

**Submission
No 17**

**INQUIRY INTO CLOSURE OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN NEW
SOUTH WALES**

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Upper House Committees
Legislative Council
Parliament of New South Wales
Macquarie Street

Re: Closure of public schools in New South Wales (Inquiry)

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Summary based on some of the terms of reference items

(a) the actual or potential closure or recess process relating to the following public schools:

Wollombi, Bilbul, Murrumbidgee, Grong Grong and other small school in danger of closure

(f) the role of cost-benefit analyses in the closure process, if applicable

Cost-benefit analysis should not apply.

(e) the impact on local school communities affected by school closures

The impact on small towns, on the fabric of regions and on Australia is enormous and damaging.

(d) the transparency of the consultation process surrounding school closures

The two examples of which I am most aware show possible criminal tendencies

(c) factors considered in determining the suitability of alternative schools in the case of a closure

There compelling reasons for a contrary view to current policies

(b) the processes, policies, procedures, accountability, and decision making surrounding the closure of schools in New South Wales

I sought the NSW State election of 2015 to debate these issues but that opportunity was denied to me.

DETAILS

Section (a) the actual or potential closure or recess process relating to the following public schools:

Wollombi, Bilbul, Murrumbidgee, Grong Grong and any other small school in any danger of closure.

If it only applies to Wollombi which are at a similar stage of closure then I risk the danger of my presentation not being accepted.

Section (f) the role of cost-benefit analyses in the closure process, if applicable

If cost benefit is the only consideration then almost every small school in the country regions will face closure – and soon.

Up until 1970 Australia was a rich country with a magnificent long term future. My strong contention is that the shared political decisions of all Developed Countries to start reducing tariffs which put us onto what would lead to huge Australian Government debt. Only one of the many adverse consequences was that NSW State politicians are looking at the cost-benefit analysis of small schools.

Exhibit I is what I saw in a DVD prepared by the late Lance Endersbee. A-B-C represents the wonderful GDP growth outlook of the Developed Countries prior to 1970

D-E is an over simplified representation of a composite of Developing Countries with a lower growth rate

My understanding is that the tariff reduction regime was agreed in 1975 via the Lima Declaration which was a 25 year plan to allow Developing Countries to reach 23% of the world's production.

D-F represents the unforeseen drop in GDP growth by the year 2000. Some claim that the Lima Declaration is a myth. Whatever the truth F-G represents the continuing reduction in GDP growth for Developed Countries.

I became more concerned when the Finance Ministry sent me a letter advising that in 2012 Australia exports were \$300 bn. I wrote that they should have been \$450bn. On 16th May 2014 when the Treasurer was claiming that the budget would balance in 2016, I sent Exhibit II showing that if required budget exceeds actual budget for any prolonged length of time debt would increase. My claim was that the chance of a balanced budget was impossible. I also advised that when the difference between the two increased the slope of the debt curve would increase

Each of these are hand drawn sketches. Exhibit III is a graph of GDP growth by the Australian Bureau of Statistics confirming Australia's downward trajectory of GDP growth.

I was so concerned about small schools being closed in country areas that I contested the NSW election. School closures were high on the agenda of all three independents who were in the race. The incumbent dodged all of us. I am writing a book which I hope to publish before the Upper House report is released. If I am sufficiently fortunate to be invited by the Committee I might or might not be given permission to quote from my book.

Section (c) the impact on local school communities affected by school closures

The impact on small towns, on the fabric of regions and even on Australia is enormous and damaging. Closing small schools is just a microcosm of what is happening to Australia. I have done some studies on how Australia is adversely affected by the shrinking of the regions in population and even more as a percentage of population. Refer to Exhibit IV showing that almost three quarters of NSW is disadvantaged or 'most disadvantaged.' Griffith (my birth place) which is in the 'most disadvantaged' had small schools at Billbul and Murrumbidgee closed recently. Even more, I am concerned about the lack of purchasing power of the regions compared to big cities and regions close to the ocean and to capital cities.

Recently I visited Matong. In my youth I remember the strong Australian Rules teams (with 18 a side just in the top grade and the same in the lower grade). Data at the former Mechanics Institute and on a commemorative plaque, opposite what was the profitable shopping area in the main street, traces the demise of Matong as the railway station was down graded, grain was able to be trucked to larger centres for better prices, the Post Office was closed, the school closed, the hotel closed and the last general store closed. Now the only inhabitants are a small number of farmers and quite a few pensioners. However as soon as both of the pensioners at each house lose their licenses they have to leave. The only shop sells antiques and is only open at weekends. To buy even bread and milk they have to drive to Grong Grong or to Coolamon.

