

INQUIRY INTO SKILLS SHORTAGES IN RURAL AND REGIONAL NSW

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Date Received: 1/08/2005

Theme:

Summary

CENTRAL DARLING SHIRE COUNCIL

CONSTITUTED 1 MAY 1959

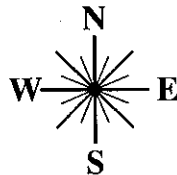
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The Director
Standing Committee on State Development
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

17th July 2005

Dear Sir

Re: Enquiry Into Skills Shortages In Rural And Regional NSW

Thank you for the opportunity to prepare a submission within the terms of reference for consideration by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on State Development's enquiry into Skills Shortages In Rural And Regional NSW.

It is indeed an important matter and Council believe they are in an excellent position to comment as we constantly experience major problems in attracting professional and skilled workers to our communities.

Council acknowledge the NSW State Government's affirmative action in addressing this issue and looks forward to working with the Department of State & Regional Development in identifying the problems and providing a solution(s)

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Bill O'Brien', written over a large, loopy oval shape.

Bill O'Brien
GENERAL MANAGER

Central Darling Shire Council

Inquiry Into Skills Shortages In Rural And Regional NSW

Thank you for the opportunity to prepare and present a submission to the NSW Parliament's Standing Committee on State Development in relation to the important issue of Skill Shortages in Rural and Regional NSW. Central Darling Shire Council and other Western Division organisations have consistently expressed concerns in relation to skills shortages in the region and the impact this has on future economic and social development.

The inability to attract skilled tradesmen and professional administrators to the Far West Region of the State is recognised by the Central Darling Shire Council as a major inhibitor to growth and stability in the area and has currently reached alarming levels. It is of further concern that existing skills levels are also diminishing and there are identified major "gaps" in certain trades and professional skills.

It is our understanding and anecdotal and other evidence suggests there is a lack of a coordinated approach by Local Government, State and Federal Government agencies and other organisations such as Regional Development Boards and Area Consultative Committees in addressing this issue. Staff attraction and retention strategies and policies in particular are in most cases non-existent.

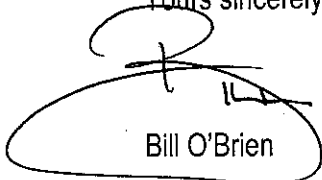
There are many examples and considerable where major construction has been delayed as a result of qualified tradesmen and skilled workers being unavailable. There have been a number of "skills audits" conducted in various parts of the region over an extended period. Nevertheless there appears to have been little or no feedback as to the results and outcomes of such audits

and few attempts have been made or programs of any type put in place to rectify or improve the situation where gaps in specific skills have been identified.

Over some considerable period, there has been a move by the Barwon Darling Alliance comprising of the Shire Councils of Central Darling, Bourke, Brewarrina, Walgett and Coonamble and Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly to introduce a Socio Economic Zone within the areas covered by member Council's. Broken Hill City Council has also shown some interest in this proposal. It is considered there is a link between skills shortages and the possible establishment of a Socio-Economic Zone as a solution to this serious problem.

This Barwon Darling Alliance Socio - Economic Zone model addresses many areas of disadvantage and it would be recommended the Standing Committee refer to this document and to assist we have attached a hard copy of this report. It is acknowledged the Barwon Darling Socio - Economic Zone model does not immediately address skills shortages notwithstanding however the objectives provide linkages to employment and social and economic incentives and the lack of effectiveness of existing Government programs in promoting development.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Bill O'Brien', is written over a large, hand-drawn oval. The signature is stylized with a large loop at the top and a crossbar.

Bill O'Brien

GENERAL MANAGER



Barwon Darling Alliance

Murdi Paaki Regional Council of ATSIC & the Shire Councils of Bourke, Brewarrina,
Central Darling, Coonamble and Walgett

INFORMATION PACKAGE

FOR THE PROPOSAL TO TRIAL A SOCIO-ECONOMIC ZONE OVER FIVE-YEARS

The Barwon Darling Alliance comprises the Murdi Paaki Regional Council of ATSIC and the Shire Councils of Bourke, Brewarrina, Central Darling, Coonamble and Walgett. The historic Alliance was formed to deal with common problems of high unemployment and serious issues affecting the quality of life of people across the region. The Alliance takes its name from the Barwon and Darling Rivers, which flow through the region.

