

Opinion

DEFINITELY NOT WELL...



Northern Star
23/6/99

EDITORIAL

Policy shortsighted

THE State Government's desire to put all Road and Traffic Authority (RTA) roadworks out to tender next year is shortsighted.

The RTA obviously believes it can repair and build highways cheaper by throwing the work open to competitive tenders. It can soothe its conscience by crowing about the savings to the taxpayer. That's all good, but it is another example of a city-based policy cutting deep in the bush. Small councils like Kyogle are unlikely to compete on price with large national and even multinational firms whose expertise is road and bridge building.

The money the Sydney-based RTA accountants save and present to the Sydney-based RTA bosses will look fine on a balance sheet. What that balance sheet won't contain is the damage caused in the regional areas by taking the work off local councils — who have managed to do it well enough so far. A few percentage points in the overall RTA budget could devastate the likes of Kyogle and other small shires. It is not just roadworks. It is 20 or 30 families reliant on this work for their continued employment as council workers. It is the money they spend at the local supermarket, pub and shoe store. It is the 40 or 50 children of these families forming the backbone of local junior sports days and school bands. It is the 20 or 30 houses that will be up for sale when these families are forced to move elsewhere looking for work. We are talking a major impact on our communities.

The RTA could easily impose tight controls on the funds available to local councils for roadworks, without necessarily putting them out to tender. This policy has unintended consequences which demand it be reconsidered.

Dean Gould,
Editor



BRICKBATS

TO the mongrels who stole possessions which belonged to Rebecca James, the daughter of Ellen and Les, who passed away in February. If they have any heart they will return them.



BOUQUETS



Letters to the

WRITE TO: PO BOX 423, LISMORE, 2480 FAX: 6624

Idiotic legislation

I AM sure 99 per cent of rural residents would agree with S Shaefer's letter on the idiotic septic tank legislation (NS 16/6).

I wrote to the Kyogle Shire Council asking them to tell me exactly what septic tank malfunctions that are a threat to public health or the environment they expect to detect and prevent through this legislation.

The answer is, in effect, was they don't really know but would like to have a look at our expense.

I have also written to the Minister, Harry Woods, asking for details of the survey he alleges shows 90 per cent of septic tanks are faulty. I am sure he will be able to offer no detail but probably a lot of waffle.

Some of the more sensible councils, particularly in western areas, have simply ignored the regulations. Unfortunately for us, most of the Northern Rivers councils are pursuing implementation with great enthusiasm.

One can only assume they have given the matter little thought, see it as a revenue source, or perhaps welcome the opportunity for a little empire building or job-creation.

Over 250 residents in this shire have signed a letter to the Kyogle mayor saying they will...



FEEDBACK

Phone 6624 3266

removed.

Our refugee guests have been through 10 years of abuse followed by 80 days of terror, torture and slaughter. Their mental will be impaired by the terror of their past.

More than 4000 of them are very happy and adjusting well to their safe home. This issue only ever involved eight people out of more than 4000 with the coaches becoming caught up in the issue because of their patriarchal social structure.

The issue has been blown right out of proportion and caused negative feelings within the wider community that refugees do not deserve.

We are a compassionate society. It is that we are also a forgiving society.

ROSEMARY CLARKE
Urban

Office move



**Federated Municipal And Shire Council
Employees' Union Of Australia
New South Wales Division**

Media Release

9 June 1999

MEU seeks urgent meeting over Road Maintenance Program

The Municipal Employees Union is seeking urgent discussions with NSW Transport Minister Carl Scully over the proposed introduction of market testing of Open Road Maintenance Work. Nineteen percent of road maintenance work is currently conducted by local councils.

MEU General Secretary Brian Harris wrote to the Minister today seeking a guarantee that Labor's pre-election promise ruling out compulsory competitive tendering for local government would be adhered to.

"The Premier wrote to me with a firm commitment on compulsory competitive tendering confirming that local government's role as a provider of stable job opportunities in regional and rural New South Wales was vital," said Mr Harris.

"The concern of the MEU is that the road maintenance program will result in enforced competitive tendering - the reverse of what Premier Carr promised."

"Our other concern is that although the government has released details of how advantageous this proposal would be for Councils, the MEU, as the primary union protecting council workers, has not been approached on how it could effect long term job opportunities for local council workers."

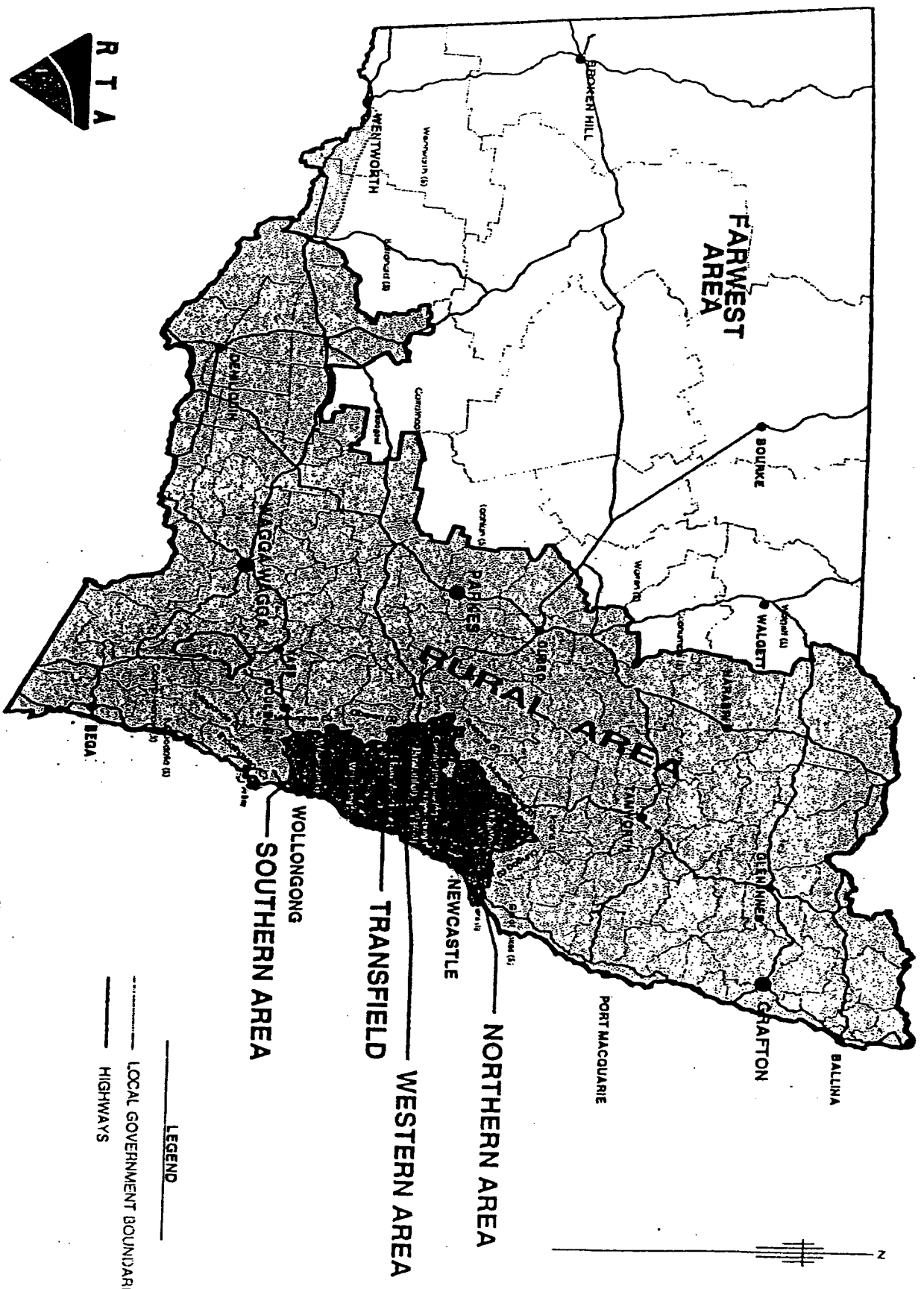
"The truth is that this could lead to private contractors offering reduced working conditions and wages so that they could win a contract. It happened in Victoria - the NSW Government must make sure that it does not happen here."

