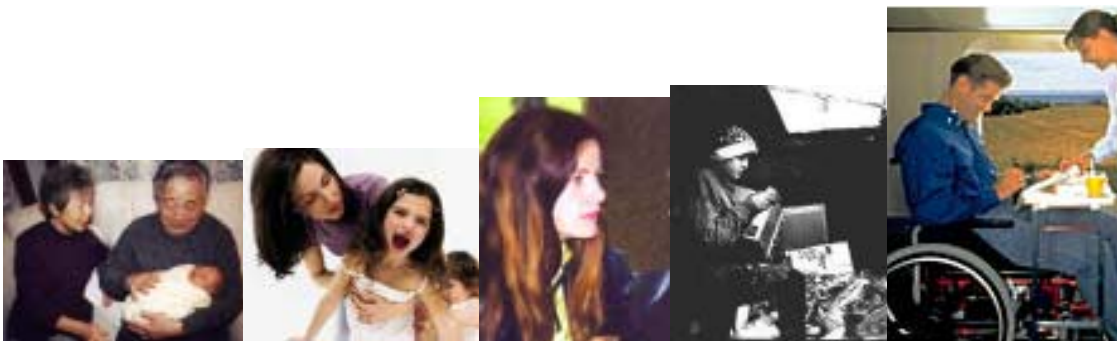
### The 7 Regional InterAgency Forums

The process by which this information was collected had flaws, but essentially provides a strong, effective voice for collaboration, for ensuring the concerns of our regional workforce are heard, and for developing a realistic strategy. Our indigenous members will also continue to participate, and look forward to having a stronger voice; the forum pace was reported as fast, disconcerting and alienating to some participants.

In asking the CPO's to collate information from the various General and InterAgency groups across the region, we were also able to determine the diverse workload and broad range of duties each Community Project Officer tackled. Where the town had limited economic development strategies that encouraged co-operation and consultation between government, business and community, the outcomes of the CPO's InterAgency consultation was less clear. In one instance, at Ballina the process was too demanding for the Council CPO, and the neighbouring Community Association (Ballina & District Community Services Association) took responsibility for supplying input to the process.

## 5. Summaries of seven Northern Rivers InterAgency forums

Northern Rivers, New South Wales



### CONSULTATION PREPARATION PAPERS

The InterAgency Consultation papers prepared prior to these seven sessions are so numerous and lengthy in size, format and scope, they are not available for easy distribution.

However, should you require access to this information, submit your request to the relevant Community Project Officer whose Local Government office would have the data stored on each CPO's computer system.

# australia

## 5.1 Lismore City LGA Inter-Agency forum summary

**STEP ONE: Approached by CPO in preparation:** Disability Interagency, Older Person's Interagency, Youth Interagency, Indigenous Interagency, Domestic Violence Liaison Committee, Nimbin (representing their 7 different Interagencies – Youth, Health & Welfare, Families First, Domestic Violence, Community Drug Action Team, Nimbin Neighbourhood Improvement Program, Police/Community Consultative Committee), Early Intervention interagency (local & regional – decided with them not to pursue), pre-school network .

**STEP TWO:** FORUM held at Lismore City Council 6 June 2002

Forum participants: 34 present, including 2 Council employees Each interagency was represented.

Indigenous: 70 services/people; Youth: 46 groups on its mailing list; Nimbin 7+ agencies; Domestic Violence: 48 groups/people; Disability – 36 groups/people; Aged – 33 groups/people; General: 80.

LOCAL SERVICES REPRESENTED	NOT REPRESENTED On the Day
Emergency, Police, Housing, Drug & Alcohol, Children's, Women's, Domestic Violence, Mental Health, Youth, Older Persons, Gambling Service, Disability, Families First, Indigenous, Neighbourhood Centres, Probation & parole.	Multi-cultural, Employment services.

### *EXPRESSED NEEDS AND CONCERNS – Prioritised from Agency reports 92 issues raised*

1. Supported **housing** for people with **mental health** issues supplied through community & public housing, extending services from busiest clinic in NSW (Richmond), adding to the regional accommodation service at Ballina & District Services Community Association (BDSCA).
2. Housing remains critical problem not only for people with mental health problems but also for **indigenous people, single parents, young people, families facing separation and isolation; also people with a disability**, housing is an issue. Affordable housing worse than previously reported levels (2000, and 1997 DOCS report).
3. **Ill-equipped services:** Extend services into other mental health support and clinical areas to attract resident Lismore-based psychiatrists, to include co-ordinated case management, visitation services for families, young people, and the isolated/frail strategies.
4. For outreach services in mental health, **Nimbin focused issues** were raised through the general Interagency consultation; solutions requiring a full time Mental Health worker supported by a Drug & Alcohol worker. Assisted accommodation (for people returning to their community post-detox) was suggested to address difficult community infrastructure problems. Lismore district's identity was seen as being an openly drug-tolerant part of the region, attracting serious transient-resident problems with no funding for semi-permanent residents.
5. **Youth issues** – including well-being, health, self-harm & suicide, isolation and violence; end "pilot project" phenomena to fund core activities. Transport for employment, education and health are a serious safety and social capital issue. Youth health issues to be addressed by Area Health and the Division of GPs with a regional perspective for more isolated young people.