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Package prepared August 2004

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The socio-economic health of the region is well below the NSW average.
- This has real bearing on the quality of life for those people living in the region.
- The economic and social issues of the region are closely intertwined.
- A continuation of current actions will not produce any dynamic improvement in the future.
- Actions need to be found to turn around long-term declining trends.
- Any action needs to cover not just economic factors but also the social and capacity building issues.
- Enterprise zones have been used, and continue to be used, to stimulate the rejuvenation of depressed areas in other countries.
- Enterprise zones have the potential to assist a socio-economic rejuvenation of the region.
- The need for a trial and subsequent assessment of this socio-economic tool (i.e. enterprise zone) for depressed regions cannot be ignored.
- BDA proposes a five year trial of a socio-economic zone, measuring success or failure by a preset list of indicators (see model).
- The investment required from government is modest. The trial requires an estimated net public investment of \$2.1m per annum (\$5m gross).
- The trial is low risk for government as the majority of the funding is only paid after a new job has been successfully implemented.
- The potential gains through better social outcomes, improved quality of life, more employment and improved business capacity outcomes are significant.
- Savings can be expected in current public outlays related to crime and high assaults, domestic violence, substance abuse and so on. This has not been modelled but could be measured in the trial.

THE HERE AND NOW

The geography of the Barwon Darling Alliance (BDA) region comprises five Local Government Areas (LGAs): Central Darling, Bourke, Brewarrina, Walgett and Coonamble. These LGAs form a region which sits wholly within the Murdi Paaki ATSIC region, in western NSW.



THE PEOPLE

The region covers an area of 145,000km². The population is currently 21,571. It has decreased by 3% between 1996 and 2001.

The indigenous population is 5,561 or 26% of the region's population. This is high when compared to the NSW state indigenous population share of 2%.

The region's indigenous population rose by 2% of the general population between 1996 to 2001.

43% of the region's indigenous population is under 18 years. This is a key statistic. The population of persons under 15 years is 5,099, at 24% of the region's population compared to 21% for NSW (data for 2001).

EMPLOYMENT

The unemployment rate in 2001 was 10% for the region in comparison to 7.2% for NSW. The percentage of the population in the labour force dropped from 44% in 1996 to 43% in 2001, compared to no change for NSW (46%).

29% of the population are recipients from various Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) welfare programmes*.

The LGA breakdown being:

	Nº	% of population
Central Darling	727	27%
Bourke	890	23%
Brewarrina	575	28%
Walgett	2,751	33%
Coonamble	1,226	27%

*These figures exclude Family Tax Benefit, Childcare Benefit, Farm Family Restart and Bereavement Allowance.

Long term unemployment, indicated by FaCS percentage of long term Newstart allowance customers, paints a telling picture of the depth of long term unemployment in the region.

The LGA breakdown being:

Central Darling	n.a.
Bourke	59%
Brewarrina	75%
Walgett	74%
Coonamble	75%

Employment growth for the region between 1996 and 2001 was negative at -0.4%. Not only was there no employment growth, but employment opportunities diminished.

A comparison of the BDA region with NSW shows that the region records figures at least 25% above the NSW indicators on total unemployment, indigenous unemployment and long term unemployment.

The region records figures at least 25% below the NSW indicators for employment growth and post school qualifications.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC PICTURE

It is widely recognized that economic and social issues cannot really be separated. In a remote region such as this, these sectors not only interact but also are clearly intertwined.

The socio-economic picture of the area has been investigated by both government departments and independent groups. The results are telling.

- The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas 2001 (SEIFA). Using data from the 2001 census, areas were ranked based on their relative social and economic wellbeing.

Four of the five shires in the BDA region fall into the bottom seven most disadvantaged LGAs in NSW.

SEIFA rankings for the BDA region:

Brewarrina	1 st most disadvantaged
Central Darling	3 rd most disadvantaged
Walgett	4 th most disadvantaged
Coonamble	7 th most disadvantaged
Bourke	15 th most disadvantaged

- The harsh reality of the socio-economic status of the region is independently supported by the Community Adversity and Resilience Report, by Prof. Tony Vinson 2004.