The MEU wants to meet with the Government as a matter of urgency and will be ensuring that any proposals put forward by the government protect wages and conditions. "We also want to make sure that local communities are not threatened by any actions the government might take. The Government ruled out compulsory competitive tendering for local government before the election so it would be a disgrace to see it introduced by the back door via forced tendering of roadworks," said Mr Harris.

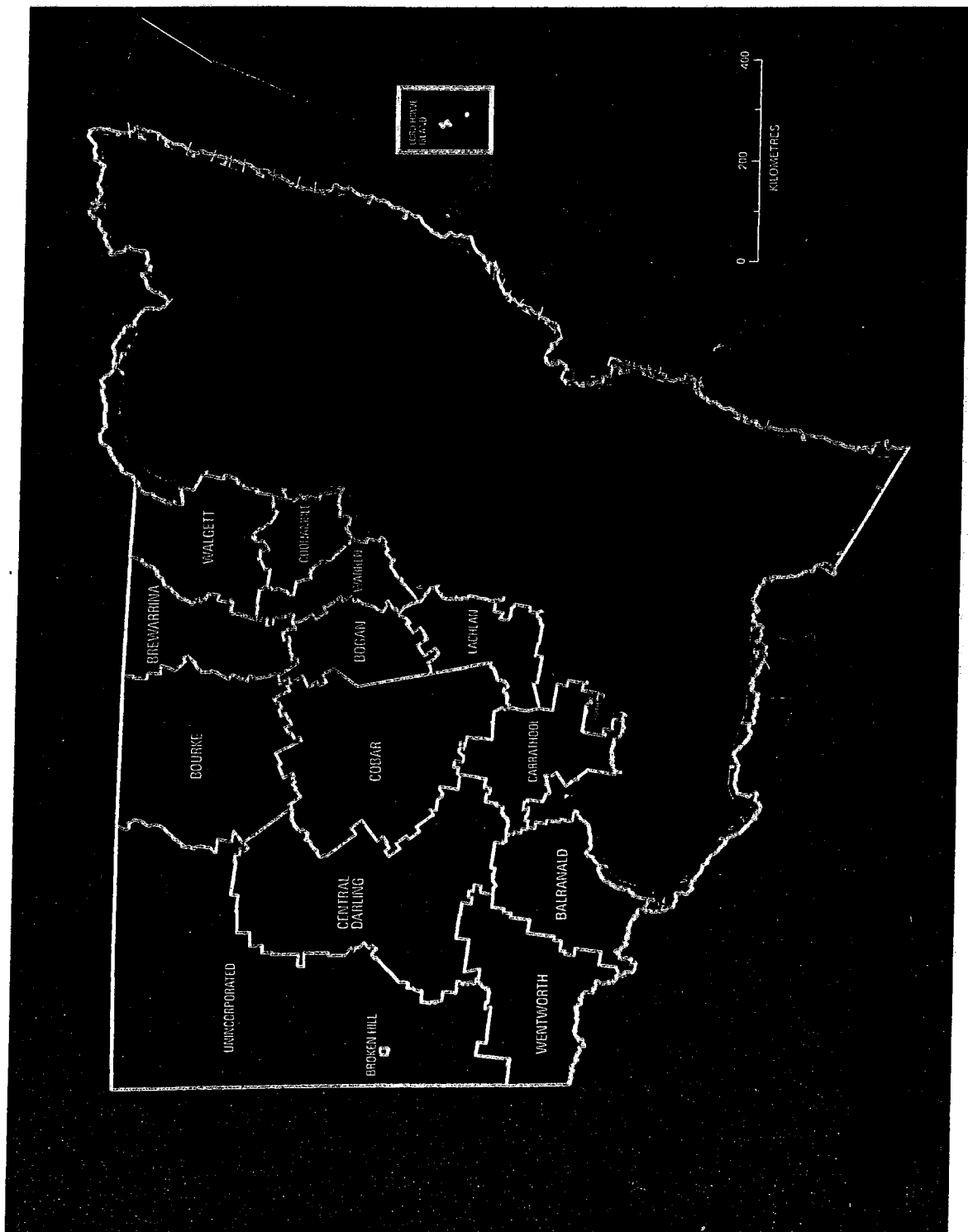
For further details contact MEU Legal Officer Ben Kruse on 9299 7293 or 0419 623 984 (m) or Brian Harris on 9299 7293.

All correspondence to be addressed to the General Secretary at:
Level 1 235 Clarence St

