

**Submission
No 17**

INQUIRY INTO REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND A GLOBAL SYDNEY

Organisation: Bulahdelah Chamber of Commerce & Tourism Inc

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Bulahdelah Chamber of Commerce and Tourism Inc.

New South Wales Legislative Council : Standing
Committee on State Development

RE – Inquiry into *Regional Development and a Global
Sydney*

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New South Wales Legislative Council : Standing Committee on State Development
Parliament House, Macquarie Street, Sydney New South Wales 2000

RE – Inquiry into *Regional Development and a Global Sydney*

Chairperson,

We wish to make a contribution to the inquiry *Regional Development and a Global Sydney*.

We believe such an inquiry is important not only to long term planning of Sydney, but also to the importance of regional areas. Both contribute significantly to the largest economy in Australia.

There is a perceived disparity between urban and regional New South Wales. Although Sydney contributes overwhelmingly to the economy, 40 per cent of economic activity and population is in Regional New South Wales and therefore cannot be discounted.

The development of long term plans and the coordination between government agencies and other interested parties is essential to realising this future vision of a productive and vibrant economy.

Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to provide a submission to this inquiry. We believe this inquiry is important to both the best interests of Sydney and Regional New South Wales.

Regards,

John Sahyoun

President, Bulahdelah Chamber of Commerce & Tourism Inc.

Vice President, MidCoast Business Chamber

4.06.2017

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3.1 Our Organisation

The Bulahdelah Chamber of Commerce Inc. is a small business Chamber located on the mid north coast of New South Wales (NSW) in a coastal rural area. We act as the peak body for business, tourism and community interests for our area. In addition we are a founding member of the MidCoast Business Chamber and have been finalists in the Hunter Business Awards for the last two previous consecutive years. We have established links with the Hunter Business Chamber and are alliance members of the NSW Business Chamber.

3.2 Our Interest

The current inquiry “Regional Development and a Global Sydney”¹ addresses the ideal of “how Sydney's growing prominence as a global city enhances regional development in New South Wales”. Whilst not wishing to demote the importance of Sydney in being the major driver of economic importance for NSW, we acknowledge that regional/rural development is important to the NSW economy. A third of Australian economic activity is generated in NSW and Sydney provides a gateway to the regions within NSW.

Being a rural Chamber, we are primarily concerned with rural NSW and the effect of any policy by way of legislation and government departmental initiatives on greater NSW.

We believe that the inquiry addresses two broad issues, these being –

- Sydney by its overarching influence as a large city being used a means to develop wider concerns. Australia is one of the most urbanized countries in the world² and therefore the state's capital (and also the largest city) produces a unique focus for debate.
- And secondly the issue of how regional/rural NSW may benefit from the development of Sydney as a key national and international player.

¹ NSW Legislative Council (2017) Regional Development and a Global Sydney. *Standing Committee on State Development*. [available] <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees/inquiries/Pages/inquiry-details.aspx?pk=2435> [accessed 23.04.2017]

² Ergas, H. (2014) Our metropolises must evolve but let's preserve their strengths. *The Australian* January 25, 2014. [available] <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/inquirer/our-metropolises-must-evolve-but-lets-preserve-their-strengths/news-story/40de1689e2bb117db546cdb96de3c49f> [accessed 22.04.2017]

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Both the state and federal government have acknowledged the importance of promoting employment and investment in regional areas, for example through regional planning committees. For example, Sydney is given special attention through government initiatives of late have been derived from the policies *A plan for growing Sydney*³ and the *Destination 2036 Action plan*, both which comment on a wide range of initiatives that need to take place over the next twenty years. In NSW, there are 14 Regional Development Committees that are tasked with –

- Being responsible for detailed regional plans that focus on the economic development of their region, taking into account relevant Commonwealth, state, territory and local government plans,
- Providing independent advice to government on critical issues affecting their region,
- Working closely with community leaders to identify priority activities that will drive regional economic development,
- Providing assistance to local communities to identify funding sources and develop project proposals to support economic growth, and
- Promoting awareness of government programmes in the RDA community.⁴

Regional NSW has its own distinctive properties and issues. There is a disparity between metropolitan and rural areas where Sydney is experiencing rapid growth and in particular rural areas are suffering decline.

