

**Submission
No 62**

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

Name: Mr Andrew Gee MP, Member for Orange

Date received: 9/02/2012

Inquiry Into Economic and Social Development
in Central Western New South Wales

Submissions of Andrew Gee MP

Member for Orange

I refer to the Inquiry into Economic and Social Development in Central Western NSW. My submissions with respect to this inquiry are set out below.

1. Health Facilities/Services

One of the most significant factors restricting economic and social development in Central Western NSW is the provision of health facilities.

The closure or downgrading of health facilities can have detrimental effect on the economic growth of regional communities as older residents often don't wish to stay (preferring to live in towns with such facilities) and younger families don't wish to move in.

Orange has a new hospital, however there is still significant investment needed in other hospitals in the area including Wellington and Mudgee and other towns across the Central West.

If the Central West is to continue to grow economically further investment in health services will be required.

Retrieval Service

The Central West is not currently serviced by a 24 hour helicopter retrieval service. It is currently the only region in NSW that is not serviced by such a service.

Leaving aside issues of equity, the provision of such a service will not only boost medical services in the region but also economic confidence by demonstrating that the Central West has the same level of services as other regions.

The Orange Health Service is a major referral hospital in the Central West, with over 90 resident specialists living in Orange itself. There are currently some medical procedures that are unable to be performed at the Health Service because aero-medical backup is not readily available through the night in the event that it is needed.

As noted above, in my view there is a clear link between the provision of health services and economic growth. The introduction of this service will not only facilitate the continued expansion of the Health Service itself but promote development across the region as those

contemplating moving to the Central West will have confidence that if an emergency does arise during the night, they will have the same chance at life as those living in metropolitan areas. The increase in mining activity in the region is a further reason why an upgraded retrieval capability is needed.

Second Linear Accelerator

The Orange Health Service currently has one linear accelerator, which has reached capacity. Patients from the Central West are currently being referred to Sydney for radiotherapy. It is vital that a second linear accelerator be installed to alleviate the financial and emotional stress of patients travelling to Sydney for treatment.

Cudal MPS

It is noted that Cudal does not currently have an MPS.

The Cudal hospital was closed down a number of years ago by the Labor Government. That government promised to build an MPS and yet did not do so.

The case for an MPS at Cudal deserves consideration.

Aged Care

The provision of aged care beds in the Central West is a critical issue.

Gulgong hospital was recently closed and money has recently been allocated in the NSW state budget for the construction of an MPS.

The number of aged-care beds should be expanded as far as possible as there is no regular bus service between Mudgee and Gulgong. For many elderly residents, travelling significant distances to visit relatives in aged care is just not an option.

The same can be said of Cudal. Cudal hospital previously had an aged care facility but now that has disappeared there is no way elderly residents requiring aged care can stay in Cudal.

It is vital that our regional towns retain the capacity for aged care.

GP Training

Charles Sturt University is very keen to establish a medical school that will train doctors for rural and regional practice.

This is a commendable initiative that should be supported in every way possible.

In some towns such as Mudgee and Wellington it can take 4 to 6 weeks to even see a GP. There is clearly a GP shortage in the Central West.

If the Central West is to grow and prosper, this shortage needs to be addressed. Towns without proper GP services are not seen as an attractive place to live or invest in.

2. Policing

Policing remains a key issue in the Central West.

In my view a lack of policing numbers has the potential to restrict economic development in parts of the Central West.

People will simply not wish to move to towns that have a perceived law and order problem. The provision of law and order services is in my view is a vital part of ensuring increased economic development. Towns such as Wellington are of particular concern.

All commands in the electorate have in the past been undermanned.

I recently made submissions to the Parsons Review on this issue, and the recent boost in police numbers has been most welcome.

3. Water Security

If the Central West is to grow and prosper water security needs to be ensured.

Mining activity is increasing across the Central West including in the Mudgee and Gulgong districts and also the Orange district. This will lead to a greater strain on water supplies in the Central West. To ensure economic development there is in my view a need for a comprehensive water strategy for the Central West, to backed with appropriate resources.

