

Glenelg Shire Council Submission: Inquiry into the Sustainability and Operations Challenges of Victoria's Rural and Regional Councils

(a) local government funding and budgetary pressures;

- VGC grants freeze until 2017/18
- Reduction to cash surpluses
- Reduced working capital ratios
- Limited ability to adopt new initiatives or expand services
- Renewal gap increasing / reduced capital spends
- Less expenditure on new infrastructure
- Limited ability to fund future Defined Benefit calls
- Regional councils have a limited ability to generate revenue from other sources
- Potential review of non-core services

(b) fairness, equity and adequacy of rating systems;

- Council's more accountable
- Opportunity to review efficiencies and productivity
- Shared services between Councils
- No connection between the amount of rates paid & the level of Council service received by individuals
- Introduce a Municipal Charge?
- Recognition of requirements to maintain infrastructure

Generally speaking there has been much discussion regarding the long term impact of rate capping – one such discussion has been the eventual amalgamation of Councils, which has occurred in some other states (Queensland). Can the formation of 'Super Councils' cater for all the region's needs? Outlying regions may lose out, be forgotten or overlooked. The voice of the outlying communities may be lost, particularly if there is not an equitable Councillor representation.

Changing political and economic landscapes are a given in today's world. Proactively positioning Council to meet future challenges is an obligation we all need to commit to. Agility and flexibility in responding to these challenges will enable us to provide sustainable outcomes for the community.

In delivering key services we need to innovate, increase productivity levels, develop stronger relationships with government and work with the community to deliver the best outcomes.

(c) impact of rate-capping policies;

Addressed in a) and b)

(d) capacity for rural and regional councils to meet responsibilities for flood planning and preparation, and maintenance of flood mitigation infrastructure;

Response to the Environment, Natural Resources and Regional Development Committee.

Capacity for rural and regional councils to meet responsibilities for flood planning and preparation, and maintenance of flood mitigation infrastructure:

Flood planning and preparation is a difficult area to manage as there are many authorities and agencies that have a role to play. Councils, through their planning departments, enforce planning overlays that are set by the regional catchment management authorities (CMA's).

Through the Municipal Building Surveyor, building levels are also set based on the above information.

Drainage strategies created in collaboration with state authorities, CMA's as well as the general public are at times created to address various issues. These strategies are however, time exhaustive and cost prohibitive for councils to undertake without additional resources usually supplied via other authorities.

Issues that affect flood planning, preparation and maintenance of flood mitigation infrastructure include;

- Lack of demarcation between different authorities creating confusion regarding responsibilities
- Lack of effective asset mapping which would allow asset management planning to occur
- Lack of legislation allowing authorities to effectively manage waterways and determine maintenance requirements
- Council's staff and monetary resources are stretched. Further demands/shifting of responsibilities would place additional pressure on these resources.

In the past it has been proposed to utilise components of the Victorian *Local Government Act 1989*, specifically those sections relating to special charge schemes in order to clean and manage rural drainage networks. This is a highly resource intensive activity and isn't considered a practical approach as there is a large amount of statutory steps involved with no guarantee that maintenance would occur (any proposed scheme could be quashed). Council could not manage this process with the resources currently available, nor could it devote the time (at a council and senior management level) for the quantity of processes needed. It is also not considered a council responsibility to manage these areas as the relevant CMA has a statutory mapping process and permit system.

(e) maintenance of local road and bridge networks; and

Country Roads and Bridges Funding has ceased. The loss of \$1M p.a. from CRB funding has significantly impacted on Council's works program. The Shire had previously used the funding to undertake bridge strengthening works and improve safety and access to bridges.

Impact of timber and dairy industry on road network.

- The Green Triangle Freight Action Plan Review (GTFAPR) has been well documented. Updated freight data and economic analysis shows the significant and sustained increase in timber volumes driven by the region's maturing timber plantations and high export demand to Asia. The GTFAPR identified that the movement of grain and mineral sands will steadily increase. The increased traffic volumes (pro rata) are having a similar impact on Council's local road network.

(f) weed and pest animal control;

Weed and pest animal control is challenging as the majority of works are limited to State Government funding, locally controlled roadsides and Council controlled public land.

Issues include:

- Lack of ability to enforce control on private property (this is up to State Govt. who are only interested with State prohibited weeds and pests due to staffing and funding constraints)
- Lack of control of weeds and pest animals on State controlled roads (VicRoads) and land (inc. leased Govt. land i.e. rail corridors)
- Funding (reliant to a degree on State Govt. funding)

While roadsides are a contributing factor to weed and pest animal spread, a large majority comes from private land. Councils have no jurisdiction for the enforcement of weed and pest animal control within private land. We may undertake weed control along the roadsides and have the neighbouring property full of the weeds which are not controlled. This makes it difficult to undertake a comprehensive control program. Where we have been able to work in conjunction with the neighbouring property owners, positive long term results have been achieved.

Due to the amount (distance) of locally controlled roads it would be cost prohibitive for Council to take on the full costs of weed and pest animal control.

Other

The *Planning and Environment Act 1987* places obligations on Council to keep its planning scheme up to date. A mandatory Municipal Planning Scheme review is

required every four years as part of this. The State Government expects rigorous and comprehensive work irrespective of whether Council is a small regional Council or part of metropolitan Melbourne. These undertakings become very costly due to required expertise and expensive Planning Panels to review the work. These obligations can pose significant difficulties for small rural Councils to sustainably finance these planning requirements.

Previous models such as the Regional Flying Squad were of great benefit in providing funding opportunities to Regional and Rural Councils for assistance in the Town Planning area. Many successful projects were funded by this program. To have this type of funding available on a permanent basis (the Flying Squad was only for a limited number of years) could provide assistance to Regional and Rural Councils that would greatly help them remain sustainable and keep Town Planning up to date.