

'Inquiry into the Sustainability and Operational Challenges of Victoria's Rural and Regional Councils', by Department of Environment, Natural Resources & Regional Development Committee, Parliament of Victoria.

Monday 9 October 2017, Century Inn at 4.00 pm, Grand Promenade Room B

**Submission from the Traralgon Community Development Association,
established 2001**

Aims of TCDA

To promote the economic, cultural, social, and community development of Traralgon city and rural districts;

To ensure community interests are protected and enhanced in strategies and policies developed for the urban and rural districts of Traralgon;

To promote community-based input to the policies of federal, state, and local governments that affect the Traralgon city and rural communities;

To provide the means for the public to explore and share options for community development;

To share community information and views between other local community bodies as well as governments at all levels and their agencies; and

To communicate information affecting the city and rural districts of Traralgon by way of regular newsletters and public meetings.

Mission of TCDA

'Helping to protect Traralgon's heritage as we all work together to build a prosperous future'

The regional council – 'Latrobe City Council'

What does this Jeff Kennett-driven political construct look like? This artificial, so-called 'city' – Latrobe City Council (LCC) - one of the most dysfunctional local councils in Australia?

The throwing together of two very different towns (Moe and Morwell) and the mature (then) City of Traralgon, each with their own histories and culture, was forced against the will of the people to become an 'entity', under the Latrobe City Council.

Traralgon

Settled circa 1846, Traralgon is the largest and was once the fastest growing regional centre from Dandenong to the NSW border. It is growing and expanding as Gippsland region's commercial hub and largest town, much of the growth due to private investment expenditure.

Current demographic projections show a population in excess of 28,000 with projections to be **37,000 in 2036**. (LCC demographic projections).

Moe

The town of Moe has a population of about **16,500** including Newborough. Despite its small size Moe had a huge library built there recently, despite many Moe residents objecting, due to the push from LCC. (Traralgon still has much the same library facility it had at amalgamation).

Morwell

This little town is built on valuable coal deposits. Its population has declined or remained static at around 12,500, with current projections of just **16,100** by 2036. About 32.5% of its occupants live in rental accommodation. Excessive public sector expenditure has occurred in this little town, particularly on public buildings eg Council Offices and Court House facilities, Centrelink, large Department of Health building, etc. Most at the initiation of the LCC, given the political pressure evident in the composition of LCC.

IBAC Investigation

Thanks to amalgamation and the LCC, Traralgon now has the worst ratepayer infrastructure in rural and regional Victoria. The disgraceful financial 'inequity' and local government funding/budgetary expenditure on Traralgon was just one of the reasons for the IBAC investigation into LCC. The outcomes of the IBAC were never made public and there continues to be little or no explanation given to residents for such little capital expenditure in Traralgon over the last decade. (**Refer attachment Traralgon 2016**). A new CEO was appointed soon after the IBAC enquiry and there have been minor improvements in accessibility, but little change in expenditure between the disparate townships.

Composition of LCC

Some years ago the TCDA was instrumental in obtaining an additional Council position for Traralgon, given the relative population distribution. The LCC is composed of a vicious mix along party politics lines, with the ALP usually in control. To sit in the public gallery is often to experience a lesson in vicious vitriol. One long-time Councillor (CFMEU based) was heard to announce that as long he was a Councillor, not one cent would ever be spent on Traralgon, if he could help it!

Issues facing Traralgon under the LCC

- The destructive and divisive arguments in LCC over the location of the **Creative Arts Precinct**, over eight years worth of arguments because select Councillors refused to have money spent in Traralgon, is an indication of gross budgetary incompetence and deliberate attempts to destroy the region's most successful town. Even now, with \$30 million allocated (local, State, Federal funding) to the

Precinct, there is procrastination and lack of information from LCC going to the public regarding progress.

