

**INQUIRY INTO INTEGRITY, EFFICACY AND VALUE FOR
MONEY OF NSW GOVERNMENT GRANT PROGRAMS**

Organisation: Bourke Shire Council

Date Received: 21 August 2020

The Council of The Shire of Bourke

29 Mitchell St, Bourke, N.S.W 2840
P.O. Box 21, Bourke, N.S.W 2840
Telephone (02) 6830 8000 Fax (02) 6872 3030
Email: bourkeshire@bourke.nsw.gov.au
Web: <http://www.bourke.nsw.gov.au>



Please address all
communications to
the General Manager

Our Ref: BH-KHO-

Office of the Mayor

21st August 2020

Mr David Shoebridge, MLC
Chair
Public Accountability Committee
Parliament House
Macquarie St
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Sir,

Re: Inquiry into integrity, efficacy and value for money of NSW Government grant programs.

Thank you for the opportunity to present a submission to the Committee as it makes inquiries into and reports on the integrity, efficacy and value for money of NSW Government grant programs.

I note that as part of the Committees Terms of Reference, the Committee is looking at:

- (a) the range and availability of funding programs, including but not limited to:*
- (ii) local government funding such as the Stronger Communities Fund and Stronger Country Communities Fund, and further the manner in which grants are determined.*

As you would be well aware the Bourke Shire has experienced the severe community and economic impact, which continues today despite recent rains, resulting from a once in a hundred year drought. This drought resulted in agricultural activity in the region essentially coming to a standstill and employment opportunities evaporating. Population numbers in the town of Bourke fell significantly.

Despite this unfortunate set of circumstances, the Shire of Bourke has been able to improve the quality of live for its residents and visitors thanks to the significant grant funding opportunities presented by both the NSW and Federal Governments in recent years.

In respect of the NSW Government, the decision to remove, where possible, the Benefit Cost Ratio (BCR) requirements of past governments, was a godsend to communities such as Bourke. Whilst

there were previously grant funding opportunities available, Bourke Council and like remote Councils, would often fall short in terms of being able to achieve the required BCR, given the limited population base.

Through the Stronger Country Communities Fund (SCCF), Council has successfully applied and then been able to undertake a project such as the redevelopment of its Olympic Pool. Pools have a limited life span and the Bourke Olympic Pool had essentially met its. The funding requirements for the redevelopment of the Pool were simply outside the resources of Council and without the funding through the SCCF, I would suggest that Bourke would ultimately be without a Pool. Such a thought is difficult to comprehend in the harsh environment of Bourke, let alone in terms of the potential dangers presented by people swimming in the river and resulting social issues.

Any suggestion that there is a need to centralise the decision making process of grant funding outcomes is rejected. We as a State need Government Ministers who can make decisions in respect of grant funding that meet the needs of local communities.

For many years, regional NSW was essentially ignored in terms of grant funding with NSW considered to refer to Newcastle, Sydney, and Wollongong. I can recall the days when we would get excited an issue a media release because the Council had received a funding grant for \$1500 to upgrade a community hall!

Thankfully, we have progressed well past that and regional NSW are finally receiving grants that are having a positive impact on the quality of life of resident and visitors. This applies to not only Bourke, but all regional NSW.

It is my strong view that the achievements of Government in NSW in respect of the distribution of grant funding should be applauded rather than being potentially denigrated. Council appreciates the need for transparency in these matters and supports the current rigour that is currently required in terms of the application and reporting process for funding.

Thank you again for the opportunity to make this submission.

Yours faithfully

*Councillor Barry Hollman
Mayor of Bourke*