4. Roads

It is vital that road infrastructure is improved in the Central West.

In my view this is holding back economic development. There has rightly been a great deal of money spent on major highways in northern and southern NSW, unfortunately there has not been a similar amount spent on roads in the Central West.

It is absolutely vital that a new road be constructed over the Blue Mountains in the general vicinity of the Bells Line of Road.

This would drastically reduce travelling times in and out of the Central West and indeed would open up the Central West to economic development and tourism.

There is no doubt that the amount of time it takes to pass over the Great Dividing Range is detrimentally affecting development.

A new road over the Great Dividing Range linking Sydney to the Central West would also have the further advantage of reducing freight costs.

To truly open up the Central West a new road over the Blue Mountains is necessary.

The Bells Line of Road has been left in a state of decay in recent years yet is one of the main roads used to access Sydney from the west.

A new expressway or freeway is needed.

Other roads issues in the Orange electorate include opening a road link between Orange and Mudgee.

At present, the drive between Orange and Mudgee takes over two hours, yet the distance between the two is relatively small. A new road link between Orange and Mudgee would increase tourism in the Central West and would also facilitate residents of Mudgee having easier access to specialist medical services at Orange. In my view the road between Orange and Mudgee should be a priority.

The increase in mining activity has also placed a strain on local roads such as the Ulan Road at Mudgee. This road is heavily used by the mining industry (benefitting the whole state) yet the Mid Western Regional Council struggles to maintain and improve it.

Other important road projects include the complete sealing of the Wellington to Narrabri Road ("the 353"). It is surprising that such an important regional road remains dirt. Sealing roads such as the 353 will reduce accidents, facilitate freight movements between regions, and also increase tourism.

The Mitchell Highway between Orange and Molong is also in bad need of an upgrade.

5. Rail Link

Rail provides an important alternative to road, yet for years, rail lines in the Central West have suffered downgrades and closures.

There has not been a corresponding increase in investment in road infrastructure. This has meant more trucks on roads that are often inadequate.

The XPT link that passes through Orange to Sydney on a daily basis is not conducive to business travel (departing in the afternoon). Most rail passengers therefore travel by bus to Lithgow.

Electric rail from Lithgow to Orange is something that could be considered as could the re-instatement of passenger rail from Lithgow to Mudgee.

6. Education

I am concerned that educational standards between metropolitan schools and country schools is widening.

In order to encourage greater investment in the Central West there needs to be increased investment in education opportunities in the Central West. These include increasing the range of available courses in rural areas and improving vocational training opportunities.

The mining industry has created a demand for workers with training in mine-related activities. This type of vocational training should be further supported and expanded.

Further, the operations of Charles Sturt University (CSU) need to be expanded.

As noted above, Charles Sturt University wishes to train doctors in Orange for practice in regional areas. It is vital to get doctors into regional areas including GPs.

A decline in medical services is a fundamental reason why towns go into decline. The sick and elderly are given no choice but to move to localities where such services exist.

In my view the CSU initiative should be fully supported.

7. Tourism

The Central West is fast becoming a destination for tourists looking for fine wine and good food. With the success of region's local wine makers, primary producers and chefs, this new found notoriety is well deserved.

In my view more support needs to be given to local tourism bodies such in order that they can continue to encourage tourists to visit the region.

Tourism is an obvious area of economic development that can be built upon in the future.

8. Reasons For Population Growth and Decline

There have been several factors impacting on population decline in the Central West.

Prolonged drought and the relative decline of the agricultural sector have impacted on certain towns in the Central West – notably Wellington.

Other reasons for population decline include the decline of health facilities (leading elderly people to move to coastal areas where services are better).

Another key reason is a lack of educational and vocational opportunities for young people.

The increase in mining activity is however set to significantly boost population in some parts of the Central West. This is most notable in the Mudgee and Gulgong area and also Orange.

In areas such as Mudgee a lack of housing and high demand for skilled labour as a result of mining could prove an impediment to even stronger growth.