

## **INQUIRY INTO SKILLS SHORTAGES IN RURAL AND REGIONAL NSW**

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**Theme:**

**Summary**



# Hay Shire Council

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## **Inquiry into Skills Shortages in Rural and Regional NSW**

### **(a) The current and future demand for labour.**

There is a constant shortage of skilled labour in rural areas and the more remote the location, the more drastic the situation is. It is extremely frustrating to find that there is often an over-supply of the required skills in metropolitan areas and coastal areas deemed to provide the required quality of life.

The health service providers, particularly doctors and dentists, are a critical component of this shortage; however it is much wider problem than that. All skilled professions are implicated.

In regards to the local government sector, it is extremely difficult to attract and difficult to retain personnel in the areas of engineering, town planning and financial management.

This Council is currently re-advertising for an engineer after the first round of advertising attracted no interest from suitably qualified applicants.

### **(b) The economic and social impact of the skills shortage**

The shortage of skilled labour is a major cause of the spiralling decline of rural and remote NSW. A critical element of this problem is the snow-balling effect that the shortages have.

If a rural centre is suffering from the lack of basic medical and dental services, that suffering will be amplified by the centre's inability to attract other skilled professionals and the difficulty of retaining those currently located there.

The availability of medical and educational services is a critical factor in enticing people to transfer from the metropolitan and larger regional cities. Similarly these services are vital to retain the skilled personnel who are much more mobile and discerning than the unskilled sector.

**(c) The strategies and programs of local governments to retain and attract skilled workers**

Unfortunately it appears to be local government that is forced to bear the brunt of any incentives or programs to address skill shortages. This is despite the fact that this level of government is the least resourced to do so and despite the fact that it is the least resourced of the councils themselves that are forced to become most heavily involved.

Smaller rural councils are forced to compete against one another in the offering of incentives to attract doctors. These incentives may include the provision of rent-free surgeries, residencies, vehicles and equipment. This Council is currently planning to build a new residence for a doctor who has expressed his dissatisfaction with the standard of the house currently provided to him.

To attract their own staff, rural and remote councils are often forced to offer salaries that are above the market rate and to offer other incentives such as rental subsidies.

A problem that is difficult for local government to address and a problem that is growing in importance is the need to provide satisfactory employment opportunities for the partner of a skilled worker. Often the partner is at least equally skilled and the opportunity for gaining satisfying employment declines rapidly in the small market place of a remote centre.

**(d) Appropriate models from other states**

I am not aware of models from other states that may be appropriate for the NSW situation.

**(e) Coordination between levels of government**

I am not aware of effective coordination between the various levels of government to address the problem of skills shortages in country NSW.

A personal experience from last financial year demonstrated that some state policies could act in reverse. I own one property and it is my intention to retire to that property some time in the future. I was required to pay land tax on that property, notwithstanding that it is the only property that I own and I am now leasing a residence so that I can work in a remote area. Such a state government policy is a disincentive to attract skilled labour to rural NSW.

In attracting doctors to Hay, this council has worked closely with the Murrumbidgee Division of General Practice but not directly with any other level of government.

**(f) The impact of the Commonwealth's regional migration programs.**

I am not aware of any positive results in this region from the Australian Government's regional migration programs. That does not mean that there have been none, simply I am not aware.

I am aware that the vast majority of doctors attracted to remote centres are overseas trained and perhaps they have been recruited under such a program.

**(g) The Adequacy of Current Recording and reporting Measures.**

I am not aware of any such measures and accordingly I am of the opinion that, if they exist, they are totally inadequate.

#### **(h) The Methods used by Training Organisations such as TAFE**

The actions and inactions of TAFE in this region have been extremely disappointing to date although there have been some positive developments in recent times.

Several years ago TAFE advertised for local tutors with those applying being advised that there was no intention to appoint anyone. It was part of a TAFE routine to compile a list of suitable applicants should the need for their engagement ever arise. This was the catalyst for a concentrated campaign to attract some permanent presence in Hay which is now promising to bear some fruit.



Bob Behl  
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Hay Shire Council