MARKET TESTING BOUNDARIES

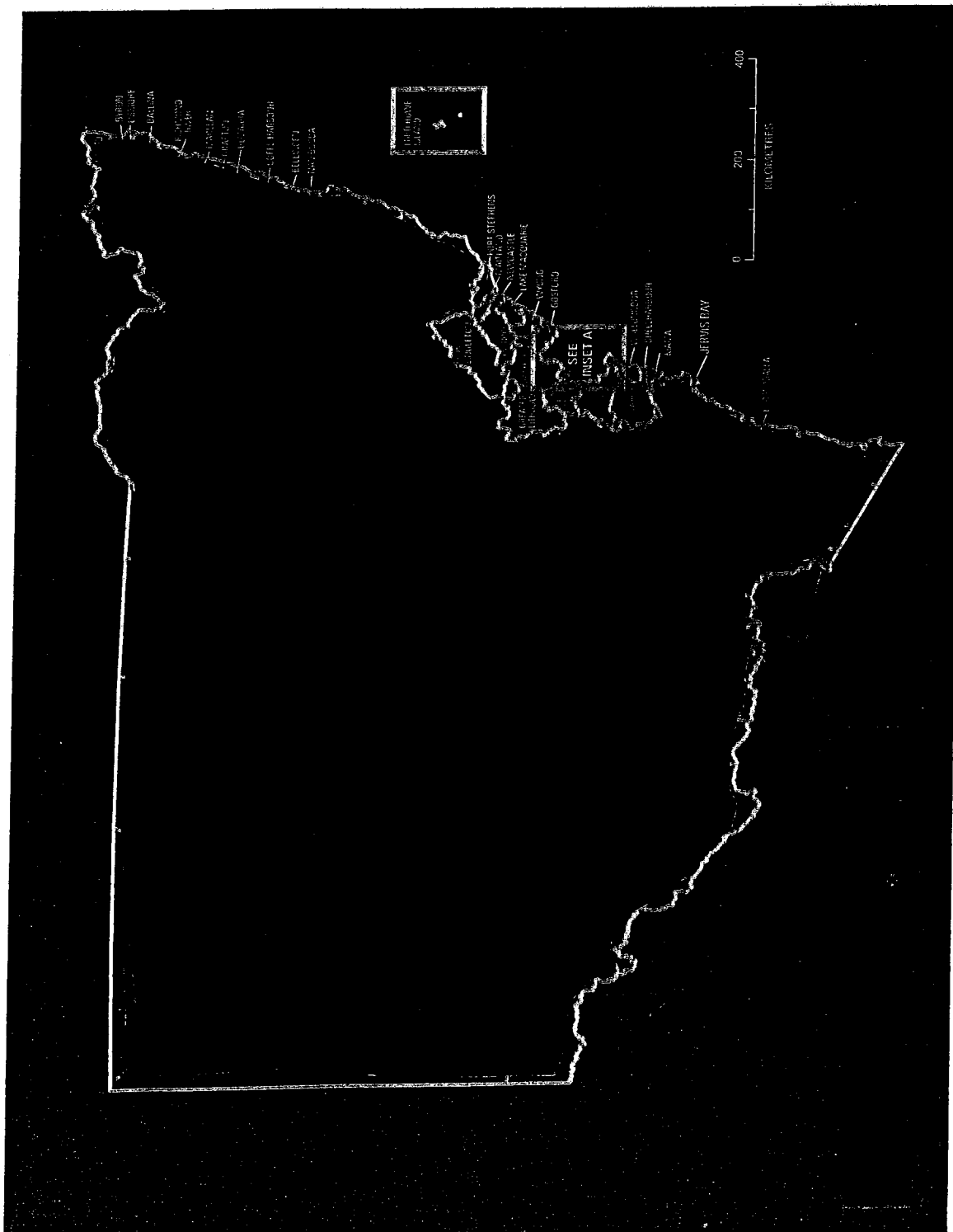


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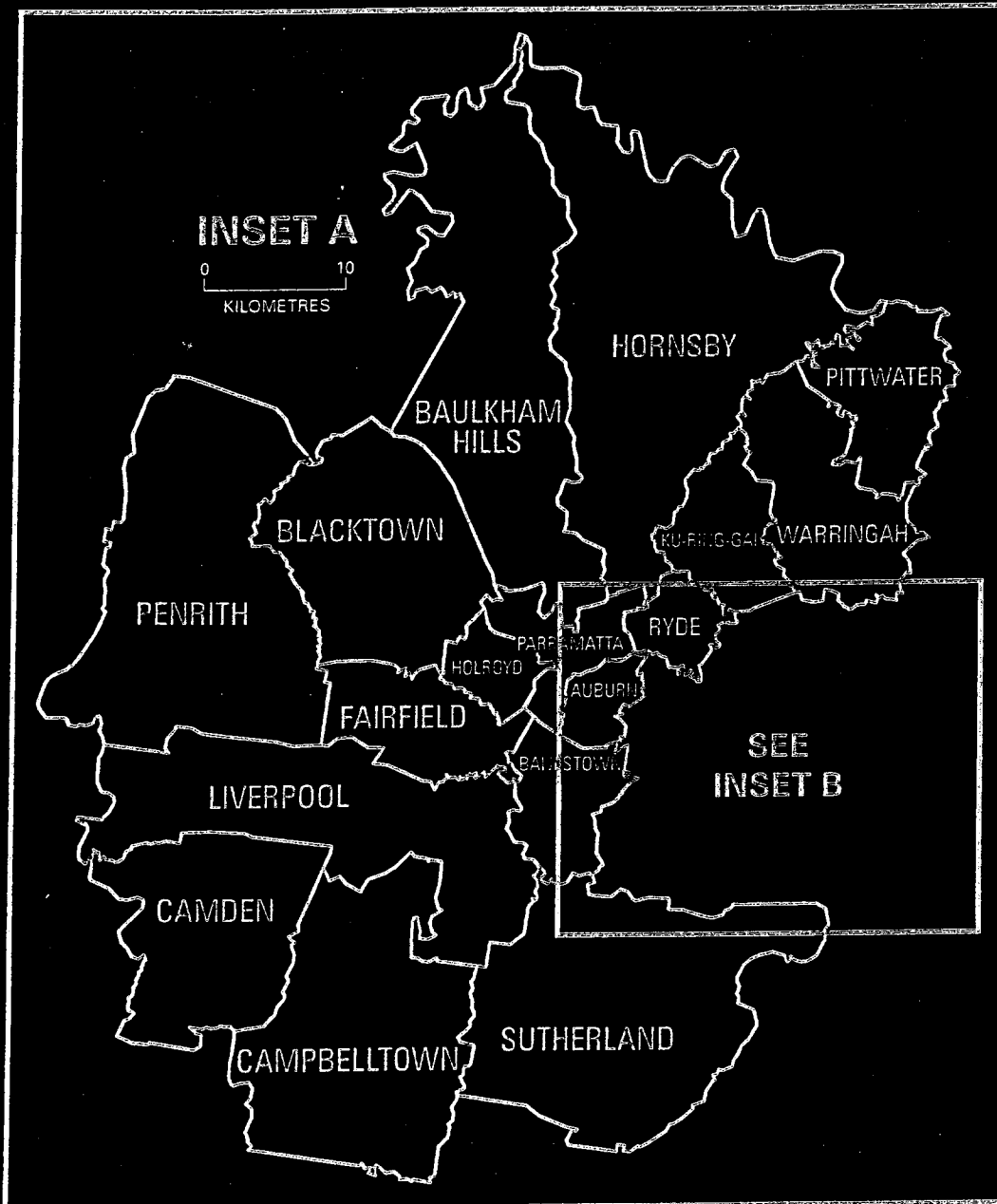
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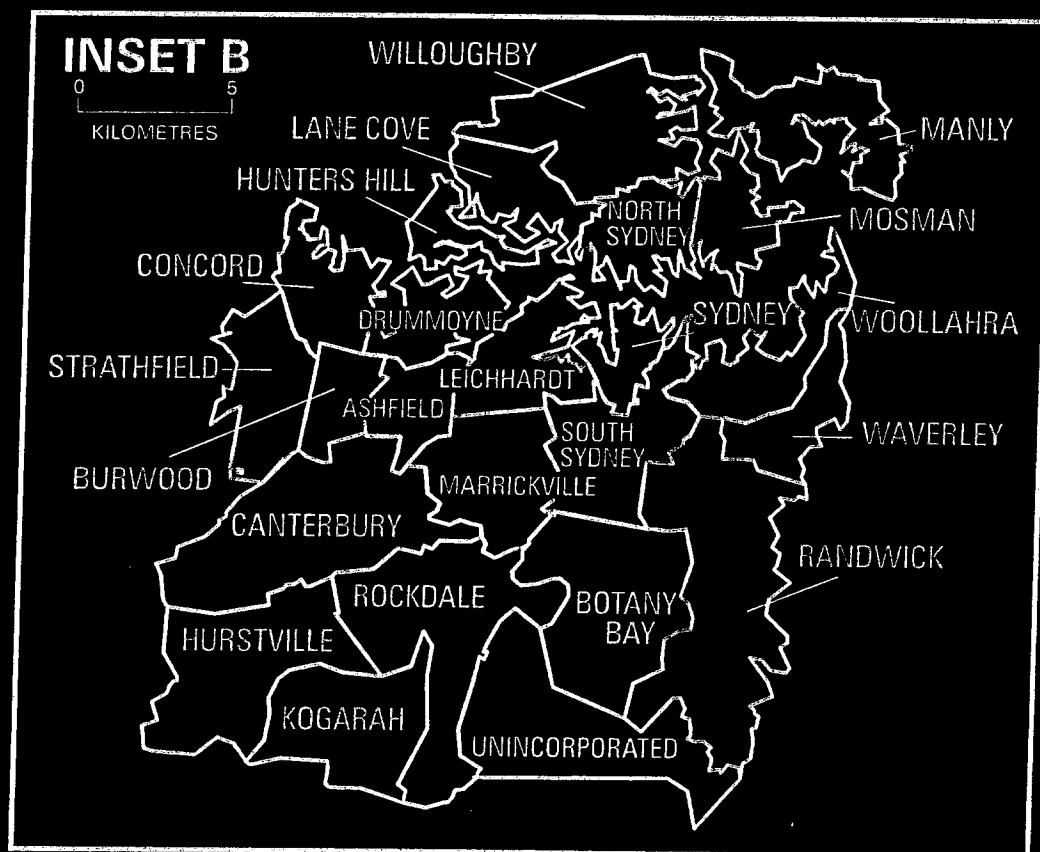
LOCAL
GOVERNMENT AREAS

Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong Local Government Areas



SECTION
9

Sydney Local Government Areas



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Sydney gets richer, the bush gets poorer

THE GREAT DIVIDE

By DEBRA JOPSON

Taxpayers in the far south-western town of Koraleigh have the lowest average personal income in NSW, \$20,185, while those in Mosman have the highest, \$63,867.

The economic divide between country and city is wider than ever, despite political and community attempts to reverse the trend.

The richest live in Sydney, the poorest in the far-flung areas of the State, according to a postcode analysis of the latest figures on personal income from the Australian Taxation Office.

At the bottom of the list of taxpayers with the lowest average incomes are 12 country areas. At the top are five Sydney suburbs.

A special *Herald* report, beginning today, reveals that across the State more than 400 small communities are battling to survive a decade of economic restructuring

which has stripped jobs, services and people from the bush.

In the area of health, for example, a recent report by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare found that people living in the capital cities do best on the three main indicators of wellbeing.

They suffer the least disadvantage, have greatest access to economic resources, and have the best rating for good education and occupational opportunities.

Wellbeing scores "generally show a pattern of increasing disadvantage as population density declines", said the report, echoing many other studies showing that the more remote the locality, the tougher the life.

"There is a revolution going on," said Mr Paul Tyrell, chief executive officer of Centacare, a charity trying to help rural people cope. "I think it's at the painful stage of the cycle."

He estimates that three in every 10 country people are "hanging on by their fingernails".

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Aberdeen, where the forgotten forego their daily bread

By DEBRA JOPSON

Every weekday at 5.40 am, the jobs young men of Aberdeen climb the hill to the tannery and sit lined up on a wall, hoping to be called for work.

Mark Wilson, 18, thinks himself lucky because he has got the call an average of two days out of five.

The only work he can get since the meatworks closed on April 16, putting himself and about 400 others out of a job pays about \$9 an hour. He describes it as "dragging miles around".

His friend Nicholas Rush, also 18, has almost given up on the wall. "It's not really worth going up there. Sometimes you go for a week and don't get work."

He has sad eyes. Not even the adults can see a good future for his town, where he and about 30 other youths are marooned, car-less and jobless.

Asked if he is dispirited, he says: "It's not good."

Already about 100 residents have quit Aberdeen, which straggles across a couple of hills on the highway just south of

Scott. The meatworks was its economic lifeblood for 109 years.

Most of the 1,600 residents remaining are hurting since Australian Meat Holdings axed Aberdeen as part of its

killing-off of small NSW operators to consolidate operations in large meatworks at Dinmore in Queensland.



Caught by abattoir closure, Mark Wilson, left, Nicholas Rush, Bruce Watson and his father Gary.

"The people who used to come in for a loaf of bread every day, come in every second day," said shopkeeper and Scott Shire councillor Mrs Lorna Driscoll. The six-shop Aberdeen Valley Fair's slow suffocation following

the abattoir's closure illustrates in microcosm the economic decline of many small country towns. Shop 1, the National Australia Bank, closed three years ago. Shop 2, the cafe, is a hangout for jobless youth.

At shop 3, hairdresser Mrs Melissa Koughan is taking a cut in her income to keep on an apprentice. She is pregnant. Her husband, Michael, lost a mining job last year and gets sporadic casual work.

Photograph by ROBERT PEARCE

Shop 4, the butcher, owned by the meatworks, closed on April 17. At shop 5, a supermarket, Mr Colin Day will request a rent reduction when his lease is up in July. Otherwise, he will probably shut.

In shop 6, a bottle shop and video store, licensee Mrs Gail Smith reports business is down 10-12 per cent since April.

At the 240-pupil primary school, 13 students have left since the meatworks closure and the school faces the possibility of losing one class next year, said the principal, Mr Phil McGurk.

The family of Australian Meat Industries Employees' Union delegate for Aberdeen, Mr Gary Watson, illustrates the trend for skilled rural workers to be reduced to casual, unskilled labour.

A qualified slaughterman whose father and grandfather worked in the meatworks, he is a casual cleaner two days a week at Liddell power station.

His son David, 18, just 2½ years through his apprenticeship as a butcher when the shop closed, has a temporary job at Mangrove Mountain, sterilising chicken pens after the

Newcastle Disease slaughter. Another son, Bruce, 17, has found a couple of weeks' work grape-pruning after losing his abattoir job.

Mr Watson's wife, Pam, frets about being able to pay the bills to keep their oldest son, Gary, at university in Sydney. He is studying to be a teacher.

"He tried the meatworks and decided it was not for him. He must have known something," she said.

Bank closures signal trouble

By DEBRA JOPSON

Outside Sydney, more than 100 NSW towns and suburbs have lost their last bank branches in the past 17 years. Between 1981 and 1998, 106 localities outside Sydney became "branchless".

meaning almost a quarter of the State's rural banks have disappeared, geographers Dr Neil Argent and Dr Frances Rolley of the University of New England have estimated.

The State's remote areas were even bigger losers, as three in 10 banks closed in the period, they told the House of Representatives standing committee on economics, finance and public administration.

Towns that have lost banks include Walla Walla, Thredbo, Hillston, Bundarra, Yeral, Bombo, Aberdeen, Nabbac, Coraki, Gulgambone, Trangie, Ivanhoe, Wentworth, Nimbin and Emuvalle.

The committee, in its report in March, noted that in NSW, losing a bank was estimated to lead to a 20 per cent fall-off in trading in local supermarkets.

Apart from creating "a loss of confidence in the economy of the town", it recognised that, losing banks meant losing the managing-ers and staff, who were often key figures in rural towns' community organisations.

According to the submission by Dr Argent and Dr Rolley, NSW closures have snowballed, with 84 per cent of them occurring since 1991, and nearly half since 1996.

The central west, northern tablelands, south-eastern and Murray regions have totted up the worst tally of towns losing their one bank branch.

"The larger regional centres, on the other hand, have generally experienced a consolidation and in some cases net growth in their level of banking services," they said.

These winners included Coffs Harbour, Lismore, Tamworth, Dubbo, Orange and Wagga Wagga, while the far and mid-North Coast and South Coast have also fared comparatively well.

Rural and remote communities had to have good access to financial services if society believed in a commitment to equity for people disadvantaged by social conditions and distance, the report said.

