

# CORRECTED VERSION

## RURAL AND REGIONAL SERVICES AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

### Inquiry into retaining young people in rural towns and communities

Yarram — 24 May 2006

#### Members

Mr B. P. Hardman

Mr R. G. Mitchell

Mr C. Ingram

Mr J. M. McQuilten

Chair: Mr B. P. Hardman

Deputy Chair: Mr C. Ingram

#### Staff

Executive Officer: Ms L. Topic

Research Officers: Dr P. Chen, Ms C. Tischler

#### Witnesses

Mr D M Duursma, Teacher & Football Coach, Yarram Football & Netball Clubs (affirmed) and

Mr J Papworth, Former Principal of Yarram Primary School and former president Yarram Netball Club (sworn).

**The CHAIR** — Welcome. Thank you for joining us today. Under the powers conferred on this committee by the Constitution Act and the Parliamentary Committees Act this committee is empowered to take all evidence at these hearings on oath or affirmation, and I wish to advise all present at these hearings that all evidence taken by this committee including submissions is, under the provisions of the Constitution Act and the Parliamentary Committees Act, granted immunity from judicial review. I also wish to advise that any comments made by witnesses outside the committee's hearing are not protected by parliamentary privilege. We are an all-party parliamentary committee, including an Independent member. We are hearing evidence today on the inquiry into retaining young people in rural towns and communities.

Before we begin could you please give us your full name and address and the name of the organization you represent today, position within that organization and take the oath or affirmation.

**Mr DUURSMA** — My name is Dean Duursma, I am the senior coach of the Yarram Football Club and I am also a teacher, a year 9 coordinator at Yarram Secondary College, so I will be representing both of those groups. My address is [ADDRESS REMOVED] Foster.

**Mr PAPWORTH** — My name is John Papworth, I am a former principal of the Yarram Primary School and I am also a former president of the committee for the Yarram Football Club. I am filling in for the current president Peter Jenkins today. I live at [ADDRESS REMOVED] which is just across the road from here and I have been living in this community since 1975 and I bought up a young family here.

**The CHAIR** — If you can please give us your evidence of perhaps about 15 minutes and then we will have time for questions following.

**Mr PAPWORTH** — Just from the sheet I have written out, a lot of this you will probably find it is fairly repetitive from wherever you go. Why the young leave, the education opportunities here are good up until the end of year 12 but from there on they become very restrictive. Up to year 12 I think the only problem we ever have is that some people want to send their children away to private schools, but that is a problem that is faced by people everywhere. From year 12 on it does become a problem. Churchill does offer something, mostly children from here they go off to tertiary education they go to Melbourne or Geelong or somewhere down that way. So you have got education opportunities and then work opportunities too, particularly in a professional line, there is not very much on offer around the place here. Career opportunities from here you get a lot of the ones go across to Latrobe Valley to find work. They live here travel across each day that is an hour's travel, there are quite a few who do that, and that is a pretty big commitment.

Some others leave here to go and live over there to be able to work there, because that is probably the area where there is most ample work, or else out in Bass Strait, you also get a lot of the ones that work out in Bass Strait. Social opportunities is a huge thing living in a small town. The young people probably feel a bit closed in and they get a chance to get out and spread their wings a bit involved with city life, see the bright lights and of course a lot of them like to travel too. You get a lot of young people nowadays that like travel opportunities and they just go.

The reason why they stay, security, family, friends, young love or something like that, that they do not want to leave and probably the biggest plus factor for this community is that it is a very, very caring community. I guess I can emphasise that and I do not mean to put Sale down or anything. I took a promotion from Yarram as a senior teacher to Sale and bought a house up there, but after walking up and down the streets of Sale a few times and coming and walking up and down the streets here, it takes an hour to walk down one side of the street and back here, because everybody stops and talks to you, because you are important to everybody and everybody is important to you. I worked and lived in Sale three years previously, so it is not as if I was a stranger in town either. Yarram has a really wonderful caring community.

There are work opportunities too that some of them get offered job apprenticeships. Lifestyle is a huge plus factor, not necessarily for young people but then it is for some because it is so cheap to belong to the golf club. It is so easy to go fishing, you have got sporting clubs here where the bonding is huge and you have got that sense of belonging to a group whether you are a high achiever or not. There are people in this community who are disadvantaged in some way, but they can be absorbed within a football club, they can be a scorer up on the scoreboard. We have got the same young fellow up there, I think he has been working there for about 15 or 20 years now and he never

would miss a Saturday and he never makes a mistake he is so proud of what he can do. But these opportunities do come there.

