
From: Vaughan Williams <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Monday, 10 July 2017 9:14 AM
To: ENRRDC
Subject: Northern Grampians Shire Council Submission on Sustainability

Thank you very much for the opportunity to make a submission to the inquiry into the sustainability and operational challenges of Victoria's rural and regional councils.

Northern Grampians Shire Council is one of the 19 unsustainable councils mentioned in the [Victorian Auditor General's annual report video \(go to minute 3:05\)](#). With \$400m of public infrastructure and only 11,500 people to fund renewal and replacement our situation is tenuous. That equates to about \$35,000 of assets to be maintained for every man, woman and child in the shire. By comparison most metro shires is about half at around \$15,000.

The situation has become more difficult in recent years with the stagnation of Federal Assistance Grant. Even though the federal government has resumed indexation the money lost during the freeze will never be recovered. We estimate that the value of that freeze is over \$800,000 for the 3 year period.

Further to this additional responsibilities are being imposed on us such as the administration of the Fire Service Levy and roadside vegetation. Current plans to introduce EPA officers and the requirement for an annual revaluation process will further increase costs to Council and reduce our ability to renew and maintain infrastructure.

In addition rate capping has constrained our income, the affordability of our sustained rates increases required to support infrastructure was questionable anyway in light of our [low SEIFA ratings](#). We are one of the lowest income earning shires in Victoria yet our rates are very high. This is primarily due to the need to maintain the significant infrastructure to cater for the population that sparsely occupies the 6000 sq kms of our shire. In rural areas we don't have the ability to generate significant income through fees and charges, and we certainly can't generate the substantial parking revenue capabilities of the metro councils.

Northern Grampians Shire Council isn't opposed to the principle of capping rates but with reduced revenue and more responsibilities how do we sustain our infrastructure?

Our answer is 4 fold:

1. seek opportunities for businesses to come to the shire to provide employment growth in our region.
2. undertake a comprehensive review of all services by engaging with the community to determine if the current service priorities match their needs in light of the rates the community is willing to pay.
3. seek efficiencies in service delivery through sharing capabilities and resources with council's in the region.
4. advocate for additional funds to support rural Victorian councils

Northern Grampians Shire Council, like all rural shires in Victoria, are vital to the economic and social fabric of our society. Without vibrant rural communities increasing numbers of our residents will be forced to relocate to the larger regional and metropolitan areas putting further pressures on their struggling infrastructure while ours are underutilised.

Regards

Vaughan Williams
DIRECTOR CORPORATE SERVICES

Mobile: [REDACTED]
Email: [REDACTED]