**5.1 Lismore Interagency Summary cont.****Other Difficulties mentioned but not ranked**

- Domestic violence, court support for families in crisis
- Transport – see Older Person's & Disability Reports: No Public transport; Community transport at its limit and only able to serve limited client-base with overly tight criteria;
- Older people in completely inadequate temporary accommodation
- Disability services at capacity, with suppressed needs no longer being identified: issue is about the changes to the methodology in receiving and keeping requests for services. Once the service is full we do not keep a waiting list. Therefore, it appears that there isn't one. When, in fact, there is now no ability to know how many people aren't receiving service in order to argue for more funds for service.

**TOP FIVE BARRIERS OR DIFFICULTIES IN IMPLEMENTING CHANGE**

1. Housing crisis in Lismore, transport issues for outer-lying villages: **under funded**
2. **Lack of core funding** for full-time staff or for part-time staff to have administrative/planning support; SAS funds not permanent, Early Intervention is focused only on those in most severe need. (funding is for 40 clients but there are 80 clients).
3. **Management committees** and managers need planning and financial mgt skills.
4. Amalgamation of services difficult with change due to **lack of access to data, systems to track need & evidence**; little service support means workers skilled in service delivery are expected to be quality control managers which is technically and personally very difficult, if not impossible.
5. **Policy** implementation: Service models that will work across such a diverse region considered impossible to design, particularly for aboriginal needs (eg. HACC services).

***EXPRESSED SOLUTIONS FROM LISMORE***

Solutions were not clearly articulated with the 34 people present, most of who had not recently participated in an InterAgency process. Consistent return to clarifying issues resulted in rising scepticism of the consultative processes already presented in previous settings over the past five years. Regional solutions to local problems were (somewhat scathingly) criticised in terms of reduced services, amalgamation of government support initiatives, repeated dependency on "pilot projects", and general withdrawal of core funding.

The forum's general feedback was that such processes usually resulted in tightening of funding, targeted at already exhausted and under-support or under-skilled workers.

Effective collaboration and co-operation as expressed on the day was determined as positive.

## 5.2 Tweed Shire LGA Interagency Forum Summary

**STEP ONE: Approached by CPO in preparation:** Aged (9 orgs), Disability (13 orgs), Tweed General (7 orgs).

Not approached: Youth Interagency

**OUTCOME:** 3 InterAgency Summaries prepared.

**STEP TWO:**

**FORUM held at Tweed Heads Council building 13 June 2002**

Forum participants: 14 present, including 3 Council employees

LOCAL SERVICES REPRESENTED	NOT REPRESENTED on the day
Housing, Family (Community) including men's well-being, After School & Vacation Care, Older Persons, Youth Housing, Community Care, Women's, Community Centre, Disability support, Home support	Community health, Multi-cultural, Employment services, Police, Legal services, Children's, D & A., Mental Health.

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### **EXPRESSED NEEDS AND CONCERNS – Prioritised from 68 issues**

1. **Affordable housing:** incentives from Local Govt & State Govt have failed to stimulate urgently needed housing solutions;
2. **Assisted housing** urgently required for disability, youth and mental health clients: as DoH has failed us, we may have to look at community-owned facilities. How can we achieve this when we have little planning expertise and funding to achieve this? **Respite accommodation** for young people, families, and others caring for the frail and disabled. Now is time to consider a creative NGO enterprise, as Federal and State efforts do not recognise our tourism and transient affected issues across the district. Other respite care needs raised but not ranked.
3. **Transport:** for people without cars, the district is extremely difficult to live in – to get to work, to get to opportunities to learn and train, to get urgent care, food and services. This most obviously affects young people across the region. They're leaving. Major problem.
4. **Management support** – both for staff and management committees; industrial, HR, safety, and financial management issues are becoming critical – prevents us working to our capacity. Getting good staff, funding permanent staff, volunteer exploitation, training etc.
5. **Respite accommodation** for young people, families, and others caring for the frail and disabled. Now is time to consider a creative NGO enterprise, as Federal and State efforts do not recognise our tourism and transient affected issues across the district. Other respite care needs raised but not ranked.