Why young people stay away, I guess workers, careers, sticks out a mile, if you are following a career path. For example I have a son who works in the oil business and he is up off the coast of Vietnam somewhere at the moment. It is interesting that he went to Western Australia and over in Western Australia there are seven young people of the same age group, from 35 to 42, 43, seven people from this community that are all over there following a career path and they stick very closely together. Following up on something that Damian was talking about too, ones who go to Melbourne there is a very strong bonding between them. They seem to all know where one another live and they meet up together for parties and it is not as if they are gone there and it is not there, that bonding is there and they do often return. They stay away because of the vibes of the city life again versus the small town where things are always the same, nothing happens that sort of attitude.

Cost of living is looking back again where people have to travel across to the Valley to work. Fuel is a lot more, phone calls are a lot more, food, everything is a bit more, but they also want that independence, privacy they want to get away from their family to build their own life. The reason they return social security among the family, friends, a very caring community as I mentioned before. Lifestyle, bringing up children, it is a wonderful, wonderful place to bring up children here. Opportunities because the football club will find them work, the football club will put them on a contract, the sense of once again being with your mates, belonging. The number of ones who go to university at Melbourne and come home at weekends to play football. It is a good mix because the parents are keen for that to happen because they do not want to see the end of their children the day they walk off to university. They keep coming home for weekends.

The strategies of retaining the young, well I think when we had a decentralisation policy it was real where business was given the opportunity or incentives, setting up businesses in the country, that seems to have disappeared, there is no real incentives, so it is more economically feasible for them to stay in the city, transport and all those sorts of things. The other one, is to maintain and develop what we do have so that we have got, as Damian mentioned a swimming pool. I have a daughter as an example, takes children to swimming in Sales twice a week, the car pool, it is three families. She seems to be the one that has to go every week, just so they can get to a heated pool, it is a fair way to travel. Others go across to Latrobe Valley to do exactly the same thing.

To look after our national parks and our fishing industry, but the recreational side of it, it is a wonderful chance for people to get together and the recreation reserve up here we have got up here where we had drought conditions, we were not able to play football on the oval it was from the health and safety point of view, it was cancelled. We really do need to develop that recreation reserve to bring it up to the standard so that it is the sort of thing that we can use it all the time, for a great variety of things. We have been through the business plan of it but it is very hard to get.

**Mr INGRAM** — You can make that statement a more broader one for the state to maintain that social infrastructure for the sporting and cultural right across regional areas, so you keep a focus in the town you use that as an example which is more of a state wide one not just a personal one for this town?

**Mr PAPWORTH** — Yes it is true, it would be state wide if other towns do not pick up on that well I wonder why. Just to finish with this, I am immensely proud of the work the football and netball clubs do within the community. First of all a town without football or netball club I really feel would die very quickly and to take a responsible attitude and I know that we have developed core values life style where you are not developing kids just to play footy or netball, but sort of a similar philosophy to what Sydney Swans have got and we take great pride in the fact that police and citizens club award for example for juniors, four years out of the last six, we have won that competition. It has only been going six years and we have won that four times, and that is that sort of attitude where we are developing future citizens of our community. Kids that play in the football, netball clubs are the kids less likely to be involved in drugs because you have that bonding, sense of belonging and a very strict code of discipline. So I am immensely proud of the work that the football club has done.

**The CHAIR** — Thanks John.

**Mr DUURSMA** — Probably just to take off from where John left off with the club working pretty hard to get the premierships for a lot of the players. In my senior team at the moment there is probably about eight boys who are 20 or under who are currently doing apprenticeships with tradesmen in town and the footy club worked

really hard to from the junior level up. They had had not a lot of success for a fair period of time so they went right back to the juniors and started building from there again and there is a really good crop of young boys that have come up now and they are all around that 21 years old.

My involvement in rural towns probably until about three years ago, was almost exclusively playing for and coaching football clubs. I spent time at Rochester, Tarwin, Kooweerup, Cora Lynn and now Yarram. I live in Foster with my wife and three children. I suppose I am a product of Suzie my wife, who grew up in Foster coming back to the community and contributing. She has got dance schools in Foster, Tooradin and Leongatha. She took over a dance school when she was in year 12 and kept it going right through her university while living in Melbourne, so she was travelling back at least once a week a two hour drive, and that was probably that was one of the main reasons we came back to live in this area, that two hour drive was getting bit too much with kids.