Many who had lost services in smaller towns had to invest time and money to get to them, and those without transport snagg-ed out. "It is the rural consumers who have to pay the cost of accessing those services," Dr Rolley said.

Koraleigh's riches are beyond the taxman

By ANDREW CLENNELL

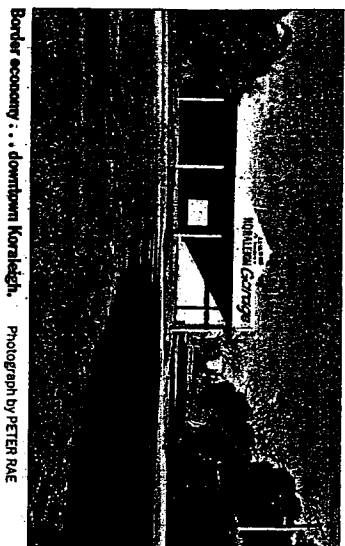
The district of Koraleigh in the State's south-west, population 400, postcode 2735, may have the lowest average taxable income in NSW, but its people believe they have their own riches.

Last week in the general store — the one and only store in the main town of about 20 houses — locals weren't surprised they had the lowest taxable income by postcode. After all, much of the work in the district is subsistence farming.

Jandella Pitts, 31, who has lived in Koraleigh 18 years and works in the store, believes the town has its own attractions — the peace and quiet, for a start.

Not to mention the house prices. A house with an eight-hectare block recently sold for \$55,000. A couple of houses "down the road" went for between \$14,000 and \$20,000.

Jim and Cathy Wiseman own the Koraleigh General Store. They have been there for two years.



Photograph by PETER RAE

Melbourne and try something different.

"The tax system's completely different up here to what it would be in Sydney — they farm for themselves here," Mrs Wiseman says.

The town is only a few kilometres from Walla Walla.

market for years said Mr Wiseman, but five had sold in the past two months.

"Older farmers are selling because they have had enough of being up on the farm. Most people move to the nearby Victorian town] Swan Hill," Ms Pitts said.

"We're getting a lot of younger families coming out to buy a farm. In terms of recreation — believe it or not — there's plenty to do."

"A lot of fishing, and when the lakes all full up we've got water skiing and canoeing and we've got tennis courts and do a lot of horse riding."

The Koraleigh area was country Burke and Willis travelled through. It used to be the home of the Watkiss tribe.

Despite its relative isolation — it takes dirt tracks to get there — there is some mobile telephone coverage. Although Koraleigh is in the south-west corner of NSW, the news-

NEW SOUTH WALES DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORT SUBORDINATE LEGISLATION ACT 1989 Proposed Rail Safety (Rail Offences) Regulation 1999

In accordance with Section 5 of the Subordinate Legislation Act 1989, notice is given of the proposed Rail Safety Regulation 1999 under the Rail Safety Act 1993.

The object of this Regulation is to repeal and remake, with no major changes in substance, the provisions of the Railway Offences Regulation 1994. The New South Wales Department of Transport invites comments and submissions on the draft Regulation and accompanying Regulatory Impact Statement.

Copies of the Regulatory Impact Statement and Draft Regulation are available free of charge from:

John Pinhorn
Transport Safety Bureau
Department of Transport
Level 12
227 Elizabeth Street
Sydney NSW 2000
Pittmore@transport.nsw.gov.au
Telephone: (02) 9268 2966 Fax: (02) 9268 2925

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INTERBUILD

SPEECH NOTES FOR MINISTER

SHIRES ASSOCIATION OF NSW ANNUAL CONFERENCE 1998

Thank you for the invitation to again address your annual conference.

This is the fourth conference I have addressed as Minister, and the last to be held before the next State election, so it is an appropriate time to look over the four years and see what has been achieved.

In two key areas in particular we have kept faith with you and the communities you represent.

First our commitment to no forced amalgamations.

Second our decision not to apply Compulsory Competitive Tendering to local councils.

In my time as Minister I have put through sixteen Acts of Parliament, and I currently have another four that have been introduced and are awaiting passage.

I believe this is indicative of the active approach we have taken to reform.

In addition to legislation there has also been a wide range of regulatory reform.

The approach we have taken to reform has been based on wide consultation. There have been two Green Papers, one White Paper and nine other discussion papers issued in addition to guidelines and practice notes.

Both the Local Government Association and the Shires Association are represented on my Ministerial Reform Task Force which has advised me on reform in a range of areas.

Local Government Act Review

The Local Government Act is scheduled for a full review this year. This is a requirement because it is five years since the Act was completely redrafted.

Newspaper advertisements requesting submissions for the review were placed in April and again two weeks ago.

The Local Government & Shires Associations were consulted earlier this year and I expect to receive a consolidated submission shortly. Submissions close on June 12.

I do not expect the review will lead to major changes in the Act. Since its introduction five years ago, there has not been one successful legal challenge against the Act. This indicates it is working well.

Also, since coming to Government I have been constantly amending the Act to iron out problems as they arise.

The national competition policy obligations of the government also require that the Act and regulations are reviewed to ensure that anti-competitive matters are addressed. The principles for the nature of this review will need to be identified and included as part of the general review of the Act.

Fundamental changes are not expected to the principles underlying the legislation itself. That is, the autonomy and related accountability of local councils is not to be diminished. Rather, the analysis may reveal areas where the legislation may be reformatted, as a result of recent experience, to better achieve the outcomes intended and to maintain or refine these basic principles.

Companion Animals

Undoubtedly the most controversial Bill I have introduced in my time as Minister has been the Companion Animals Bill.

This was developed through an extensive consultation period that attracted around 10 000 submissions.

Those submissions have covered a huge spectrum of opinion.

On the one hand you have organisations who believe that cats should be declared a protected native species and be free from any legislative requirements, and on the other hand you have groups who believe that cats should all be de-sexed and kept indoors at all times.

Trying to find middle ground is virtually impossible, but I believe the Bill currently before Parliament strikes a reasonable balance.

There are a couple of particularly important reforms for rural communities in the Bill.

For the first time farm working dogs will be exempt from any registration requirements. This recognises that working dogs are a completely different category to companion animals.

The exemption has been negotiated with NSW farmers' representatives.

The Bill also specifically recognises for the first time the right of farmers to take action against feral cats to protect their livestock. I know that feral cats are a major problem in rural communities, and my Bill offers support to farmers to address the issue.

De-sexing of cats will be encouraged through the new registration system. There will be a large discount on the cost of registration for de-sexed animals. This will assist in reducing the incidence of cats being dumped and adding to the feral problem.

The Bill now has the support of major organisations such as the RSPCA, the Cat Protection Society, the Canine Council and the Farmers Association. I am confident it will be passed through the Parliament.

Voluntary Regional Organisations of Councils

Earlier this year a Bill was put through the Parliament to recognise Voluntary Regional Organisations of Councils in the Local Government Act.

I have spoken to you on this issue many times, and so I don't propose to go into too much detail today. I just want to reinforce a couple of points.

First Voluntary Regional Organisations of Councils are just that – voluntary.

No council can be compelled to join one.

Second, VROC's offer the potential for great savings to councils, and I again urge you to look at using them for such things as regional planning, regional State of the Environment reporting, resource sharing and bulk purchasing.

By getting the benefits of savings in these areas you will be weakening any future push for amalgamations.