## 5.2 Tweed Interagency Summary cont.

### **Other Difficulties mentioned but not ranked for Tweed**

- There were 68 reported issues ranging from housing for people with additional needs through to lack of flexible respite care for people with dementia;
- Employment, poverty and cycles of neglect including D.V. raised;
- Meeting the needs of aboriginal client base not represented at the forum;
- Drug and alcohol problems were raised but not ranked;
- Children's' services at crisis point for childcare, OOSH, documented in General Agency report.

### **TOP FIVE BARRIERS OR DIFFICULTIES IN IMPLEMENTING CHANGE**

1. Waiting for HACC, and DoH solutions will not solve our needs. Council incentives to encourage business sector to build affordable housing outside our immediate influence.
2. Depleted capacity of mainstream services (CACPS, COPS, Home care) including extended wait times (50-60 people waiting for services for over 2 months) for aging population – not easy to solve. Outer communities needs not understood.
3. Lack of incentive for local government to co-operate with Federal government on core issues, particularly innovating Housing solutions as it's often been a State issue.
4. Employment services for young people are increasingly difficult to access, harder to collect data on, and too few places for young people to supply information and become part of the solution.
5. Equity of access to transport services – regional solution needed for local problems.

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### ***EXPRESSED SOLUTIONS FROM TWEED***

Tweed InterAgency discussed the complexity of funding and criteria to rank issues. When confronted with the inadequacies of this process, their own long-standing efforts, and several other factors, a different prioritisation process was suggested.

The solution was considered localised, simple and collaborative.

The Tweed group proposed that co-operative efforts between the InterAgency groups could result in significant outcomes. Specific, building-by-building, service-by-service efforts to address housing needs were seen as the major solution. This would require them to address communication, management and funding issues collaboratively. This would provide the model needed to ensure skills and track-record to address more complex issues in future.

### 5.3 The Clarence LGA Interagency Forum Summary

**STEP ONE: Approached by CPO in preparation:** Housing & Support Working Group, Transport, Youth, a summary from Grafton Women's Refuge supplied post-forum, and Aged/Disability planning paper (Issues Paper, November 2001)

OUTCOME: 3 InterAgency Summaries prepared

**STEP TWO:**

Forum held at Cowper Hall, Cowper (Pristine Waters Shire) participants: 17 present, including 1 CPO

LOCAL SERVICES REPRESENTED	NOT REPRESENTED on the day
Aged, Area Assistance Scheme, Women's Refuge, Lower Clarence Women's Group, Community Development, Centrelink Multicultural/Lingual service, Aged Care Disability support, Housing, Home support Red Cross, Telecross, Information and Referral, Volunteer Placement, Home Maintenance & Modification, Children with disabilities, Children's services, Neighbourhood Centre, Adult Learning, Youth Development, Transport Forum, Housing Forum.	Area Health/Community health, Employment services, Police, Legal services, Education services, DoCS, Indigenous, (These are represented by the interagency rep.)

**EXPRESSED NEEDS AND CONCERNS – Prioritised from 35 documented issues; 2 follow-up email reports.**

1. **Crisis accommodation** needs are extreme – only a few bed sits available in Maclean, and DoH owned, Anglicare managed services are at their limit. DOH priority Housing has one year waiting list.
2. **The cycle of poverty**, unemployment, low income, Drug & Alcohol abuse, Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault and other big social issues are considered fundamental priorities with significant service gaps. The creation of meaningful employment, education and access to training is critical in such a poor region.
3. **Isolation, lack of transport**, and lack of access to Health services caused by short staffing/part time staffing and inflexibility.
4. Welfare workers are **only part-time**, not meeting needs, not able to travel to disadvantaged
5. Economies of scale are not available in The Clarence: perception of **Grafton City population** declining does NOT represent an accurate picture of the rapidly growing Clarence Valley as a whole. Lack of local government amalgamation means little shared efficiencies, comparable to other LGA's, eg. Lismore, Coffs Harbour, Tweed, despite significant comparable population density, highest population growth in New South Wales (regional), and similar scale of terrain. Inland communities not benefiting from increased tourism industry are at particular risk of a depressed economy Social and Community Service system.

## 5.6 Clarence Interagency Summary cont.

### **Other Difficulties mentioned but not ranked**

- **People with English** as a second language are extremely isolated, and Grafton hub does not outreach to these people, particularly women.
- Inclusion of aboriginal needs: lack of housing, increased D/V, growing unemployment and racism
- Access to health services, particularly allied health and specialist care
- Larger group of low-income (but not Highest Priority) housing needs client-base not being met.