The Vinson report found that the whole of the BDA region fell into the most disadvantaged category. This report covered social disadvantage factors such as: unemployment, long term unemployment, low income, early school leaving, non-completion of Yr 12 schooling, unskilled workers, low birth weight, child abuse, psychiatric hospital admissions, criminal offence convictions, child injuries, imprisonment, threat severance electric supply, mortality and disability/sickness allowance.

- The Wilcannia example. This inter-connectiveness of employment and social issues was dramatically exposed in Wilcannia during 1994/95, when a 'Working Nation' programme employed a significant number of previously unemployed adults.

During the time of the programme the criminal incident rate appears to have decreased by 90 %. The communities changing crime pattern, during the period of the programme, moved the then Magistrate, Mr B.Lulham, to write:

“As magistrate of Wilcannia, I have noticed a very marked downturn in the number of matter coming before the court. Whereas in years gone by there were over 100 fresh charges each month before the court the figures lately have been approximately 10 or less each month.

I am absolutely convinced that, the fact that so many persons usually unemployed are now gainfully engaged in work is the main factor contributing to the marked decrease in crime.

More importantly less crime and particularly less assaults result in enormous social benefits.”

- The significance of Magistrate Lulham’s observation of ‘enormous social benefits’ arising from ‘less crime and particularly less assaults’ is highlighted when examining 2003 data from the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research.

The Bureau ranks the top 50 crime hot spots by incident, with a 1 ranking being the worst hot spot in NSW. The BDA region or part thereof features high up in the rankings for recorded criminal incidents:

1	Assault DV Related
1	Assault
2	Break and Enter Non-dwelling
1	Break and Enter Dwelling
1	Motor Vehicle Theft
15	Robbery
2	Sexual Assault
14	Steal from Person
2	Steal from Motor Vehicle

- A multitude of things makes up the current decline of the quality of life for those people living within BDA communities. Assessment of the available data leaves no doubt that this area of NSW is depressed both socially and economically. The remote location and isolation of the communities complicate the picture. For example, urban methods of government or private sector delivery do not always work here.

WHY THE NEED FOR CHANGE

With the above circumstances the government has not sat by idly. Both State and Federal Governments have poured large amounts of funds into the region, under a range of programmes.

Surprisingly the actual amount of funds coming into these five LGAs is unknown, not just by the BDA but by the different governments themselves. BDA queries to Government Departments, the Grant Review Administration and Parliamentary Representatives offices did not elicit enough information to be able to calculate the government funds being expended on the area.

Funding that can be clarified covers an area larger than the BDA region. However, there is some value in looking at the magnitude of some of these figures. The State of the Regions Report 2003 reveals that for the region NSW Far and North West, covering Mudgee in the east across to the Queensland and South Australian borders, the value of Social Security in the area was \$436 million for the year.

The government approach to disadvantaged regions seems to be that their job is completed on the supplying of money to the area, whether through social security or a range of existing programmes. The BDA has made representations that some existing programmes are valuable but others are simply not hitting the mark. Better value for the total government investment might come from a true whole of government approach that includes closer working arrangements between the Federal, State Governments and the regional ATSIC council and LGAs (i.e. the BDA). The point is that local people know their problems better than 'outsiders' do and they can add value and find solutions that are practical in their specific region. Policy makers will make better policy and get better return on invested public funds by listening to local people who have a deep interest in improving the long term health of the region.

BDA contends that the obligation of government to the people and the communities throughout NSW and Australia is to work with them to ensure opportunity exists for a fair and just quality of life.

Investment of public funds should be measured by whether it increases the quality of life to a comparable level with others in the nation. BDA contends that the current approach to the region cannot be adequately assessed and that striving for better outcomes should be a top priority of any government, in a region with such pervasive socio-economic problems. The BDA's proposal to trial a socio-economic zone specifically seeks to measure outcomes so the investment can be assessed objectively. Currently we are virtually flying blind with no targets.

By both the government's own reckoning and by independent sources, the BDA region is socio-economically depressed and the people of the region fail to enjoy the same quality of life that is regarded as 'normal' in Australia.

For all the goodwill, for all the government money, for all the past and current programmes and hard work by many committed groups and individuals, none of these have turned around the socio-economic environment of the region.

