RETURNED & SERVICES LEAGUE OF AUSTRALIA VICTORIAN BRANCH

SUBMISSION TO THE “INQUIRY INTO GROWING THE SUBURBS: INFRASTRUCTURE AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT IN OUTER SUBURBAN MELBOURNE”

Currently the Victorian Branch of the RSL has over 65,000 fee paying members distributed over 302 Sub Branches. Of these 68 are significant food/beverage and gaming businesses in their own right, offering local employment, resources and support to nearby traditional, or non-commercial Sub-Branches and acting as important welfare and community hubs. 80% of our total Victorian membership is linked to these 68 licensed Sub-Branches. The RSL’s core business is the welfare and support of the serving and ex-service men and women of the ADF and their families and the Sub-Branch network is the primary vehicle through which this objective is delivered. Of course comradeship, social interaction, a safe and secure venue for families to dine at, subsidised meals to older community members and a local hub for other community groups to use are just some of the other services and amenities delivered by the Sub-Branch network. Professional guidance, advice and governance support is in turn provided to the whole network from State Branch Headquarters at ANZAC House.

The RSL’s current geographical coverage is largely historically based around the veteran population distribution of the 1950’s and 1960’s, and does not completely reflect the current or future areas of growth in the outer suburbs. To a degree local, originally “rural” Sub Branches have expanded to meet the new needs of the developing urban community in some areas.

As the membership demographic changes, the Branch has led a number of initiatives to amalgamate smaller Sub-Branches, establish community support groups in areas where Sub-Branch closure is inevitable and generally find ways to maintain an RSL footprint where it has traditionally existed. Only through maintaining this presence can we continue to deliver our core objectives. The Branch is aware however that on the urban fringes of Melbourne, and in some large regional centres, there are significant areas of current and planned future population growth which does not have an active RSL Sub-Branch presence currently in place or reasonably accessible.

There would be many young families and/or retirees in these areas who the League would be keen to engage with and offer our amenities and support to. A significant proportion would satisfy one of our membership categories, especially through a family relationship to a serving or ex-service man or woman.

The RSL State Branch would be grateful for an opportunity to be involved in assisting with the Inquiry in terms of how best the future identification of need for services provided by Sub-Branches can be identified and provided for in outer suburban Melbourne in particular. This is not only in respect of our core function of support for serving ex-service members but support for the general community through the provision of our ceremonial, commemorative and education programs.
Developments such as the Dandenong Cranbourne model, where an existing successful urban Sub-Branch provided support for a Sub-Branch expanding or developing in a growth area may be of interest, as may the development of government funded community infrastructure on the site of smaller traditional Sub-Branches that were originally located in farming country but are now in the midst of major new housing developments.

The degree to which State Government, Local Government, developers or other community organisations could assist with the development of Sub-Branches in growth areas will vary of course, but there is considerable property management and development expertise resident at ANZAC House. The RSL State Executive and the Branch Property Committee would therefore be happy to engage further with the Parliamentary Committee to plan in a proactive way to sustain our own objectives and provide vital community social hubs in growth areas where these will need to be developed. The RSL sees future Sub-Branch growth and organisational viability being based on providing community wide access, while still providing an outlet for our traditional support to the serving and ex-service men and women of the ADF, as well as commemoration and comradeship which is clearly supported by the wider Victorian community.

Please contact the Branch CEO Michael Annett, in relation to this submission.