### **TOP FIVE BARRIERS OR DIFFICULTIES IN IMPLEMENTING CHANGE**

1. Private sector have not responded to Federal initiatives to build low-cost housing.
2. Suppressed needs are not fully documented or understood wide-scale, despite consultations;
3. Health services are inflexible, inadequate and in a “shambles” – this includes serious issue of lack of bulk billing from medical services
4. Management crises such as public liability, heavy responsibilities for Mgt Committees etc., and other HR/Industrial issues (including volunteer exploitation) indicate inability to plan, change and implement solutions. Networking, sharing and reducing duplication therefore cannot occur.
5. Despite the close-knit nature of smaller communities, the larger towns (Yamba, Grafton) are not capable of outreaching properly as they themselves are already divided and dispersed through rapid growth.

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### **EXPRESSED SOLUTIONS**

Clarence InterAgency raised several varied opinions about how to address significant social crises. The absence of the largest funded organisation for the Valley prevented full dialogue, but a strong mix of representatives ensured a good debate. The conclusions reached were:

1. An alternative NGO is required for the lower Clarence that will concentrate on addressing services gaps already raised. The strategy for establishing this might be achieved through co-ordinated InterAgency meetings.
2. Meaningful work/job creation programmes can be provided through stronger relationships between private, government and community sector.
3. Pool professional resources to support management committees, and reassess supply of services, based on geographic not demographic areas alone.
4. Use the strengths of the InterAgency process to contribute to existing projects so that under-resourced but essentially functional organisations and systems can operate to their potential.

## 5.4 Richmond Valley Interagency Summary

**STEP ONE: Approached by CPO in preparation:** quarterly meetings discussion

OUTCOME: 3 InterAgency Summaries prepared (attached).

**STEP TWO:**

**FORUM held at Oaks Estate, North Casino 25 June 2002**

Forum participants: 14 present, including 1 Council (CPO) employee

LOCAL SERVICES REPRESENTED	NOT REPRESENTED
Aboriginal (Wula Wula Nga), Youth (ReConnect), Neighbourhood Ctr, Housing (DoH, HACC, Bunjalung), IFBS, Young Women's Accommodation, Family Support, On-Focus, Community Health	Employment services, Police, Legal services, Education & Training services, DoCS, Aged, Disabilities, Emergency Welfare, Transport specific, Lands Council,

EXPRESSED NEEDS AND CONCERNS – Prioritised from forum

- 1. Transport – public & community** – lack of it, inequity, was considered the connecting factor 24 issues raised at the forum. Subsidy, revitalisation of train service to the other major towns of the region, for access to employment, education, health, and important social networks; because of easier access to Public Housing, people from across the region were in Casino without adequate transport, support services, mens' services, and particularly for elderly with disabilities
- 2. Youth Concerns**, including provision of a youth worker at Evans Head (threatened with imminent closure), Youth Centre (NIMBY problem) closure, racism – particularly against young aboriginal residents, cycle of poverty including **domestic violence**;
- 3. Family and Children** – service delivery gaps significant: no Child/Family service, no OOSH, and other problems caused by Issue 4; Sexual Assault services not well promoted; AVO rate one of the highest in NSW (60 per month); **operating in “crisis mgt mode 75% of time”**
- Welfare workers are **only part-time**, not meeting needs, not able to travel to disadvantaged in outer areas of region; (eg. One service had 46 p/t workers, 1 f/t worker and another had 56 p/t workers with 1 f/t co-ordinator); not adequate pay structure, can't attract quality workers. No tax breaks for rural/regional/isolated workers in NSW (as there is in Qld);
- Transient and/or mentally unwell population – **no emergency accommodation service** – residents spend up to \$150 to get treatments/support travelling; Neighbourhood Centre receives people in crisis with complex needs, not just housing, but Health.

#### 5.4 Richmond Valley Interagency Summary cont.

##### Other Difficulties raised but not ranked

- **Court Support** – Legal Aid Commission’s new regional model failed to consult on its suitability or adoption for Casino, Kyogle and Mullumbimby outreach from Lismore;
- Aboriginal funding being achieved but **aboriginal people not easily able to access** the specially provided services without determination, skills and sometimes a “fight” ; racism in town obvious: lack of employment of aboriginal people; popl. density of indigenous people is 4.3% (NSW average 1.68%).
- Access to health services, particularly allied health and specialist care
- Larger group of low-income (but not Top Priority) housing client-base not being met.

#### TOP FIVE BARRIERS OR DIFFICULTIES IN IMPLEMENTING CHANGE

1. **No recurrent funding for youth** – ongoing problems such as employment, skilling/training, and violence, are not being addressed
2. **Govt Departments are not collaborating or flexible** over serious issues such as mental health crisis accommodation, nor are they providing much needed local data to support applications for funding to address serious problems;
3. **Management skills** are not easy to find, develop because of chronic employment difficulties/part-time workers in service delivery: can’t survey, can’t plan, can’t use technology properly, can’t afford IT support, can’t develop effective lobby strategies, and can’t afford training for management or management committees.
4. **Efforts to network with Lismore prove fruitless** – we don’t always know why – Things are worsening especially as there is no funding for travel to Lismore, nor to outer lying areas of region; Lismore is under-resourced itself and can’t extend services to our Shire – our towns usually miss out; our villages are ignored.

