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ADVANCE SEA LAKE INC

26 April 2006

Ben Hardman MP
Chair
Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee
Level 8, 35 Spring Street, Melbourne
Victoria 3000 Australia

Dear Sir

At the April meeting of the Committee of Advance Sea Lake Inc, we discussed the issue of young people leaving small rural towns such as ours. The following points were raised:

- Long term work opportunities are generally lacking.
- Family farms are unable to support multiple families and indeed are being sold off because young people finding employment elsewhere do not intend to return.
- Lengthy periods of drought continue to have a long term impact, particularly those of the 1980s, where we lost a generation of young people, and this decade where lack of rain continues to be a problem.
- Young people often need to travel to larger regional centres or major cities for further education and training.

For example, of the 15 students who completed Year 12 at the local school in 2005, two are undertaking apprenticeships in Bendigo, one in Swan Hill and another with a possibility of one in the Gisborne area, three are enrolled at Melbourne universities, three in Ballarat, one at an agricultural college near Horsham and one at TAFE in Mildura, one is looking for employment or training in Melbourne to follow sporting commitments, one has returned to Melbourne and one is currently working in Sea Lake but looking to join the Defence Forces.

At this stage, only one is considering returning to the local area in the future.

- One member of the Committee expressed the belief that the location where you first experience work is often the location where you stay.

ADVANCE SEA LAKE INC
A0048986T

ABN: 42 466 711 915

PO Box 190
SEA LAKE 3533

VISION

To have a leadership group with the passion and drive to motivate and stimulate the development of a strong, thriving, supportive community

Other points raised:

- For those who have returned or are considering returning for family or lifestyle reasons, housing is a major concern. There is a lack of quality, affordable accommodation for rent or purchase.
- Another major issue is a lack of employment opportunities for the spouse/partner of young people returning, except in education or health.
- There has been a decline in services available in small communities. It is difficult to attract and retain staff in the health field, particularly doctors and nursing staff.
- It is becoming increasingly difficult for sporting groups to field sides. Many towns' teams have had to amalgamate. People are less likely to shop in their local towns if they have to travel to follow sport.
- Many committees of community groups are aging and experiencing difficulties with succession planning. Some organisations have folded as their members become too old to continue.
- One possible solution is the development of alternative industries to provide new opportunities for ongoing employment. A combination of climatic, economic and technological factors indicates that agriculture is likely to only provide limited opportunities in the foreseeable future.
- Local communities also need assistance with promotion of their needs and opportunities. This may be financial but help is also needed in terms of expertise and coordination.

Thank you for providing this opportunity for us to contribute to your discussion.

Yours faithfully



Patricia Amos
Minute Secretary
Advance Sea Lake Inc
amos.patricia.d@edumail.vic.gov.au