Grong Grong school has now been closed. There was basically no genuine communication. My contention is that they are doomed to follow the various stages of decline to the current status of Matong and then to oblivion. The spirit of revival which is described here has been snuffed out by closure of the school. The DEC describes the (doubtful) benefits to the students of getting out of their town by bus while there has been no consideration of the effects on the vibrant life of the town.

Section (d) the transparency of the consultation process surrounding school closures

For the only two schools I know of the transparency of the consultation process has been abysmal. In the case of Grong Grong an extremely capable mother with extensive talents for published writing has presented some damning evidence. I quote her:

'They advised us that no final decision had been made, and further discussion with the community would be undertaken. The Department's report, foreshadowing a recommendation for recess (which we obtained under the *Government Information Public Access Act*) was dated the day after the initial community meeting. Consultation indeed.'

STOP PRESS

An email has just arrived from Helen Dalton who is overseas:

Presently I'm overseas and will return on the 22nd August.

School closures should not happen unless there is consultation within the school and wider community. A school in a remote rural area provides the "glue" in that community. Without the school the community will suffer. Usually demise of footy team, no policeman, drop in housing values etc

In the case of Murrumbidgee, 19 students should not place a school at risk of closure. The department of Ed had apparently commissioned a study which concluded that Murrumbidgee was waning economically and school enrolments would drop. I would like to examine the study and where they got their figures from. There is plenty of job opportunities in and around Murrumbidgee eg Freedom foods, expansion of cotton, Wumbulgal logistic site, and generally farm gate prices are rising particularly in the protein industry (chooks, beef, lamb, nuts) etc.

The lack of transparency is a concern. The wider community including past parents were excluded from "discussions". It was a hatch up job. While Piccoli tells us to be upbeat about the great things happening in the area he is removing infrastructure and closing sites.

The Murray electorate has received very little infrastructure spending, For example the Griffith Police Station development was not built with government money so mr Piccoli is actually not gaining any but planning to remove infrastructure.

I will add that Mr Piccoli also needs a late note from his absence of government obligations. My goodness these comfortable politicians need to be reminded of their obligations to their electorate. They are our servants!

The Murrumbidgee school site was donated by the Wynne Family for a school. Does the department have the right then to sell this?

Section (c) factors considered in determining the suitability of alternative schools in the case of a closure

There are compelling reasons for a contrary view to current policies. However I want to give at least two examples where the considerations (or lack of them) by the Department of Education need to be made known.

The first one is completely second hand and from many years ago but perhaps someone might feel that the facts might be worth uncovering. The school is at Lake Wyangan it was fortunate to be a number of years ago when the DEC was not so aggressive, I was told that the school attendance was due to reduce to one. The very dedicated teacher personally visited many parents and was able to register six students which was sufficient to save the school. In following years the enrolment continued to climb. The reputation of the smaller local school attracted parents (and their children) to a school which did not have what were seen to be by some as gangs at the much larger school which they were to travel to by bus.

The second reason for a contrary view was based on the very constructive initiatives of the people of Grong Grong.

For the second I want to quote from a published story by Gemma Maier a parent from Grong Grong.

'At the end of that year (2014) we called for expressions of interest in enrolment and received 26 positive responses, including from Narrandera, where parents had heard good reports about our school.'

'With our school, we had a gem, and on a number of occasions we invited the Department of Education to look at our formula.' My comment *I can think of no better example of what makes country people great.*

Section(b) the processes, policies, procedures, accountability, and decision making surrounding the closure of schools in New South Wales

I was so concerned about what is happening to our small country town that I contested the NSW State election of 2015 to debate these issues but that opportunity was denied to me. Is this a part of the process of the Establishment? I am writing a book with the title of 'Is Australia's Establishment Failing?'

This was quoted by a parent in Grong Grong 'The Department told us the average taxpayer would not be happy to hear a school was being kept open for just a handful of children.' Is this a process of intimidation? Is it a procedure to say this to parents of small country towns? Is it bullying?

Recommendations

- 1. The policy of closing small country schools should be stopped and even the re-opening of some schools considered**

(Arthur) Brian Mills