3.3 Overall performance

It is reported that for the fifth consecutive quarter, New South Wales has been the best performing State in Australia⁵. In such, both Sydney and regional NSW contribute

³ NSW Government (2014) NSW Government (2014) *A plan for growing Sydney. NSW Planning and Environment* [available] <http://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/~media/Files/DPE/Plans-and-policies/a-plan-for-growing-sydney-2014-12.ashx> [accessed 14.07.2017]

⁴ Regional Development Australia (2016) *New South Wales* [available] <https://rda.gov.au/my-rda/n>

⁵ Angus, C. (2017) *Statistical Indicators 2/2017. Parliament of New South Wales* [available] <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/researchpapers/Pages/NSW-Economic-Update-Autumn-2017.aspx> [accessed 28.05.2017]

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significantly to not the overall development of NSW but also to the overall economic development of Australia.

At the State level, construction, financial services and rental, hiring and real estate services accounted for over 40% of NSW economic growth in 2015-16: a dependence that leaves the State exposed to economic risks. The increasing reliance on volatile transfer duty for NSW Government revenue presents an additional economic risk, which may lead to increasingly complex budgetary challenges if the NSW housing market experiences a significant downturn⁶. Key to this is the issue of economic development as this forms the basis of government economic policy.

Significant issues for both Sydney and Regional NSW include –

- Skill shortages – This is particularly important in regional NSW where, for example, medical personnel are in short supply.
- Government policies (as these dictate practice). It is important to note what has worked and what has not worked previously and make amendments where necessary.
- The contribution of technology initiatives. For example, the National Broadband Strategy (NBN) targets towns greater than one thousand, which means that smaller towns in regional NSW may miss potential development of technology initiatives.
- The need to learn from the lessons from economic successes/failures of other countries. Similar economies may have previously experienced similar issues and may provide insights into future directions for NSW.
- What decisions do people make in relocating from Sydney to regional NSW, whether these be for a “sea/tree” change? How does this affect their well being and contribute to regional development?

⁶ Angus, C. (2017) Statistical Indicators 2/2017. *Parliament of New South Wales* [available] <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/researchpapers/Pages/NSW-Economic-Update-Autumn-2017.aspx> [accessed 28.05.2017]

3.4 The Primacy of Sydney

Historically, Sydney as a primate city has dominated the debate. Before and after Federation, Sydney has been dominate in population, economic and finance, tourism with transportation networks radiating outwards from it. It also acts as an international gateway. Globalisation and centralization have strengthened the position of larger regional centres and cities in relation to smaller communities⁷. It is acknowledged that “Sydney is undergoing significant growth ...with massive investment in new infrastructure and a new planning governance structure with new global opportunities for economic growth⁸. These being “...knowledge-based businesses such as financial services and banking, information and communications technology, legal and management services, accounting and education”⁹.

Therefore, Sydney acts as a ‘hub’ in attracting people through its large population and therefore economies of scale are achievable as well as its positioning as an international city.

Sydney’s population growth is faster than that of regional NSW. It has been identified¹⁰ that Sydney absorbs 78% of NSW total population increase and this places pressure of existing infrastructure

Sydney exerts a powerful influence over NSW by its size, economy and the concentration of services. As a large city it is distinctly different to its surrounding

⁷ Planning Institute of Australia (2017) *Policy: Rural and Regional Development 12/10*. [available] <https://www.planning.org.au/policy/rural-and-regional-development-1210> [accessed 26.04.2017]

⁸ Regional Development Australia (2015) Sydney (RDA) is Bringing About The Next Phase Of Change And Growth Required To Keep Sydney At The Cutting Edge Of The Global Economy *Regional Development Australia* [available] <https://www.rdasymdney.org.au/news.asp?pid=134&id=221> [accessed 18.04.2017]

⁹ NSW Department of Industry (n.d2) Making it happen in the regions: Regional Development Framework. [available] https://www.industry.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0018/93222/regional-development-framework.pdf [accessed 13.05.2017]

¹⁰ Wade, M. (2017) Sydney’s population tops 5 million, ABS data shows. *The Sydney Morning Herald* March 30 2017 [available] <http://www.smh.com.au/nsw/sydneys-population-tops-five-million-abs-data-shows-20170330-gv9pnq.html> [accessed 12.05.2017]

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regional areas. In addition it is recognized as a city on a global scale and therefore acts as a “magnet” for business activity and tourism.

