

Submission  
No 43

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

**Organisation:** Cr Ben Shields, Mayor of Dubbo Regional Council

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DUBBO REGIONAL COUNCIL  
*Office of the Mayor*  
Councillor Ben Shields

20 August 2020

Mr David Shoebridge MLC  
Chair  
Inquiry into Integrity of NSW Government Grant Programs  
Parliament House  
6 Macquarie Street  
SYDNEY NSW 2830

Dear Sir

**SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY INTO THE INTEGRITY, EFFICIENCY AND VALUE FOR MONEY OF NSW GOVERNMENT GRANT PROGRAMS**

As the Mayor of the Dubbo Region I welcome the opportunity to make a submission in regards to the delivery of NSW Government funding schemes and the impact they have on our region.

At a time when regional areas are receiving unprecedented levels of government investment and infrastructure backlogs are being addressed, I find it disturbing that this issue is being politicised. The current government deserves praise for providing billions of dollars for projects that will revitalise rural and regional NSW and have supported it through a drought that threatened the survival of entire communities.

It was very disappointing to see media reports alleging that Dubbo had received more funding than it should have from the Stronger Communities Fund program in 2017. The \$27.7 million allocated to the Dubbo Region was for projects including the reconstruction of the Wellington Pool, upgrading of Dubbo's Fitzroy-Cobra streets intersection and construction of a new premises for the Dubbo VRA and SES.

I have personally been very satisfied with the level of funding that our region has received through extensive funding programs such as the \$400 million Stronger Country Communities Fund, \$500 million Growing Local Economies Fund and \$100 million Regional Communities Development Fund, to name a few.



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Since the merger of the former Dubbo City and Wellington Shire Councils, there has been tens of millions of dollars in infrastructure backlog, especially in the Wellington Shire, that have been determined. Unprecedented levels of funding provided by the Government have made it possible to address some of that backlog.

Problems in Wellington included an aging and structurally unsound Olympic Swimming Pool, outdated facilities at a number of sporting grounds, and the Wellington Caves tourist attraction no longer being up to standard. Funding for all of these projects and many more have been forthcoming from regional programs that have been prioritised by the Government.

Talking to Wellington residents they feel increasingly confident about the future of their town and genuinely delighted about the amount of new projects that are proceeding. It is their belief that there is more investment in their town than there has been for a long-time and a greater cause for optimism.

One project of particular pride, which came through State Government funding, is the creation of a Wiradjuri Community Space in Cameron Park and the creation of a bronze statue of the Wedge-Tailed Eagle, the totem of the local Binjang clan of Wellington. The goal of this facility is to enhance education around the region's rich Indigenous history, generate employment for local Aboriginals and create a sense of pride and achievement. It is these sort of projects that have previously been unsuccessful for grant funding yet the current government has understood their importance for cultural, tourism and social benefit.

Dubbo has also benefitted with new sporting facilities, upgrades to the CBD and tourism hotspots and general road upgrades. Additionally, works continue on the redeveloped Dubbo Hospital including an integrated cancer centre. All of these projects have helped the regional economy through employment, tourism and general investment.

The reality is that the Dubbo Region has significant social problems that need to be addressed. Funding from the State Government has seen a considerable uplift in economic activity and in turn, created much needed jobs and prosperity. Added to that, the significant investment in Aboriginal cultural infrastructure as mentioned earlier is funding that is desperately needed but has not been afforded by any previous government.

There has also been an increase in funding transport infrastructure through the \$500 Fixing Local Roads and \$500 million Fixing Country Bridges program with the Dubbo Region sharing in funding from both.

Dubbo is the epicentre of Western NSW and supports a service population of 140,000 while only having a Council population of 55,000 people. This highlights that government assistance is needed by ratepayers to fund vital services for people who may not even live within Council borders.

Let me be very clear. To politicise important regional economic and social spending that creates jobs and increases cultural harmony and awareness can at best be described as ignorant and at worst, racist.

I find it extremely concerning that at a time when there are regional funding programs that are finally delivering a fair share to regional Councils, some politicians are questioning these vitally important grants. As a Mayor I have met with a number of parties within State Parliament who have shown an interest in Western NSW and the issues affecting our region. Liberal, National, Labor, Shooters, Fishers and Farmers, One Nation and Independent politicians have all been to Dubbo and have met with myself to discuss the matters that are important to the people of Western NSW. However I have not heard from the NSW Greens and I am disappointed they have chosen to attack these programs without talking to relevant Councils.

While I am extremely grateful for the hundreds of millions of dollars in funding Dubbo Regional Council has received from the NSW Government, I believe there should be more, not less. Council continues to push for funding for a Drug and Alcohol detoxification and rehabilitation centre, and a Drug Court, to help us combat the scourge of illegal narcotics, including methamphetamines in our region.

I would hope that this inquiry doesn't harm potential future funding opportunities for a rehabilitation centre, or other important projects that will help to close the gap for our Indigenous population and those who are financially disadvantaged.

As always, I remain available for any member of parliament who may wish to discuss the economic, infrastructure and social issues that effects Dubbo and Western NSW.

Yours faithfully

*Councillor Ben Shields*  
Mayor