More of the same is not acceptable. If no different action is taken the indicators and trends will continue to decline and devalue the quality of people's lives. BDA contends that doing nothing is not reasonable. We seek to engage with other tiers of government to agree on a meaningful socio-economic goal and a path to get there.

As Sam Jeffries, Chairman of the BDA and the Murdi Paaki Regional Council of ATSIC, has pointed out, "if we think we have problems now, wait for the next five to ten years then you'll see real problems".

Jeffries points in particular to the third and fourth generation of total welfare dependency in families, the loss of a sense of purpose in many people's lives. He also points to the risk, with such a high proportion of the population aged under 15, of even deeper social dislocation as that group moves into adulthood. He knows the entrenched negative socio-economic cycle needs deliberate targetted action if it is to be broken.

SO WHAT IS THE ANSWER ?

We must search for a mechanism or system that will act as a catalyst to turn around the socio-economic environment of our region. One such mechanism has been used successfully outside Australia. It has been used in other western economies to stimulate the rejuvenation of depressed areas, both urban and rural.

The BDA has, after extensive research, taken the framework used for enterprise zones and tailored a model system for the BDA region. It is the BDA's goal to trial this model, so as to be able to assess the value of such a mechanism to depressed regions in Australia.

The objective is to turn around existing negative socio-economic trends into positive trends that will enhance the quality of life for all people within the region.

THE MODEL

Enterprise zones are job creation focused. Government incentives are used to reduce the business risk environment to enable business investment. Business investment in the form of expansion or the establishment of new businesses creates jobs. With increased employment there is a direct beneficial flow on effect on social issues.

The Western Research Institute was contracted to construct an enterprise zone model, tailored to the BDA region. The model is based on a socio-economic zone approach.

The incentives are a mixture of economic, social and capacity building. This combination has been shown to be the most successful in enterprise zones. Offshore experience and commonsense suggests that there will be a strong positive flow on effect from the increased employment that will improve the measures of social health in the region, such as education, health, crime and general quality of life.

After extensive research of enterprise zones in a number of overseas countries a business survey was conducted within the region. Businesses already established within the region were presented with a list of the most successful incentives used in current and past enterprise zones overseas. The businesses were asked to rank the incentives in order of priority as to what would be best to enable them to expand their current business or establish a new business. This became the basis of the model. The results of this survey can be found in the model booklet.

The model has five clear-cut objectives:

- Achieve a rate of employment growth of 5%, or 75% of the average employment growth of NSW, whichever is lower.
- Achieve private business investment by existing businesses and 'home grown' businesses at least equal to the public funding provided for the enterprise zone.
- Reduce the official rate of unemployment in the BDA region to less than 9% or less than 1.25 times the average unemployment rate for NSW, whichever is higher.
- Reduce the rate of indigenous and long-term unemployment among the BDA region population by at least 25%.
- Increase the proportion of the BDA region population that hold a post school qualifications from 17.3% to at least 25% over the next 10 years.

The structure of the model allows for a stand alone administration, placed within the region. The administration would manage the budget and personnel. There would be both pre and post employment activity involved in working with potential employees and employers and mentors, which are seen as integral.

A second business survey was distributed throughout the region in 2004 at the request of the Commonwealth Department for Transport and Regional Services (DoTARS). DoTARS requested evidence that the job creation forecast was realistic in its assumption.

This survey asked businesses already established, if the model was put into place for five years, whether or not they would expand their current business or establish a new business, and, if so, approximately how many new employees would they require. The result of the survey showed overwhelmingly that the forecast 400 jobs could be met. This was over and above any effect of re-employment of past positions in the expected post drought recovery stage. The results can be found in Attachment A.

It is strongly felt that the success of this mechanism and its continued use overseas warrants an Australian trial. It is also strongly felt, that given the BDA region's socio-economic trends and current likely future, that this area would be a good testing ground for such a trial.

Due to the clear cut objectives set down for the trial it will be relatively simple to calculate, at the end of the trial, whether or not this is a mechanism that can stimulate the rejuvenation of depressed areas, in Australia.

The trial requires gross government investment of \$5 million per annum. However, after taking into account the flow-on returns to government (increased income tax and GST etc), the net public investment would be reduced to \$2.1million per annum.