The challenge will be for governments to develop “flow on effects” from Sydney to that of regional NSW. The NSW Government in their plan for growing Sydney¹¹ believe that “Sydney is a global city, the premier city in Australia and the economic capital of the country. What happens in Sydney is important to the rest of the nation because of its impact on jobs, the economy and our capacity to produce goods and services that are in demand around the world.”

The question arises on whether Sydney needs the regions outside itself to prosper and whether regional NSW can address the issues that are inhibiting their development. We propose that both can enhance each other to power both our state and national growth and economy.

It is reported that “At the State level, construction, financial services and rental, hiring and real estate services accounted for over 40% of NSW economic growth in 2015-16: a dependence that leaves the State exposed to economic risks. The increasing reliance on volatile transfer duty for NSW Government revenue presents an additional economic risk, which may lead to increasingly complex budgetary challenges if the NSW housing market experiences a significant downturn”¹²

3.5 Regional Areas

Development of rural areas is seen as important. Regional NSW is home to about 41% of the total NSW population (2.9 million), and produces about one third (\$138 billion) of total NSW gross state product¹³.

Therefore rural/regional NSW is viewed as important to the economy of the state.

¹¹ NSW Government (2014) A plan for growing Sydney. *NSW Planning and Environment* [available] <http://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/~media/Files/DPE/Plans-and-policies/a-plan-for-growing-sydney-2014-12.ashx> [accessed 14.07.2017]

¹² Angus, C. (2017) Statistical Indicators 2/2017. *Parliament of New South Wales* [available] <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/researchpapers/Pages/NSW-Economic-Update-Autumn-2017.aspx> [accessed 28.05.2017]

¹³ NSW Department of Industry (n.d.) *Regional NSW and the Regional Tourism Infrastructure Fund* [available] <https://www.industry.nsw.gov.au/business-and-industry-in-nsw/assistance-and-support/regional-tourism-infrastructure-fund> [accessed 14.05.2017]

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There are a number of inhibiting factors that prevent development and have a bearing on their economies. It is noted¹⁴ that access to rather than an absolutely equal distribution of services and opportunities is a key driver of regional development.

3.6. Key Regional Issues

Notwithstanding, there are a number of key issues that bear upon regional development outside of Sydney. These being -

Trade is often seasonal. For example tourism is dependent upon favourable weather conditions. Tourism is also dependent upon sufficient infrastructure, a range of accommodation options and that there is currently a lack of an integrated tourism strategy¹⁵.

Commodity cycles – A downturn in commodity prices has an adverse effect on regional economic growth¹⁶. Many rural and regional communities are dependent upon primary production which is vulnerable to changed economic conditions.

There is a lack of land that can be used for industrial development. Development of businesses is dependent upon the suitability of land and the constraints of local government approvals.

There is a lack of business expertise. There are in addition issues in regional Australia with the aging populations and the lack of suitable employment opportunities for youth.

The cost of freight and transportation is high¹⁷. Coupled with inadequate infrastructure acts as a negative influence of being cost-competitive with major centres such as Sydney/

¹⁴ Planning Institute Australia (2008) *Future Directions for Regional New South Wales. PIA NSW Economic Development Chapter* [available] <https://www.planning.org.au/documents/item/1494> [accessed 26.04.2017]

¹⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2013) *Research Paper: A Review of Regional Development Australia Committee Regional Plans 2.3 –Tourism*. [available] <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/1381.0~2013~Main%20Features~2.3%20Tourism~40> [accessed 18.04.2017]

¹⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2013) *Research Paper: A Review of Regional Development Australia Committee Regional Plans 2.1 – Economic Threats*. [available] <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/1381.0main+features202013> [accessed 18.04.2017]

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Funding for regional infrastructure is limited to large scale projects that bring substantial economic benefit¹⁸ Funding is limited to “critical visitor economy infrastructure projects such as rail trails, airports and cruise terminals. Improving infrastructure assists in attracting more visitors to regional NSW and makes it a more attractive place to live and work.”