The lifestyle was attractive and of course the affordability of home and land was important and for her, the proximity of her parents was important as well. My involvement in rural footy clubs has enabled me to see the importance of sporting clubs to young people's lives and particularly their sense of belonging to a town and a group because I think that is probably – I looked at the terms of reference and I thought just keeping young people here is not enough it is actually helping them to be contributors to that community rather than just staying. I think that football clubs and sporting clubs in general offer some of that. They offer young people a chance to contribute and give back to what the town gives them.

To jump across now in my role as teacher and year 9 coordinator at Yarram Secondary College. We surveyed staff, students and parents about four years ago and there was a general dissatisfaction with the situation and what was a perceived dislocation or disengagement of the college to the community. We instituted a community program as year 9's and what that means is that for three 75 minute periods a week all the students are involved in linking themselves with a community group within the town, or within the state. So we have got year 9 students are involved in coast care, surf lifesaving clubs, waterwise, land care, Fishing Australia, CFA. There is a group that heads down to Crossley House here in town or St. Elmo's and spends time with older people at the nursing homes and things like that. We are trying to help them or assist them to get out into the community to become a more integral part of it. The community program also includes, taking on from what I heard you talking with Damian about, a large part of the community program we run, we actually specifically teach leadership skills, team work skills, goal setting. It is a real emphasis to try and take the students out of their comfort zones, and the aim is to build confident young people who do feel a sense of belonging and ownership of the community in which they live.

Further on your discussion with Damian about Melbourne, we take the students as much as we possibly can out of the area. He was correct in talking about the cost being prohibitive. We have a huge reliance on government funding and one of those VRAP 9 in which all year 9 students, rural students the cost of buses is paid for to get down to Melbourne for a day of cultural attractions. They get to see some live shows they get to whatever else you can arrange for them to do. They get to go to the MCG to something along those lines, the museum whatever you can organize. That costs students I think it is about \$10 each to get down to Melbourne and do all these things, but even that we find there is still a percentage of the students, around 20% to 25% do not pay that, it is still too much. So the school just wears that, we make sure they go anyway. The poverty is an incredible hamper on these kids actually feeling that sense of belonging and participating.

Terry Harrington our Principal will probably speak a little bit more about that when he comes in afterwards. It really does prevent students and young people from feeling a part of the community. Also there is a program that we run with year 10s that all year 10s head down to Melbourne for a week long camp which does exactly what you were talking about before. They have to get themselves around the town on trains, trams, et cetera, and it is called City Camp and they all have to prepare, spending a fair bit of time preparing for it with hypotheses that they have to work on. That is about it for me as well.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you.

**Mr MITCHELL** — Right Dean, John, we have got the magic wand, how do we fix it? From our perspective what can the government do to encourage people to come out to Yarram?

**Mr PAPWORTH** — I suppose the work opportunities are the big thing In this community we have had the Alberton project, which you would be aware of, where the community has worked to try and attract industries to come here so that we do have some opportunities for work and be able to retain the young, but that has not really

worked. It has been fairly limited in what it has done. Somewhere there needs to be a real incentive for businesses to work in the country. When I was a kid, there seemed to be that incentive that was given, now it seems to have gone back the other way that everything focuses into Melbourne. If you are not working out of Melbourne you do not really get up into the big league. You need to have some sort of way of getting work out into rural Victoria.

**Mr McQUILTEN** — I think you have to work on your natural assets and I would have thought that one of the assets that you have got here is natural resources underneath where we are saying now, which is the largest brown coal deposit in the world and I think that has enormous potential for growth in this area.

**Mr PAPWORTH** — Are you saying you should work, you mean me, I should work?

**Mr McQUILTEN** — No I am just saying that is going to happen over the next few years, you will find there is going to be some growth and provide a lot of jobs.

**Mr PAPWORTH** — It is being developed potentially in Latrobe Valley fairly well.

**Mr McQUILTEN** — It will be down here probably more than the Valley I think.

**Mr PAPWORTH** — It is harder to get over this side, a bit deeper down.

**Mr INGRAM** — Dean and John you mentioned the apprenticeships and the fact that the football club had actively, I assume, supporters of the club to assume targeting some of your key individuals that you would like to retain that you can count on to support your team. Is that not somebody else's job to be encouraging apprenticeship take up and I suppose how much support is there outside the football club to encourage businesses to take on an apprentice, because that is one of the key things in a lot of areas. How many employers out there are employing apprentices and what are the incentives like to do it? There are a few questions there.