VROC's are not a precursor to amalgamation as some have claimed. If anything, they are the opposite.

Open council meetings

I currently have another bill before Parliament in relation to open meetings.

It will reduce the complexity of the procedure for closing council meetings and simplify the process for providing information from closed meetings to the public.

In particular, it will remove the ridiculous provision introduced by the Opposition when the Local Government Amendment (Open Meetings) Bill was being debated in the Legislative Council in 1997. This required each council to furnish the Minister with a report specifying the amount of time council meetings were closed to the public, expressed as a percentage of the total time of the council's meetings.

Such a statistic is irrelevant and meaningless. Councils would be wasting their time, and mine, in keeping such information.

The Bill will remove this unnecessary requirement and allow councils to get on with doing the business for which they are elected.

Elections

I currently have a bill before the Parliament which proposes some amendments to the electoral provisions of the Local Government Act.

Following the local government elections in 1995 many valuable comments were received from councils, local government groups, candidates and electors.

I issued a discussion paper some time ago which took up some of those comments. 86 submissions were received in response to that paper, including 67 from councils. That process formed the basis of the current Bill.

The Bill provides for candidates to submit candidate information sheets rather than candidate resumes in order to expand on the matters that may be included in them. For example candidates will be able to include policy statements or other statements of their intentions on what they propose to do if elected. This will both assist candidates in advising voters of their intentions and allow voters to make a more informed decision at the ballot box.

The Bill will also allow group voting tickets at all council elections and not just at elections for council areas not divided into wards.

Candidates and parties at local government elections are currently obliged to disclose their electoral contributions and expenditure. Declarations must be lodged with the election funding authority within three months after an election.

The Bill proposes to require groups to also make declarations of electoral contributions and expenditure. All declarations, whether from individual candidates or parties or groups, will be able to be lodged up to four months after an election.

The wider coverage and longer period will reflect the disclosure procedure applying to candidates at elections for State Parliament.

Social issues

It is important for councils to improve the quality of life for residents through the implementation of social justice principles.

They must recognise that all people, irrespective of their background, whether it be race, religion, language or cultural background have the same right to access to council services. Similarly, physical or intellectual impairment must never serve as an excuse for a person being denied or unable to access those services.

A social policy framework has been developed by the Department of Local Government for guidance in addressing relevant social issues relating to councils functions.

Within this framework, the Department is now developing ways of assisting and guiding councils in their reporting on social policy and planning.

One of the aims is to ensure that social policy needs are recognised and integrated into local government functions as an essential factor in providing effective and efficient services.

Many councils are already developing and implementing responses to social justice considerations. In some instances councils are actually addressing social policy issues, but they are not identifying them as such.

The Local Government (General) Regulation was recently amended to require councils to:

- develop a social or community plan by June 1999 in accordance with departmental guidelines; and
- include in both their management plan and annual report a statement regarding access and equity activities planned or undertaken by Council in a format specified by the Department.

To assist Councils implement this requirements, Social /Community Planning and Reporting Guidelines were developed and sent to councils by the electronic mail in mid May.

The Guidelines provide details in relation to the minimum social planning and reporting requirements which councils are required to meet. Printed copies of the Guidelines with the Social /Community Planning Manual are being posted to councils during this week.

Multiculturalism

A Multicultural Committee was established in December 1996 to advise on multicultural issues in local government. Representatives on the Committee include the Local Government and Shires Associations, a local government representative (from Marrickville Council), the Ethnic Affairs Commission, and the Ethnic Communities Council.

A major initiative of the Committee was the Local Government Multicultural Forum co-hosted by Marrickville Council in September 1997. The Forum was well attended and included speakers such as Lex Marinos, Stepan Kerkasharian, and the late Senthil Vasan.

In September this year, the Multicultural Committee will co-host a Forum with Waverley Council. I would encourage you all to attend.

Youth related projects

The Department of Local Government has conducted a research project on how local councils consult with young people. The purpose of the project is to assist councils in enhancing the way in which they consult with young people. For the purposes of the project, young people were defined as 12-24 years inclusive.

A report entitled *'How local councils consult with young people'* has been compiled from the findings of a survey of all local councils.

In summary the survey found that the mechanism used most commonly by councils to consult with young people is Youth Week (61%).

Other mechanisms used by more than half of the councils which responded to the survey are - council staff consulting directly with young people (53%); council staff consulting indirectly with young people (55%), and public meetings on specific issues (52%).

The most common features identified for effective youth consultation mechanisms were a broad representation of young people, respecting and valuing the views of young people, making a commitment to acting on information provided by young people, providing young people with feedback about outcomes, and allocating adequate funding and staff resources to support consultation.

Visits to 7 local councils, including Byron and Wellington, to interview councillors, council staff and young people have recently been completed. A report on the findings from those interviews is expected to be distributed to all local councils before the end of the year.

The Department is managing a 12 month rural youth affairs project being carried out by the Local Government and Shires Associations.

The project, funded by the NSW Government, has employed a Project Officer to work with three rural councils, ie Hay, Hastings and Parkes Councils, to develop and implement integrated whole-of-council models for involving young people in council decision making, meeting young people's needs for the use of public space and addressing local youth crime and anti-social issues.

The project will also involve the development of a strategy to encourage other rural councils in NSW to implement one of the models or an adapted version of the model.

Department of Education and Training Aboriginal Employment and Career Strategy

I would also like to bring to your attention the DET Aboriginal Employment and Career Strategy

The Department has been advised by the Department of Education and Training (DET) that it has initiated the Local Government Aboriginal Employment and Career Development Program.

The Program is designed to provide local Councils with financial resources for a fixed term for existing council positions whilst meeting the employment, training and career development needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The Program is not intended to create new positions for Aboriginal people in Councils. It is intended to encourage Councils to examine existing vacancies and to encourage Aboriginal people to apply for them.

A number of councils have already made application and the Department is encouraging all councils to consider participation in the program. If you weren't aware of the program in time for this financial year, consider applying to be considered for next financial year.

On Site Sewage Management Reforms

The Government is implementing on-site sewage management reforms to establish a sound framework to enable councils to implement ecologically sustainable on-site sewage management practices over the next three to five years.

The Local Government (Approvals) Regulation has been amended to allow councils to charge on a fee-for-service basis to inspect and licence domestic on-site sewage management systems.

The ability to recover costs in this area was a specific request from your 1997 Annual Conference.

The resolution you passed then read: "That the State Government be requested as a matter of urgency to allow councils to inspect on-site waste disposal systems on a fee for service basis."

The regulation requires households that operate on-site sewage systems to have council sewage management approval. This will enable councils to ensure that on-site sewage management systems are maintained and operated in accordance with environment and health protection standards.

The Regulation is supported by Guidelines which encourage councils to prepare on-site sewage management strategies for their area in consultation with their local communities, considering the full range of sewage management options based on health and environmental objectives, resource management issues and social and economic factors.

The Guidelines also give councils technical advice regarding selection of appropriate systems.

The reforms are flexible. They encourage councils to develop responses best suited to their council area. Councils can give priority to supervision of sewage systems in more closely settled areas and in areas where significant environment, health and amenity risks are identified, ie a risk based approach to management which allows a tiered supervisory system based on risks.

To assist in the implementation of the reforms, the Department of Local Government conducted a series of 13 regional workshops across the whole of the State. From the regional workshops, 18 regional working groups were established to implement reforms.