**Close-knit community strengths not utilised** because of long-standing tradition, possibly racism, and believing no need to market services strongly within the Shire.

#### EXPRESSED SOLUTIONS

If regional transport solutions could be addressed alongside local transport through an invigorated transport injection of funds towards viability, community workers could co-operate with the very small business community to determine solutions, learn skills and adopt a collaborative model (based on good connections and communication already in place).

A clear focus on the needs of young people would enable young people to remain in the Shire, through collective services such as youth workers, specialist youth health workers (including those outside of Evans, Woodburn and Casino), transport and centre services. Better communication about why the problems exist between Commonwealth, State and Local Government down to us at the “coal face” would help us develop input to solutions.

“As you are aware, there are a number of services that the NRAHS are meant to provide, that we do not receive- the Mid Richmond has had NO D&A counsellor for 6 months, we have had No Child & Family Health services for 12 months, we have No generic counselling services...No early intervention services for children. Additionally, Casino Family Support is funded to provide services to this area, and we have not received any outreach services for 18 months. It is not satisfactory that positions vacant are not filled and I have taken this up with area DoCS. The Mid Richmond is constantly promised services, that do not come to fruition- perhaps this is another issue for discussion- how are isolated areas allocated services??? Obviously the provision of services from larger regional centres is not successful, particularly in our case.” Mid Richmond Neighbourhood Centre.

## 5.5 Kyogle Interagency (Kyogle Can Do) Summary

**STEP ONE: Approached by CPO in preparation:** Indigenous, Youth, Disability Access, and some Children's Issues

OUTCOME: 4 InterAgency Summaries prepared

**STEP TWO:** FORUM held at Roxy Theatre Centre 26 June 2002

Forum participants: 9 present, including 1 Council employee

LOCAL SERVICES REPRESENTED	NOT REPRESENTED
Youth, Mens, Youth Health, Community Health, <u>Business</u> , Family Support Service.	Employment services, Police, Legal services, Education & Training services, DoCS, Aged, Disabilities, Emergency Welfare, Transport specific, Lands Council, Housing, Quota, Community Drug Action Team, No one from outer lying villages or towns.

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### **EXPRESSED NEEDS AND CONCERNS – Prioritised from forum & reports**

1. No co-ordinated **management plan** for community development/social development integrated into general community and business life: many implications for community and social development, particularly as community workers are generally part-time and are not able to access complex funding applications easily.
2. **Transport** is a mess – isolation across the Shire is at crisis point.
3. **Employment crisis**, particularly for young people and people displaced by closure of traditional industries is double the NSW average. The cycle of poverty, multi-generational abuse including drug & alcohol abuse is extreme. Services have significant gaps: for example, people who might enter voluntarily into a self-help “detox” programme can only access a programme that is dominated by people sent there unwillingly after jail sentences (court orders), making participation extremely limited if not damaging.
4. **Family support**, particularly for addressing men's needs (domestic violence, depression, D & A abuse)
5. **Crisis housing worsens mental health/D&A/DV problems across the shire; affordable housing for low-income families is also at serious levels. Vacancies exist outside of town, but they're in poor condition or isolated etc.**

## 5.5 Kyogle Interagency Summary cont.

### Other Difficulties mentioned but not ranked

- Significant issues were presented in the Interagency papers.
- Needs for aboriginal families, particularly concerning employment , native title and housing are critical; no workers to act as role models pose long-term problems; Need for expansion of cross-cultural projects.
- Older persons/disabled using motorised scooters pose serious safety hazards

### TOP FIVE BARRIERS OR DIFFICULTIES IN IMPLEMENTING CHANGE

1. **Unfunded commitment from local, State & Federal** sources to achieve co-ordinated economic growth for the town
2. **Lack of transport feasibility plan** to determine affordable solutions, business case towards its improvement
3. **Geographical isolation** of the shire prevents connection with other villages and towns across the region – serious social isolation, transport and housing problems manifest from under and un-employment
4. **Exploitation of volunteers, lack of economic development,** age-old ways of dealing with complex problems

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### EXPRESSED SOLUTIONS

Topping up of existing services in **youth** was considered essential to continue long-standing efforts to include young people in Kyogle Shire's development.