**Mr DUURSMA** — I think that the club network I guess has been encouraged to look at the kids coming through because they are decent kids as well so the incentive is there for them to bring on apprentices. Also the whole network is like a community itself and it uses each other, so if you need any plumbing done, the plumber from the footy club is usually the one that you ring or the builder. So it is a community within a community I guess, but it does go out to the rest of the town, because it is a small town it crosses from the other footy club as well that is in the area. I think it is bigger than just the football club itself.

**Mr INGRAM** — How much support out there within, if you like, the government agencies within the education system, within the employment networks to encourage employers to take on apprentices, is there enough support? Is there enough encouragement for young people to try and do trades? We have already heard that there are some challenges actually taking on the training program of the apprenticeships locally? Do you have a comment on that?

**Mr PAPWORTH** — I think that the football is probably in the front of all the people trying to get apprenticeships and it goes back to when you start the kids down at the fourths level and you work your way through it does become very much like a family and you do not have to be a good footballer to go to the football club and say, can you help me get a job? They will help because everybody has that real bonding, a sense of belonging so yes, they would probably be as active as any group, but certainly your secondary school would be working in that area as well.

**Mr DUURSMA** — With different pathways, with VCAL, VET, there is another teacher coming down to talk I think specifically about those pathways that assist students towards that. I think I understand your question I am not sure if I feel qualified to talk to it, as I do not know what the incentives there are for employers to take on apprentices. To skip across to another thing – the young people in this area do seem to want to stay in that our last three year 12 cohorts that have gone through have all had a large percentage of students who have applied to university, and their first choice is Churchill or the closest university to the area. So there are a lot of kids who do want to stay. Yarram is a little different to the other country football clubs that I have played for and coached in that we only have one or two people who come back from Melbourne to play. It is probably the two and a half hours I guess, although Rochester was similar and they had eight or nine players who lived in Melbourne but came back every weekend to play. I think that is mainly because the whole town, the whole senior team is local they all live in the area, except for one or two.

**The CHAIR** — The fact that young people are doing that obviously says that Yarram is doing something right and therefore what we can do too, is find ways that other towns might work on Yarram's experience, why is it that the young people here may be more of them want to stay, and or return, than in other communities. Even going to local university for example, the most local university, we have heard that people who have gone to those from other towns have been the ones that actually have come back or actually kept working or gone out to work in rural and regional areas. One of the things I was interested in, you were talking about earlier on, was the development of the junior footballers and how that has actually benefited the actual senior team now. It probably said to those young people back then, our community is backing us, they want us to be good contributors. I was wondering how you see that could be done in other areas of country life?

**Mr PAPWORTH** — Could I go back 10 years ago, Yarram did not have a third side and when you have not got a third side, you are in terrible trouble, the fourth side had not won a game for four years, so you can get a picture of what it was like. We realised that the football club had lost the direction they were going in, so we borrowed from the most successful clubs that we could see that were working with juniors. One was MDU, and another Yannar, two clubs that we tied in mostly with to find out how they were going because they had junior programs. Within a five year period we not only restructured our thirds, but we won a fourth's grand final and we won two third's grand finals. We had other clubs then contacting us – how do you run your junior program we would like to follow something similar just to get ideas from you. So you do borrow from one another and the areas you pick up a little bit just the same as what we did to get started.

**The CHAIR** — I was just wondering what the process was that you went through to do that. You got the ideas what did you do then to actually go about it?

**Mr DUURSMA** — I guess it is similar to anything that there had to be people prepared to put their hand up and do the hard work and it was a number of the parents of those kids, those fourths at that stage who got together. They put their own money in as well and they bought the kids the new jumpers and they put in a lot of time. They were actually very well coached and I suppose the discipline was really forced for that group of boys, that they would not put up with any fighting on the field, all of those sort of things. I think what John was talking about before winning the most disciplined club. There were some kids in that group who could easily have been troublesome but because again that sense of belonging to the group that did not adversely affect the rest of them. I think it is the same as anything, people had to roll up their sleeves and do a fair bit of work.

**Mr PAPWORTH** — You developed a pride and the kids themselves they became very proud because as I said they looked after their new jumpers and they were supplied their boots and all the gear and everything so we made the club a club that where grandparents could come to and feel very comfortable and that the whole social discipline within the club was such that people felt very comfortable about bringing their kids there and kids in turn felt that sense of pride they were the best dressed, the best looked after in all aspects. We ran the junior part separately to the senior part and they just went right ahead with it.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you for sharing that with us, and obviously we want to share those trade studies as well. You will get a copy of the transcript in about two weeks time and you may correct any typographical errors but not matters of substance.

**Witnesses withdrew.**