

**Submission
No 94**

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

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RE: NSW Stronger Country Communities Fund

To the NSW Legislative Council Public Accountability Committee,

I am writing today to comment on the importance of local government funding, in particular the Stronger Country Community fund. I have lived in country communities most of my life and am saddened to see the long-term impact of not only drought, flood and bushfire (and now Covid) but the slow collapse of many once vibrant communities as residents grow older and the young look for financial security for their families in larger regional centres or cities.

The ongoing financial support of Country communities is critical to the long-term success of our state. Failure to invest in rural areas, promoting community and indirectly business/industry will see an increase in movement of population (especially the young) from regional to metropolitan areas, further eroding the ability of communities to grow or rebuild. Additionally, increased flow of population to more metropolitan areas will increase pressure on already overburdened resources where expansion of services is limited by available land. Statistics indicate a small flow of population to regional areas, however most of that is to large regional areas with good infrastructure, not small country communities .

This program allows each Local Government Area to be allocated funding, without competition from larger councils or cities, while still equitably distributing funds to community projects, in more colloquial terms “spreading the love” for the wider community good, not just those communities with the resources to commit the writing of grant preparation.

The Stronger Country Community fund allows smaller communities such as Cowra to aspire to growth and development that is based on community needs both current and future. This model allows for development that is selected by those who will benefit from it and who best know and have personal involvement in their community needs. Growth of country communities is growth for NSW and the expansion of Sydney is geographically limited. The move to country regions, which has hopefully been expanded by the unexpected move to working from home for many, is a golden opportunity for the NSW Government to continue to invest in the future of country communities while allowing some autonomy in the choice of that investment.

I look forward to seeing the outcome of this inquiry and am hopeful that this invaluable program will continue to be available for country communities.

Yours sincerely,

Kylie Docker