A cohesive community development strategy is urgently needed, to be developed with better support for the CPO, the economic development unit (to be established), and other paid co-ordination services, particularly to improve access to **strategic and entrepreneurial information.** "A co-ordinated approach by government agencies (through the premiers department to look at where the bucks are going and where they could go in an equity spread to) consulting with communities in a considerate and timely manner i.e. meeting held in each shire prior to budgeting allocations to government departments to outline this is how much \$ is available to your community where do you want to put it i.e. Premier says \$xx Kyogle Council area 2002-03 for social welfare projects meeting targets for aged/ youth/ indigenous/ disabled/ women/ men/ families to be distributed through existing services ie. Kyogle FSS; DOCS; Kyogle Youth Action: DOCS; Kyogle Council Community Projects Officer: Planning NSW; Land Councils: ATSIC; Home and Community Care: ADHC etc. If this is all happening – we need to know about it."

**Transport feasibility** to be investigated – integration with other council, tourism development plans  
 A **multi-functional proposal** to incorporate cultural, heritage, employment, and tourism needs proposed.  
 Special **men's** service proposal was also tabled in writing for discussion. Adding to existing services for much needed suicide prevention services (via Area Health) was proposed.

## 5.6 Ballina Interagency Summary

**STEP ONE: Interagency discussions were held, but without CPO guidance on pro-forma research**

OUTCOME: BDSCA (community organisation) took up promotion of process.

**FORUM held at Ballina & District Community Services Association 1 July 2002**

Forum participants: 4 present, including 0 Council employee

LOCAL SERVICES REPRESENTED	NOT REPRESENTED
ReConnect (Family Support 12-18 years), Information & Referral services (BDSCA), Youth & Children's Service (including OOSH, accomm, activities, aboriginal youth work, etc) Community Health (Aged/Disabled/mental/child/family etc.)	Police, Charitable emergency services, education, DoCs, Family Support, HACC, D & A, Sexual Assault, Mens, specific mental health, specific services for older people/aged, Legal, Early Childhood, Employment etc.

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### **EXPRESSED NEEDS AND CONCERNS – Prioritised from discussion & statistics only**

1. **Crisis accommodation** – not just for Aged services, but particularly for young people and families at risk: caravan parks planned (West Ballina) are not going to meet needs here. Emergency housing is “impossible to get, even for children at risk with multiple incidents”.
2. **Affordable housing** – we’re picking up Byron’s overflow – but there’s a 10-year wait for public housing, and very little available. This provides a real strain on resources. Getting information circulating is sometimes difficult, between agencies, between districts, particularly in view of the latest changes socially. This places significant pressures on all services, and on the housing and transport infrastructure. We’re unable to meet the needs of people who live here, and they’re leaving, some to Casino for affordable housing, others leave the region. Assisted housing also is desperately needed, for aboriginal, frail/disabled, children and youth.
3. We have a high turnover of people coming and going. On census night in the main part of town, we have visitors staying in people’s homes of .05% - not even in a peak period. We have a significant social demographic change in the past five years: rapid increase in single parent families (17%), Generally “...younger children (0-9 years) are not on the increase, but there has been a significant increase in youth (10 – 19 years), with a decline in the 20-39 family formation population. For older people the latest census data shows:
  - the large increase in the 40-64 population,
  - the surprising decline in the 65-74 population and
  - the expected very large increase in the very old 75+ population.
  - The decline in the 20-39 population, particularly the decline in the 30-39 population, may herald a decade of declining birth rates (Note: decline in family numbers) .

The more immediate challenges are the meeting of demand for services from the very old, the 10-19 population and their families, and the 40-64 population in their middle years (many with dependent children) and in pre-retirement. “ ABS 2001 Census Statistics supplied with analysis courtesy of participant, Ian Dall , B.Soc. Work. (Ballina Community Health, NRAHS).
4. **Transport difficulties** – expensive, and prohibitive – we’re working on it, but the progress is so slow. For a young person to get to Wollongbar TAFE and return, each week costs \$35 week. This is a deterrent, and is unequitable.
5. **Management Skills** for community organisations, for planning personnel, for working collaboratively with the CPO (who needs more assistance and Local Government commitment.) to work with problems such as inadequate funding for good part-time workers.



**5.6 Ballina Interagency Summary cont.****Other Issues mentioned but not ranked**

- ❑ “Sea Change” factor – once families leave the cities, they have a significant cultural and social need, living off capital, and or not realising how vulnerable they become; then grow dependent on Centrelink, public health facilities, and high costs of fuel, travel. These income levels are hidden – a growing under-employed community; volunteering, part-time working.
- ❑ Sub-standard housing, coastal housing rental & price rises, chasing affordable rents promotes instability – half the students that start in a class in February are gone by the end of the that same year. Transience.
- ❑ Centralisation of services for regional disability services

**TOP FIVE BARRIERS OR DIFFICULTIES IN IMPLEMENTING CHANGE**

1. Lack of integrated support between the social, business and ecological table: The business development sector appear to sit at another table, separate, and Local Govt. is not able to enforce responsible development that includes adequate transport contributions, adequate low-cost housing solutions, and incentive for housing solutions.
2. Ill-researched planning that duplicates already reduced services; part-time workers very stressed and the solutions then appear out of reach, even impossible; restructuring appears to be crippling with far less consultation occurring.
3. Local Government does not appear committed to supporting CPO, and other community development projects long term.
4. Governmental rigidity in the face of failing infrastructure – lack of co-operation – eg. “breaching” because of isolation, lack of transport, and other difficulties.
5. Focus has been on aging and business communities – but it’s the others that need help too.