The trial is low risk for government as the majority of the funding is only paid out after a new job is created and the new person is hired. It has been calculated that 95% of the funds expended through a proposed wage credit will flow back to government through various flow-ons such as social security savings, income tax and GST flows. An evaluation on the Californian State enterprise zones showed a seven-fold return on government funds expended.

An evaluation on a number of UK enterprise zones consistently found that in the remote zones (non urban) over 50% of the new jobs were taken up by the previously unemployed. This group is a key target for the BDA, which ironically is also a region beset by skilled labour shortages. There is a distinct mismatch between the skill set of the potential regional labour pool and the needs of business houses.

SUPPORT FOR THE TRIAL

ORGANIZATIONS

The following organizations have indicated support for a trial of the socio-economic zone model to be conducted in the BDA region.

Bourke Shire Council
Brewarrina Shire Council
Central Darling Shire Council
Coonamble Shire Council
Country Women's Association
Council of Social Services of NSW
CPA Australia
Institute of Chartered Accountants of Australia
Murdi Paaki Regional Council of ATSIC
Community Working Parties, Murdi Paaki Region
NSW Chamber of Commerce
NSW Farmers Association
NSW Local Government and Shires Association
NSW National Party
NSW Road Transport Association
Orana Regional Development Board
Orana Development and Employment Council
St Vincent de Paul Society
Walgett Shire Council

The Alliance is also briefing major employers within the region including Country Energy and Telstra Country Wide. There has also been good feedback from media releases which spelled out support from business within the region, support from the indigenous Community Working Parties in the region and the recognition of the value of this work by the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust. See Attachment B for media releases.

INAUGURAL NATIONAL REGIONAL RESEARCH COLLOQUIUM

The BDA model was presented by Western Research Institute CEO Tom Murphy, at the Inaugural National Regional Research Colloquium, held in Canberra in February 2004 and hosted by DoTARS, Bureau of Transport and Regional Economics (BTRE). The presented papers were chosen by independent referees and regarded as worthy of peer recognition. BTRE will also publish the paper.

THE WINSTON CHURCHILL MEMORIAL TRUST

The BDA's project manager, Charlotte Finch, has been awarded a Churchill Fellowship for 2004. She will be travelling to the United Kingdom to study and research the long term benefits of enterprise zones and to meet with government personnel that currently administer the enterprise zones. She will also be researching current rural and regional development trends.

APPENDIX A.

BUSINESS SURVEY No. 2.



Barwon Darling Alliance

Murdi Paaki Regional Council of ATSIC & the Shire Councils of
Bourke, Brewarrina, Central Darling, Coonamble and Walgett

BUSINESS SURVEY

Aim:

To gather information from businesses already established in the region as to the flow on effect of the incentives to new real job creation.

Businesses were asked:

If this model was established and trialled for five years would they consider expansion of their current business and/or establishment of a new business. If so, approximately in what industry and how many new jobs would be created.

Survey Response Rate 75%

Respondents came from a broad range businesses:

Horticultural Properties	Clubs & Pubs	Machinery Services
Agricultural Suppliers	Newsagencies	Clothing
Supermarkets	Nurseries	Tourism
Motor Vehicle Repairs	Earthmoving	Motels
Agricultural Properties	Fencing	Hardware
Tyre Service Centres	Service Stations	

Expand Current Business:

97% would expand their current business if the trial went ahead.
This would create an estimated 148 real new jobs.

Establish New Business:

76% would establish an additional new business.
This would create an estimated 98 real new jobs.

New Jobs:

70% of respondents said they would both expand their current business and establish an additional new business if the trial went ahead.
Survey estimates translated into 246 real new jobs. A trial goal is 400 new jobs, an employment increase of 5%. This goal is obviously achievable.

Increased Economic Growth in the Region:

90% said that due to expansion or establishment of business they would access additional goods and services from within the region, under the trial, giving a significant flow-on effect to economic growth.

Trial Incentives:

The trial is based on government incentives lowering the business risk and so allow private business investment, within the region. Each trial incentive was seen as very important by least 58% of the businesses. The type and size of the business often determined how important an incentive was ranked.

