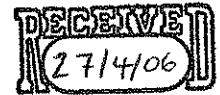


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Submission Regards – Inquiry into Retaining Young People in Rural Towns and Communities



There are many factors that influence young people in deciding to leave or remain in rural communities in which they reside, but for the sake of relevance, we will concentrate on what we believe to be the two most important – employment and housing.

1 – EMPLOYMENT

The ability to gain employment is one of the most influential factors that contribute to young people leaving or remaining in rural towns and communities. The opportunity of employment in rural towns is essential for a young persons sense of wellbeing and health. Employment gives one an income and purpose, and makes a person feel needed and useful. Being employed in a rural town gives one a sense of contributing to the community and society in which they live. As we are all aware, this sense of connectedness is a crucial ingredient of retaining our well being, both physical and mental. It also reduces the chance of being effected by health related issues such as depression, loneliness and anxiety, common illnesses of our modern society.

2 – HOUSING

Housing is in our opinion the second most influential factor in this issue. There must be affordable housing or land available to young people in rural towns and communities. Without this availability, even if they have employment and thus an income, we will not retain the young people, if a large proportion of their income is depleted by paying rent, and they see themselves as not getting anywhere, as far as saving for owning their own home is concerned, they generally leave their rural towns or communities to settle in a place that can offer these two crucial ingredients- employment and affordable housing/rents.(Starting their families else where.)

The housing commission developments, offered to some communities, over the last forty to fifty years, were a wonderful opportunity for young people to have a chance of saving and perhaps buying a home in the community in which they were residing, by providing affordable rent and therefore the opportunity to save. They may not have necessarily bought the housing commission home they where living in or renting, but if not, they often bought elsewhere in that town or community and in so doing, they contributed to the social and economic wellbeing of that community.

OTHER FACTORS- that influence a persons desire to stay or leave.

Life style,

Rural living is often seen as healthy living, but it can be quite the opposite. Young people often feel isolated and lonely as rural communities often offer less, in terms of social activities & entertainment .The older community members often have the need for more professional medical services which are hard to access, as there are fewer hospitals and doctors in Rural Towns to meet and treat the needs of the community. Specialists are nearly always in the cities and very large regional centres.

Family and friends

This is another reason why sometimes people choose to stay or leave the rural towns and communities in which they reside. Seeing family and friends leaving a community prompts one to question their own future in that community. For instance if the local sporting club closes (football & netball), the friendship networks formed through this association will be lost, particularly if friends or family members decide to leave that rural township and community. People tend to reassess their future in a rural community if they lose their friendship network and other factors such as employment and housing are not good.

Public transport

Rising fuel and motoring costs

Future employment prospects

These can all be seen as reasons why people decide to stay or leave Rural Towns and Communities.

2. DECIDING TO RETURN TO THE RURAL COMMUNITY OR NOT

The most compelling reasons for deciding to return to the Rural Community after completion of study or being away, is usually based on the availability of employment and housing.

Other reasons could be as simple as-

-They did not like city life.

-Mum and Dad are getting older and need looking after. (And we feel a responsibility for this).

Our own personal experience with this is our son who has completed his studies and achieved a degree at university and returned to live with us at home in our Rural Community where he has contributed to and knows many of the social, sporting, and community groups that he has grown up with. He would like to settle down and make a future for himself, but with the cost of housing/ rent it is now very apparent to him even though he has employment, that he will not be able to live here, marry, and raise a family here in the future.

3. DEVELOPING STRATEGIES TO RETAIN AND INCREASE YOUNG PEOPLE IN RURAL TOWNS AND COMMUNITIES.

Well-balanced strategies.

There needs to be a 'whole of government', approach to this. There is no point, one government department making decisions concerning their area of policy development, without thorough consultation with other government departments and the community on which they have an effect.

Planning departments need to consider the social and economic implications of their policies, as much as the environmental implications. It appears at present, that the environmental factors to policy development far outweigh the social and economic factors. In our opinion all 3 factors are crucial components and must be considered equally if we are to have a well-balanced approach to planning and strategies.

Implications of the sea change phenomenon.

The sea change phenomenon, appears to have encouraged planners for rural communities to tighten and contain development and housing to within town boundaries. This policy implies a weighty consideration of the environment but little consideration of the 2 other crucial factors that make for a sustainable community- social and economic factors. In many rural communities on the coast,

this can only lead to the forcing out of the young people from these towns as they have no where to live. Property prices are well beyond their reach and there are no affordable land or housing packages available. Planning is not balancing the 3 crucial factors- social, economic and environmental factors in policy development. These high housing and land prices, often change the character of the town by encouraging multi-unit development and high-density living which can lead to neighbour-to-neighbour conflict. This can also create a loss of identity and friendship networks for the people that wish to remain, as they see their neighbourhood changing, and family and friends selling up and moving to cities. People buying into many of these rural towns and communities on the coast are often wealthy retirees that just want a holiday house and a good investment at the same time. Whereas the rural towns need the young people to stay as a permanent part of the community and not just the part-time holiday house owner.

Strategy for affordable land and housing.

We believe that state government should develop a strategy of affordable land release for all rural towns and communities. (It has been done in the past at Lorne). The basis of the land release in 1985 at Lorne as we understand it, was to provide land (eight allotments) for local couples that worked and lived in the town but could not afford the current market prices for houses in the town. Some of the conditions to be eligible to apply for the land were, that you had to build within two years, you had to have enough finance to build, you were not to rent your new home, it had to be your first home or land purchase, you could not sell your new home under five years, and you needed to have been working and living in the town for a certain number of years.

We feel that with a reappraisal of the conditions that applied and perhaps some new criteria added, that this strategy could again be used to help solve this problem of affordable housing for young people and families in all rural towns and communities.

Of the eight couples that bought land here in Lorne in 1985, all went on and had families, seven of those families still live in Lorne and three of those families still live in the same houses that they built in Dorman St and contribute to the social and economic wellbeing of this community. These families would not be living here today if it were not for the Labor government of the day making some hard decisions, which have benefited this community and could benefit other rural towns and communities if done again.

Employment.

An employment strategy that works long term is very difficult to develop. Obviously some form of work needs to be available, often it is seasonal in rural towns and communities and based around tourism and agriculture which is very much effected by our regional and state climatic conditions, and thus at times makes it hard to deliver employment when this fails.

In our experience, our local rural town has endless opportunity for employment but because of the lack of affordable land/housing the young people who would be

attracted to this employment are unable to live in this community and therefore are forced to find affordable housing elsewhere which leads to them living and working elsewhere.

State Government could perhaps work with local government and look at many of the local government structures that were in place in many rural towns, prior to amalgamation of many shires, for economic reasons. Surely a reassessment of these employment positions on social and economic wellbeing to the community should now be considered against just the supposedly economic factors that closed many of these employment opportunities in rural towns and communities. Some of these could be perhaps be re-established in the rural towns and communities where they once functioned. For example local shire works depots in rural towns, many of which have been now closed, often employed local community people who knew the area in which they worked and made these people responsible for looking after their area. This gave them and the rural community in which they lived, a sense of achievement through being seen working in that community and achieving something for that community. (Getting a job done).

To the future.

If we are to have sustainable rural towns and communities, retaining young people, government must formulate new strategies giving equal consideration to the social, and economic wellbeing of the community as well as the environmental factors. Looking forward, it appears that many young people in rural towns and communities will continue to leave if nothing is done to support and help them as we support and help the elderly in our communities.

State government can and must take some bold actions to solve this problem as they have been seen to do in the past with their housing commission and their structured, affordable land release packages.

Yours sincerely

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