**EXPRESSED SOLUTIONS**

1. To overcome under-employment, poverty issues, inadequate services, create incentive and build useful rapport between business and community to address housing crisis.
2. Continue supporting initiatives of Public transport committee, led by Sue Daiken, Counsellor, to attain goals in line with the NSW Local Govt. Assembly towards improved access points, promotion of the service, and reduction of costs (\$15 down to \$8 return Lismore), but support through reduction of communication and other barriers (such as having to pay to attend NewStart interviews/Housing services interviews) to basic human services.
3. Use these forums to communicate outcomes to State planners, so that out input from local services is understood, particularly with rapidly changing needs, in context of Local Govt’s plans as well. An example would be the improvement of Child Protection Helpline to be a Hotline; properly researched and consulted before being changed.

## 5.7 Byron Shire Interagency Summary

**STEP ONE: Approached by CPO in preparation:** Ballina/Byron Aboriginal Interagency, Ballina/Byron Aged & Disability Interagency, ECICP – Early Intervention – Childrens Services Network; Stop Violence Against Women Network, WEBY – Youth Interagency and School Counsellors Network

**OUTCOME:** 3 InterAgency Summaries prepared with solutions.

**STEP TWO:** FORUM held at Byron Council building, Mullumbimby 4 July 2002

Forum participants: 13 present, including 1 Council employee (CPO)

LOCAL SERVICES REPRESENTED	NOT REPRESENTED on the day
Community Health, Aunty Program, DoCS, Community Centre, ECICP, Community Transport, Youth Service, Family Support Service, Youth Health, Social Planning Committee (BSC) Counsellors Network	Employment services, Police, Education services, Indigenous, DADHC. Some apologies were received from these services.

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### **EXPRESSED NEEDS AND CONCERNS – Prioritised from 85 documented issues**

1. Impact of loss of affordable housing
2. Sustainable employment – particularly for youth
3. Affordable transport: “If you don’t have a car in this region, then you’re stuffed”.
4. Crisis mental health/D&A issues particularly accessing professional workers caused by high levels of transience (eg. No generalist welfare worker in Byron Bay, and there are approximately 40 homeless people a day to service in peak periods).
5. Family support, particularly following family breakdown; integrated youth support.

Considerable discussion took place concerning the impact of tourism on all of the services above, currently estimated at 1,752,000, being approximately, 233% increase since 1999, particularly as many services are only funded to meet resident population (28,900).

The social planning, community profiles, cultural and safety plans, disability plans and community development to build Social Capital were reported at crisis points because of inability by local government to implement due to lack of funds and other reasons.

Discussion on the problems of isolation, networking between the major villages and towns with substandard, inadequate public and community transport (for many reasons) took place.

## 5.7 Byron Shire Interagency Summary cont.

### Other Difficulties mentioned but not ranked

- Poverty, underemployment, stimulation of long-lasting economic means within sustainable development.
- Post-school training – access to facilities – especially in Brunswick Valley.
- Access to health services, particularly allied health and specialist care
- Larger group of low-income (but not Top Priority) housing client-base not being met.

### TOP FIVE BARRIERS OR DIFFICULTIES IN IMPLEMENTING CHANGE

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1. **Political process** – we have lower priorities than other regions due to the political representation in the State Government portfolios.
2. No effective stimulation of affordable housing by Government is now taking its toll.
3. Domestic violence is difficult to define, determine – particularly with a semi-transient client-base and therefore hard to prepare realistic solutions in a well planned, co-ordinated approach.
4. Part-time or ill-resourced workers face continual stressful and under-resourced facilities and working conditions.
5. Lack of employment initiatives, are worsened through undermining by illegal employment practices in the business sector.

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### EXPRESSED SOLUTIONS

1. Collaboration between Federal and State Government planning processes, political bodies and funding groups to address problems
2. Boosting of service to support CPO in community planning efforts, providing a community guiding capacity, information sharing and ongoing collaboration with all sectors.
3. Stimulate affordable housing, particularly through Council incentives, investigation of State and Federal initiatives to encourage business sector to take up commercially viable subsidised Housing, address transport issues.
4. Broadening criteria for services to achieve transport and support services- looking at D.V., children's support in families in crisis.
5. Employment strategies to stimulate local efforts, and address illegal employment practices by hospitality and agricultural owners who offer work to backpackers, and other unauthorised people at the expense of our local economy and young people.