Mentors:

90% indicated that a locally based mentor would help their business get better result when employing new staff, especially long term unemployed and indigenous workers. Many saw it as an absolute necessity. Under the trial, mentoring is both pre and post employment.

APPENDIX B.

MEDIA RELEASES (June/July 2004)

1. Businesses gives thumbs up for enterprise zone.
2. Indigenous leaders want jobs and support enterprise zone trial.
3. Churchill Fellowship will focus on enterprise zone trial.



Barwon Darling Alliance

Murdi Paaki Regional Council of ATSIC & the Shire Councils of Bourke, Brewarrina, Central Darling, Coonamble and Walgett

MEDIA RELEASE

Business gives thumbs up for enterprise zone

Western NSW businesses would create new jobs by expanding operations under a proposed five year 'Enterprise Zone' trial in the Barwon Darling region.

A survey of businesses has found that the target of creating 400 new jobs under the plan is realistic. "97% of businesses surveyed told us they would expand in some way if the Enterprise Zone trial was in place. This is because the risk of expansion would be lowered by some special incentives," said Barwon Darling Alliance project manager Charlotte Finch.

Businesses said they would respond positively to incentives such as exemptions from a range of government charges, wage credits, accelerated depreciation and access to low interest finance. Mentoring of the long-term unemployed was also an attractive incentive. "We have worked closely with the business community to make sure the proposed economic incentives are relevant and meaningful," said Mrs Finch.

The aim of the Enterprise Zone proposal is to kick-start economic and social recovery in an area that has been slipping for decades. Four of the five shires in the Alliance are ranked among the seven most disadvantaged in NSW. The Alliance says current government programs are not working to stem the tide of disadvantage. It wants to form closer ties across all levels of government and the local community so that assistance becomes better aligned with local needs.

The Barwon Darling Alliance (BDA) is a unique alliance of indigenous and non-indigenous communities, comprising the Murdi Paaki ATSIC Regional Council and the shires of Coonamble, Walgett, Brewarrina, Bourke and Central Darling. These communities live with serious socio-economic problems and a key solution is real private sector jobs. "We want government support to run this five year trial, and then assess the impact," said Mrs Finch.

The Enterprise Zone proposal would save on government outlays of welfare and raise the quality of life for hundreds of families, who would be able to join the work force. The plan targets special mentoring, industry networking and opportunities for people to get new skills to help them secure employment.

The Alliance has had extensive consultations in the past several months with federal and state parliamentarians and government departments, seeking support for the trial. Numerous business and community groups have signaled support. The Alliance looks forward to securing whole of government support.

The Enterprise Zone trial model was developed for the Alliance by the Western Research Institute at Charles Sturt University.

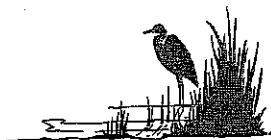
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4th June 2004

Media contact:

Interviews can be arranged with Barwon Darling Alliance chairman Sam Jeffries and/or project manager Charlotte Finch by contacting Helen Murray at Kurrumbene Agribusiness 0419-991-424.

BDA media release 04.06.04



Barwon Darling Alliance

Murdi Paaki Regional Council of ATSIC & the Shire Councils of Bourke, Brewarrina, Central Darling, Coonamble and Walgett

MEDIA RELEASE

Indigenous leaders want jobs and support enterprise zone trial

Aboriginal leaders in the Murdi Paaki regional ATSIC area confirmed their unanimous support for the Barwon Darling Alliance (BDA) (1) proposal to run an 'enterprise zone' trial in the region, at a meeting of 16 Community Working Party leaders at Cobar.

"The enterprise zone would take some pressure off business and enable them to employ more local people", said Coonamble Community Working Party chairman, Wayne Fernando.

"We need opportunities for our young people to find mainstream employment. And we need to encourage employers to take that step. So many good things flow from having a proper job," says Mr Fernando. The Alliance wants the federal member for Gwydir and Deputy Prime Minister John Anderson to get behind the trial.

There are opportunities for people to get traineeships now, but Fernando says, "It's no good having hundreds of people trained up if there are no real jobs to go to."

"I would like to see more Aboriginal faces in the retail sector, people would like opportunities to get that type of work," says Fernando, "But there is still a gulf and we need to make it easier for employers to take that step." Fernando has lived in Coonamble all his life and is deeply involved in indigenous community and employment affairs.