The NSW Government has recognized “serious issues facing regional NSW such as pockets of youth unemployment, social disadvantage, changing economic opportunities and increased competition”. In addition, regional NSW may be in decline and the emphasis may be to manage to negative effects of decline¹⁹.

3.7 Discussion

Sydney exerts a powerful influence over NSW by its size, economy and the concentration of services. As a large city it is distinctly different to its surrounding regional areas. In addition it is recognized as a city on a global scale and therefore acts as a “magnet” for business activity and tourism.

Regional NSW has its own distinctive properties and issues. There is a disparity between metropolitan and rural areas where Sydney is experiencing rapid growth and in particular rural areas are suffering decline.

The challenge will be to develop “flow on effects” from Sydney to that of regional NSW. The NSW Government (2014)²⁰ in their plan for growing Sydney believe that “Sydney is a global city, the premier city in Australia and the economic capital of the country. What happens in Sydney is important to the rest of the nation because of its impact on jobs, the economy and our capacity to produce goods and services that are in demand around the world.”

¹⁷ Australian Local Government Association (2010) *State of Regions Report*. [available] <http://alga.asn.au/?ID=165&Menu=44,68,179> [accessed 23.04.2017]

¹⁸ NSW Department of Industry (n.d.2) *Why Sydney and NSW* [available] <https://www.industry.nsw.gov.au/invest-in-nsw/why-sydney-and-nsw> [accessed 26.04.2017]

¹⁹ Planning Institute of Australia (2017) *Policy: Rural and Regional Development 12/10*. [available] <https://www.planning.org.au/policy/rural-and-regional-development-1210> [accessed 26.04.2017]

²⁰ NSW Government (2014) A plan for growing Sydney. *NSW Planning and Environment* [available] http://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/~/_media/Files/DPE/Plans-and-policies/a-plan-for-growing-sydney-2014-12.ashx [accessed 14.05.2017]

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As Sydney forms an International and Domestic gateway, it is strategically important in attracting tourism. Austrade²¹ indicates that tourism is growing annually at 4%. In order to service this demand attention needs to be placed on declining infrastructure, particularly in roads and rail networks. Recent political initiatives such as the sale of ‘poles and wires’ contribute to an infrastructure pool, mainly directed as Sydney infrastructure.

The question arises on whether Sydney needs the regions outside itself to prosper and whether regional NSW can address the issues that are inhibiting their development.

3.8 Reference Terms and Recommendations

- ***ensuring the regions benefit from the expansion of international trade, infrastructure, employment, tourism, innovation and research in the greater Sydney region***

Recommendations

- Exploration of international trade opportunities in regional NSW, for example primary production (mining, agriculture). The produce we produce is acknowledged as being superior to our nearest Asian markets and further exploration of market penetration would be of benefit to our economy.
- Coordination between government departments (both state, federal and local). Any initiative will require all levels of government to be able to work together for a common cause.
- Regional think tanks to explore current and potential investment opportunities.
- ***Identify the sectors of the economy that can provide the greatest opportunities for regional development, including forecasts for jobs growth***

²¹ Australian Government (n.d.) Welcome to Tourism Research Australia. *Austrade* [available] <http://www.tra.gov.au> [accessed 12.05.2017]

Recommendations

- Increasing decentralization. Government departments have been or are to be relocated to regional centres²². This may include departments and organisations that are not dependent upon a physical locality. This may explore the advantages of using information technology.
- Identify²³ where new trends where regional areas may benefit is through information technology which provide new business opportunities that are not dependent upon being located in a capital city.
- The development of tourism infrastructure and promotion, using international tourists to Sydney as a “springboard” to visiting regional areas. Beyond increasing primary production, this employment category has the greatest potential for growth.