### Suggestions about approaching solutions

A solutions-based trend was very clear from the forums: the system in place generally works, but the services are poorly funded to achieve their core activities. It's the communication that needs improvement.

Reliance on "special or innovative pilot projects" (Lismore, Kyogle, Casino, Maclean, Byron) to support the salaries of core workers was mocked by participants. Capacity to direct criteria for funding innovation was wishfully expressed, along with equal frustration at the inability to effectively lobby in 6 of the 7 forums.

Forum participants generally reported that the overall service system didn't require reconfiguration, "fixing" or reconstruction, it just required adequate levels of funding to keep the services – governmental, NGO, community & charity etc – functioning. In one quoted instance part-time workers were supported by full-time worker support at a ratio of 48:1, and in another at Casino, 56:1. This employment strategy was not deliberate, but wage and administration cost restraint was necessary in order to achieve minimum service delivery.

Solutions to the problems revolved around three main resources, (and many participants expressed concern at the naivety of re-iterating what had been frequently articulated and obviously not considered particularly helpful):

- i) increasing support for part-time workers;
- ii) improving communication throughout the industry especially when regional State government initiatives were established by senior government employees;
- iii) increasing funding through collaborative effort..

The members present at each of the seven LGA forums agreed that political and strategic skill was required to ensure that the voice of those working at the "community coal face" was adequately expressed to senior representatives and those working on regional solutions. Without this approach, co-ordinated responses would continue to be unsuitable or fragmented in their delivery. In each forum, examples of "regional/rural solutions" designed without adequate consultation by city government programmes were cited. These were cited as examples of poor planning of a new solution that could not improve service delivery in the widening gaps, but would seriously undermine recent progress.

Participants also expressed that the issues require significant senior level consultation – not just amongst senior government representatives and regional delegates. Initiatives such as those from Shelter NSW's collaborative efforts with Commonwealth-State Housing Agreements, Premier's Department regional planning priorities, and Priorities Regional Communities Taskforce were cited as good starting points for project development.

Overall, the forums demonstrated that the people who serve daily, to improve the quality of life for their constituents, have comprehensive understanding of the issues our residents and visitors face. They are extremely keen to participate in emerging solutions, and approached the forums with sobering facts and trends. This approach, particularly involving constituents from the LGAs of Kyogle, Clarence and Richmond Valley, will ensure a fully collaborative regional approach, that breaks a pattern of “top heavy” decision making – both at the NRSDC level, and in government.

A prevalence of exhaustion, despondency and futility also greeted the facilitator at most interagency forums. However, through close communication and example, (with the inundated Community Project Officers of the region), the emerging strategy from this “Prioritisation” process has given InterAgency Members a fresh approach to address local and regional issues.

These seven forums were a keen renewal to a process that had previously lacked direction. While Interagency forums will always hold a place for co-operative discussion on client services process, the focus must now shift away from mutual support at a localised level, to a strategic process over a long period of time. Participants agreed that addressing political processes through improved management and leadership training (communications, planning, financial accountability, team development skills, issues clarification, problem-solving, strengthened networking and marketing etc.) was a significant process priority.

By creating a workable vision, in collaboration with appropriate governmental services and other NGO’s, including the NSW Council of Social Service, the Regional InterAgency Process has a significant role to play in developing an improved social capital for the Northern Rivers. Until workloads are significantly reduced, the development of an improved social capital should be done with the emphasis on the strength of its representation and capacity to consult, not on the strength of its capacity to consistently be in attendance at meetings. The goal of the Northern Rivers Regional Interagency now needs to be defined.



## Acknowledgements

Jane Oliver of Footprint Directions, wishes to thank the Northern Rivers Social Development Council, the Lismore City Council and the Northern Rivers Regional Strategy for their strategic and administrative support in compiling this report. The Northern Rivers Regional Interagency Working Party is also gratefully thanked for their willingness to contribute at short notice, online, with no additional funding support.

Of importance is to thank the Ballina & District Services Community Association for stepping in to provide an equal service for Ballina: thank you Coral Wheatley. Additionally to the North Casino Oak Estate Neighbourhood Centre for arranging the good range of participants to the Richmond Valley forum, thank you.

But to the participants of the seven forums, and to the CPO's who gathered them together, thank you for your generosity, curious approach, and willingness to give your reports, ideas, suggestions and concerns (once again).

The only documents referred to in this report have been acknowledged in footnotes.

Jane Oliver