- Trying to achieve any local government funding and equitable budgetary allocation? Petitions galore. Over 5000 separate signed letters for the Creative Precinct to be built in Traralgon. More petitions to get funding for an aquatic centre. Why should petitions be required if LCC were demonstrating fairness and equity and competence?
- Large **indoor aquatic centres** have been built in Morwell, Moe and Churchill – little towns!! Traralgon, the most populous and fastest growing area? Only a cold outdoor pool, around sixty years old, paid for out of wages of the workers in Traralgon in the 1960s. This is due to the refusal of LCC to apply for funding for an indoor centre for Traralgon. Petitions, petitions – again! Due to increased public pressure and State MP involvement funds for a large aquatic centre have been made available this year, from the State government – but the LCC is again prevaricating and arguing about location, feasibility studies etc, all of which have been funded years ago. Another ploy to deprive Traralgon of this allocated funding, due to procrastination?
- The historic **Traralgon Court House**? The heritage classified building belongs to DWELP but it is under the responsibility of LCC for its preservation and maintenance. For over fifteen years requests from concerned Traralgon residents have begged LCC to stop the rising damp and take steps to protect this historic building. Nothing!! Absolutely nothing! It is only in the last eighteen months, due to petitions and community pressure, initiated by TCDA, that something is being done.
- Petitions and lack of transparency. Why is it only when local community groups are formed out of frustration due to inaction by LCC that petitions have to be collected just to get something done? Why the lack of transparency in decision-making? For example, in 2014-2015 47% of decisions by LCC were in closed sessions. This improved during the last Council, but the current Council members are increasing the secrecy. Why?
- **Graffiti** – the previously mentioned Councillor declared that any graffiti in Morwell reported to LCC would be removed within 24 hours. Graffiti in Traralgon? Last year our lovely Sound Shell Centre was used for the Leukaemia Light the Night venue. Hundreds of families present. Above the head of our State MP and across the Sound Shell was F—k and a girl's name! Great TV footage – disgraceful, but it was in Traralgon so no-one at LCC had thought to clean off the graffiti for the function!!
- CBD and **parking upgrades**? There are plans, and overviews and consultation and procrastination, as usual. Parking facilities are appalling in Traralgon, with years of promises by LCC, but no action.
- The culture of deal-making is rife, 'selected' preferred suppliers to LCC, and **excessive red tape** to work through LCC to do anything in our community. It is an effective deterrent, particularly to activities in Traralgon.

- There are areas of Traralgon Creek running through our central park – choked with weeds and shopping trolleys. When was the last time the area was cleaned up? The historic Traralgon Railway Reserve is a popular tourist spot – but it has **no toilets** or hand-washing facilities! How long has LCC been going to remedy this?
- Public seating in Traralgon’s CBD – broken. Parking behind the Railway Station – unlit, unsafe and dangerous. LCC refuses to tackle this, yet ‘gave away’ car parking spaces near the railway station to the Federation Training building some years ago. With LCC initiation and support, a new railway station and parking facilities were provided in the little town of Morwell. Facilities for station parking in Traralgon? Nothing.

There is an 8-year limit to be President of the USA! Why not a limit on the consecutive year’s one can be a local Councillor? A couple of Councillors treat LCC as their personal fiefdom, and spend the rates paid by residents, particularly Traralgon residents’ rates, accordingly.

Not one major capital works project has been undertaken in Traralgon in the 23 years since amalgamation?!!!

Fairness? NO.

Equity? NO.

Adequacy? NO.

Meeting responsibilities? NO.

Is local council adequately meeting the requirements of this regional area? NO.

A disgrace? YES.

A deliberate attempt to reduce growth in Traralgon? YES.

The above represents just a very small selection of areas where there is blatant discrimination against the rate payers of Traralgon, within this amalgamated ‘Latrobe City Council’. In the last few years TCDA has been instrumental in finally getting the decision to build a Creative Arts Precinct in Traralgon; an indoor aquatic centre to be built; the Court House with some funding. This only in the last couple of years, but there is no excuse for over 20 years of deliberate neglect of Traralgon, and this rural region’s growth, by Latrobe City Council.