Other than construction activity (as a principle driver of our economy) which is vulnerable to demand and factors such as interest rates, alternative pathways and initiatives should be explored to ensure continued economic expansion. This may, for example, be increased housing activity in regional NSW.

- ***How collaboration between levels of government, non-government and private sectors can assist the regions to benefit from Sydney’s global position.***

Recommendations

- One area that could be discussed is the commonality of issues of Sydney and regional NSW. That is, infrastructure concerns, population demographics (both advancing and declining populations in regional/rural NSW) and which industries could be developed to enhance both (e.g. tourism).

²² Hutchens, G. (2017) Coalition announces dramatic public service decentralisation plan. *The Guardian* 19 April 2017. [available] <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2017/apr/19/coalition-announces-dramatic-public-service-decentralisation-plan> [accessed 20.04.2017]

²³ Ergas, H. (2014) Our metropolises must evolve but let's preserve their strengths. *The Australian* January 25, 2014. [available] <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/inquirer/our-metropolises-must-evolve-but-lets-preserve-their-strengths/news-story/40de1689e2bb117db546cdb96de3c49f> [accessed 22.04.2017]

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- Have committees composed of those who understand the challenges, opportunities and priorities within their local community. These committees should have a mix of experience in different industry sectors and have a broad experience in these sectors. These committees should have demonstrated leadership and are well networked within their particular communities.
- In establishing such committees, there should be an emphasis in developing broad strategies that will identify the area's potential growth sectors and future opportunities. This may include potential new markets and related workforce issues.
- There is a need to engage with various stakeholders across government, industry and community to provide a coordinated response.
- Funding should reflect the regions identified priorities. Consideration should be given to a mix of private and government funding for worthwhile initiatives.
- There is comment that indicates²⁴ the lack of planning coordination, regulatory hurdles and the differences in economies between Sydney and regional NSW as being the major inhibitors of change. Regulatory hurdles such as the reduction of red tape and better communication/coordination between government agencies.
- Planning controls on development by state and local government authorities is excessive. The Planning Institute of Australia²⁵ suggests that this may be overcome by "All levels of government to coordinate using a planning approach to regional development, based on state and regional spatial frameworks

²⁴ Kelly, A., Dollery, B. and Grant. B. (2009), Regional development and local Government: Three generations of federal intervention, *Australasian Journal of Regional Studies*, 15(2), 2009, 171-193. [available] <http://ro.uow.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1268&context=scipapers> [accessed 18.04.2017]

²⁵ Planning Institute of Australia (2017) *Policy: Rural and Regional Development 12/10*. [available] <https://www.planning.org.au/policy/rural-and-regional-development-1210> [accessed 26.04.2017]

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- providing a hierarchical network of connected settlements, ensuring environmental sustainability and managing decline.”
 - o ***any other related matter.***
- Overall, the key to sustained development in both Sydney and regional NSW is the development of a long term coordinated plan that allows to development of both rather than one at the expense of the other. Sydney has experienced significant population growth which has placed pressures on, for example, ensuring sufficient transportation infrastructure and affordable housing for the growing populous.
- The current *Regional Infrastructure Fund* currently directs funding to large scale projects of significance that will create employment and economic benefits. Consideration should be given to a similar scheme for small and medium sized business initiatives as they are the main drivers of the economy.

3.9 Concluding Remarks

Concentration of development has favoured Sydney. This is particularly true with infrastructure where, for example, the sale of ‘poles and wires’ has seen the diversion of proceeds to the larger cities. As Sydney contains the highest population concentration and economic activity it will remain the focal point for activity in NSW. However, regional NSW also contributes significantly to the state economy as developments at state level should acknowledge this and develop a coordinated plan for development of both.

Both Sydney and regional NSW face significant issues in the development of their economies and in the enhancement of each.

Policy in this area is largely dependent upon identified needs or shortcomings being identified through government reports, with the media as an observer of the wider public debate concerning wider issues.

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