These regional working groups are looking at issues such as regional education campaigns, consistent application processes, categorising systems on the basis of risk, developing different supervision options, developing compatible databases, developing regional strategies etc. The working groups each determine which issues should be developed at the regional level and hence the working groups are working on different issues.

'Major and Special Events Planning – A Guide for Promoters and Councils'

The document titled "Major and Special Events Planning – A Guide for promoters and Councils" was prepared to provide councils, event promoters and the general public with information about how to successfully facilitate major and special events for their communities. These events include street parades, motor races, cycling races, jazz festivals, cultural celebrations, sporting events, open air theatres and concerts, and balls or dance parties and can often attract large numbers of people.

The guide recognises that major and special events are a form of 'development' and aims to promote good practice by promoters and councils so that the benefits of these events for the community are maximised and any negative social impacts are minimised or reduced. It explains the various approvals required from councils, the police and the Environment Protection Authority and the policies and procedures that councils may have, or would like to develop, in relation to these events.

The Department of Local Government, the Police Service of NSW, the Environment Protection Authority of NSW, and the Department of Urban Affairs and Planning have worked together to prepare this practice note. The aim is promote a holistic approach to the planning of major and special events so that all the relevant matters are considered as part of a unified process rather than as a collection of isolated requirements and approvals.

The guide addresses how the impacts of special events can be assessed and managed; guides promoters through the legislation and various approvals that apply to events and provides information for councils about developing and implementing an events policy and improving the consultation process.

The Millennium Bug

Councils need to prepare their information technology system to avoid the potentially devastating effects of the millennium bug. The millennium bug or year 2000 problem occurs because a 2-digit year code is used in computer programs and systems, chip controlled equipment, PABX's etc, rather than a 4 digit code.

This can affect hardware and software and any system that is time/date driven.

The range of systems that can be affected is nearly endless but includes telephones, building services, water and sewerage operations, leisure centre facilities, most of your business operations and your internal administration systems.

The year 2000 issue needs to be treated as a business project not purely as a computer related problem. It requires the active involvement and commitment of councillors, the general-manager, directors and staff, ie everyone.

You need to think laterally about the areas of risk and the potential implications.

The NSW Government has developed a number of initiatives to combat the possibility of failures because of year 2000 problems, including the development of a year 2000 business risk analysis methodology, a panel contract of business analysts to assist agencies apply the methodology and a web site to provide advice, assistance and news.

All councils have been surveyed to assess their progress in identifying and overcoming possible year 2000 problems. Of the 177 councils, 80 have responded. 77% of those have commenced a year 2000 business risk analysis. The other 23% are to commence shortly.

However, I am concerned that while most who have responded have commented on their administrative computer systems, such as accounting and personnel, few made any comment about their operations such as water and sewerage or building systems.

I am also concerned about the 97 councils who have not responded.

While the Department will continue to monitor councils to ensure that the risk of systems failure is minimal, at the end of the day any disasters will have to be borne by those councils that failed to make the necessary preparations to ward off the millennium bug.

Auditors

Councils have a right to expect that their auditors will provide early warning of developing budget problems or inadequacies in financial reporting systems.

In a number of cases that have recently come to my attention auditors have failed in their duty to councils.

It seems that some auditors are finding out about financial difficulties only after the matter has come to the attention of myself and the Department. This can leave councils with a much worse financial problem than would have happened had they been given early warning and been able to take remedial measures.

The Local Government Act was recently altered to allow the Department of Local Government to set out minimum requirements for council audits. This can be done by regulation.

This is an issue you will hear more on. I am determined to see that auditors are doing their work properly and supporting you in your work as councillors.

National Competition Policy

As I mentioned earlier, there is no CCT for NSW councils, and the Government remains committed to this policy.

I think it is important for you to have the position of the major parties clearly stated on this issue before the next election. I don't need to tell you what the impact would be on local economies if CCT were introduced.

In particular I think that you deserve a bit more clarity on this issue from the Coalition. Up to this point their public comments have been somewhat unclear and concerning.

Speaking at a Regional Chamber of Commerce meeting last year the Shadow Minister for Local Government said he believed that councils "..... will need to move further down the compulsory competitive tendering track."

His comments were made in the context of the changes made by Sydney City Council, which has nearly halved its workforce through a process of contracting out.

That may well have been the correct thing for them to do. But the important thing is that it was the council's choice - no one forced them to do it.

I do not support any policy that would force councils to tender out parts of their operation, and neither does our Government. I believe decisions on competitive tendering should be made at the local level with the welfare of local communities as a primary consideration.

And I cannot think of any town I have visited which would benefit by having its council's workforce reduced by half.

As I am sure you are aware the effects on many small towns in Victoria have been extremely concerning since the introduction of CCT.

In conclusion I would like to thank you all very much for the assistance that you have offered me over the past few years.

When I came to office I said that I knew very little about what made councils outside of the Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong areas tick, and that I was determined to correct that.

I have gone out of my way to address that, and in my travels around the state I have learned a great deal.

I don't mind saying that what I have seen has impressed me a great deal.

The work that you do to promote the unique benefits of the areas you represent is fantastic.

Councils in rural and regional NSW are dynamic forces in attracting investment and improving the quality of life for local communities.

I have always said that I am available for Mayors and General Mangers over the phone at any time to discuss problems. I won't duck your calls. If there is an easy solution to your problem I am prepared to pursue it immediately.

I will continue to be available in this way so don not hesitate to contact me if you have something you need to discuss.

On a personal note, I would also like to thank you for the tremendous hospitality shown to me and my wife on our trips around councils.

I have not travelled anywhere without feeling most welcome, which has made my job a lot easier.

I look forward to continuing to work constructively with all of you over the coming months.

Minister for Roads and Transport, Carl Scully
Keynote address, NSW Shires Association
Wednesday 3 June, 8.30am; Wentworth hotel
Country Roads Funding & Mass Limits Review

- It is timely that the Shires Association has invited me here today on the morning after the State budget. Members of the Shires Association always show a great interest in road funding and for many Councils this is the major expenditure item.
- I am pleased to announce that the 1998/99 State budget continues to recognise the importance of Local Government working in partnership with the State Government to maintain and develop our road network.
- Highlights of this year's budget include:
 - ⇒ The improved condition of State roads in country NSW
 - ⇒ Initiating a new \$129 million program to restore and where necessary to replace 140 RTA country timber bridges over the next five years
 - ⇒ A continuation of the Government's 1995 commitment to assist local Government fund Regional roads
 - ⇒ Increasing the level of funding for maintaining roads and bridges on Regional roads by 14% in real terms compared to the annual average for the previous Government
 - ⇒ Maintaining the total roads funding for country Councils in real terms compared to the annual average for the previous Government
 - ⇒ Ensuring that an equivalent level of funding continues to be made available to the RTA to target 3x3 objectives
 - ⇒ Delivering the Government's commitment to the Pacific Highway

Regional roads

- The State Government gave a commitment to the Local Government and Shires Associations in 1995 to at least maintain the real level of funding assistance for regional roads at \$93 million per annum for three years.
- Over the last three years, this commitment was met.
- I am very pleased to say that the State Government has continued this commitment and has increased the level of funds dedicated to regional roads to \$99.3m in 1998/99.