The trial has a targeted local approach, bringing needs of both the unemployed and employers closer, "especially with mentoring," says Fernando. Mentoring will come from respected local people in each BDA community. "This will help people overcome the many daily hurdles that can happen when settling in to a workplace."

Fernando can think of only one Aboriginal person currently in private employment in the Coonamble. The Shire has an indigenous population of 800, which is one-fifth of the total. "There is a lot of room for that to rise."

The Barwon Darling Alliance is lobbying state and federal governments for a gross annual investment of \$5 million for five years to pay for all aspects of the trial. The Alliance believes that its enterprise zone model, developed with the assistance of the Western Research Institute, can create 400 new jobs. The net cost to government will be much less than \$5 million because of offsetting savings from lower welfare payments and extra GST and income tax generated.

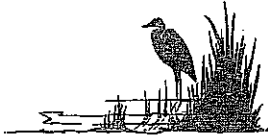
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17th June 2004

(1) The Barwon Darling Alliance is a unique alliance of indigenous & non-indigenous communities, comprising the Murdi Paaki ATSIC Regional Council & Coonamble, Walgett, Brewarrina, Bourke & Central Darling Shires.

Media contact:

To arrange interviews with BDA chairman Sam Jeffries (chair Murdi Paaki ATSIC region) contact Helen Murray at Kurumbene Agribusiness 0419-991-424.



Barwon Darling Alliance

Murdi Paaki Regional Council of ATSIC & the Shire Councils of Bourke, Brewarrina, Central Darling, Coonamble and Walgett

BARWON DARLING ALLIANCE MEDIA RELEASE

26 July 2004

Churchill Fellowship will focus on enterprise zones

Bourke resident Mrs Charlotte Finch is a delighted recipient of a prestigious Churchill Fellowship.

She will use the award to visit regions in the UK which implemented enterprise zones to overcome severe economic disadvantage. The Winston Churchill Memorial Trust awards fellowships so that people can strive for excellence in their field. It involves not only an opportunity to gain personal skills and knowledge but also to contribute to the future of Australia.

Mrs Finch is project manager for the well-known Barwon Darling Alliance (BDA), which is a unique alliance of indigenous and non-indigenous communities. It comprises the Murdi Paaki ATSIC Regional Council and the shires of Coonamble, Walgett, Brewarrina, Bourke and Central Darling. Four of the five shires rank in the lowest socio-economic group in NSW. The region covers an area of almost 20% of NSW and 26% of the population is indigenous.

Mrs Finch is deeply involved with the BDA proposal to trial an Enterprise Zone in the region. It aims to lift business investment and job opportunities, to bring unemployment and other measures of regional wellbeing back to levels more in keeping with a first world country.

"The trial aims to create more real jobs, return positive economic growth to the region and increase the proportion of people holding post school qualifications. In a region such as ours, these are critical in tackling our social issues. Employment, or the lack of it, is closely linked to our social and quality of life factors," said Mrs Finch.

The fellowship will allow her to meet people currently involved in structuring and administering enterprise zones. "I will be able to study the long term benefits by visits to three remote enterprise zones. Like our region these were depressed, the UK government continues to use the enterprise zone structure to stimulate rejuvenation."

"The people of this region, especially their local elected representatives, refuse to accept that a continued decline in our quality of life is inevitable. We do not believe that the lives of people here are of less importance than those living in the more populated areas. The Alliance does not accept that things cannot improve and will continue efforts to persuade both the State and Federal governments that an enterprise zone trial, in Australia, is needed," said Mrs Finch.

"Only then can Australia assess the worth of this economic tool. It has worked in other western economies and we should be open to new possibilities", she said. With the federal election in the air, the Alliance is looking for commitment to the trial from both major parties, before the area loses further ground.

"The Churchill Fellowship will enable me to bring back valuable first hand knowledge. It will be of tremendous benefit. What I learn has the capacity to benefit not only this region but potentially regional Australia as a whole," said Mrs Finch.

ENDS

Media contact:

Interviews can be arranged with Charlotte Finch by contacting Helen Murray at Kurumbene Agribusiness 0419-991-424 or the Barwon Darling Alliance 02-6872-2055.

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