- This comprises \$79.9 million for block grants and \$19.4 million for REPAIR projects.
- I am also pleased to add that the Government has allocated a further \$7.3 million for several specific high priority works on regional roads of which \$5.4 million will be spent in country NSW.
- This additional \$7.3 million funding takes the Government's total funding for regional roads in 1998/99 to \$106.6 million.
- The distribution of regional road Block Grants for 1998/99 incorporates changes previously foreshadowed to the Local Government and Shires Associations through the RTA/Local Government Liaison Committee.
- The changes are the initial 25% phase out of the safety net for the roads component of the Block Grant, and the adoption of a more equitable formula for the distribution of the traffic facilities component.
- The distribution formula for the roads component of the block grants have also been updated to include the latest traffic data. A full list of council block grants will be circulated to councils.

Local roads

- In 1998/99, The Government will provide \$15.5 million under the Council Determined Program to achieve the Government's \$60.3 million commitment under the 1995-99 3x3 funding program.

Review of Local Government/RTA relationships

- Over the last year the RTA and Local Government, through the RTA Local Government Liaison Committee, have undertaken reviews of the Regional Road Repair Program, the Council Consultative Committees and the Wheat Roads Scheme.
- All Councils had the opportunity to be involved in review discussions and over 60 Councils made submissions to the review working party. Thank you for your help and interest in these reviews.
- Implementation of the recommendations of the review, which I support, will improve equity between Councils, provide more flexibility at the local level and encourage closer cooperation in achieving road management efficiencies.
- The review of the REPAIR Program will result in a greater emphasis being given to maintaining existing road assets, with encouragement being given to larger projects particularly rehabilitation projects for economies of scale.

- Selection of projects on a regional priority basis will provide assurance to Government that it is getting value for money for its contribution.
- Some Councils had raised concerns about the 50% Council contribution requirement under this program.
- The Government remains committed to the principle of 50:50 shared funding but recognises that some flexibility is warranted.
- Accordingly, Regional Consultative Committees will be able to propose a reduction in a Council's contribution under special circumstances.
- Recommendations would be referred to the RTA Local Government Liaison Committee for approval. The special circumstances could include:
 - ⇒ Limited benefit to local ratepayers through whose area a particular Regional Road passes
 - ⇒ Significant State benefits
 - ⇒ Major bridge upgrades
- The review also proposes that Regional Consultative Committees support the REPAIR program by developing a **four year plan of works**. This will allow Councils to plan ahead with greater certainty.
- The review of the Regional Consultative Committees has been undertaken to clarify roles and functions and allow Councils and the RTA flexibility in how they structure their committees providing the key roles and functions are met.
- This will provide scope for Councils to cooperate more closely in road management activities including planning their regional road network.
- A review of the Wheat Roads Scheme was also required as the scheme contained significant anomalies that resulted in inequities between Councils.
- The review concluded that this scheme was no longer justified given the significant changes in the grains industry since its inception.
- It was also unfair to others Councils where haulage of other commodities was undertaken without special assistance.
- While the Wheat Roads Scheme will be discontinued, I have agreed that all of the funds set aside under this scheme of \$500,000 per year will continue to be provided to Councils.

- This will be achieved by adding the funds into the total Rural Road Block Grant Pool, which will benefit more Councils.

3X3 PROGRAM

- Turning to the 3x3 program, I know that many Councils are concerned about the impact of the High Court decision regarding the State's fuel excise.
- I am pleased to say that I will be taking legislation to Parliament shortly to ensure that an equivalent level of funding continues to be made available to the RTA to target 3x3 objectives. All roads funds received by the NSW Government from Federal fuel levies will continue to be dedicated to the road program.

Total funding for Local Government

- For the period 1995/96 to 1998/99 the Government has budgeted more than \$1.25 billion in real terms to all Local Government for all roads portfolio programs, including Road Safety, Network Development, Maintenance and Traffic Management.
- This Government has on average, in real terms, increased the annual level of funding for all NSW Local Government by 3.1% per year in comparison to the previous Government for all roads portfolio programs.

State roads

- The average condition of country State road pavements funded from the State Government has improved significantly since this Government took office.
- Using laser measurements, the RTA has given entire State road network, a "good" smoothness rating. This is a significant increase since 1995 from about 85% to 90%.
- To achieve this increase, about 1,800 km of road have been improved.
- X • This reflects the RTA and Council service providers efforts in maintaining State roads.
- In addition, the Roads and Traffic Authority inform me that the backlog on resealing left over from the early 1990's has been rectified.
- Of course, there are still some State roads requiring further work, but on average, State roads are in a much more sustainable maintenance condition.

National highways

- The improvement in country State roads funded by the State is in stark contrast to the National Highways funded by the Federal Government, including the Hume, New England, Sturt, Newell, Barton and Federal Highways.
- The overall condition of the National Highway network is deteriorating.
- There has been some community speculation that the Federal Government's financial commitment to the Pacific Highway has been at the expense of the National Highway system.
- You will all be aware of the RONI (or RONPI) program introduced by the Federal Government. Unfortunately, the RONPI's have also been funded at expense of the National Highway system.
- The last three Federal Government budgets have cut funding to the National Highways in NSW by \$242 million in actual dollars.
- This represents 58% of total funding cuts to National Highways across Australia since 1995/96, and consequently NSW is bearing the brunt of these cuts.
- This is despite the Federal Government's promises on road funding before the last election which included "continuation of Federal road funding expenditure commitments at current levels".
- The overall level of funding for National Highway maintenance has decreased in real terms by 28% due to Federal funding cutbacks since 1995-96 including the New England highway.
- The recent Federal budget has continued with this inadequate level of funding.
- The RTA estimates that the overall Federal funding shortfall for National Highway maintenance is \$35 million pa.
- The RTA is ensuring sufficient funds are provided to maintain safe travel. However, it predicts that on average the condition of all NSW National Highways will deteriorate in future years as a result of the current Federal funding projections.

Proposed increases to heavy vehicle mass limits

- The National Road Transport Commission has proposed an increase in the axle mass limits for heavy vehicles from 42.5 tonne to 45.5 tonne.
- The NRTC has argued that this proposal will result in significant productivity benefits for the road transport industry.

- I have stated from the outset that I need to be convinced that these gains will not be outweighed by increased road and bridge costs.
- Even if so called "road friendly suspensions" causes less damage to our road pavements, the extra mass on our bridges is a cause of major concern.
- As a result, the RTA has recently completed a major assessment of the capacity of the NSW bridge stock to carry the increased mass.
- NSW has the oldest and most extensive road network in the country. This includes over 12,000 bridges many of timber construction, designed to a pre-1948 load limit based on a 20 tonne truck.
- The RTA's assessment revealed that many of these older bridges, especially those on Local Government roads, should be replaced if heavier loads of 45.5 tonne are allowed.
- Should increased mass limits be introduced, the RTA estimates the total cost to NSW as \$760 million. This figure is the estimated total cost of strengthening over 1,900 bridges to carry the higher mass limits, or where the bridge cannot be safely or economically strengthened, to replace the bridge.
- The total bridge upgrade cost for NSW includes a cost of \$470 million to strengthen or replace over 1,700 Local Government bridges to take the increased weight. This figure does not include any assessment of the additional pavement damage to local roads from heavier vehicles.
- Pavement damage is also a significant issue, given that around 80% of interstate freight movements are through NSW.
- The Commonwealth Government is expected to gain \$150 million in extra tax revenue from any productivity benefits which result from an increase in heavy vehicle mass.
- It was on this basis that the April meeting of the Australian Transport Council agreed that the Commonwealth should report back to its next meeting in November, on the additional funding which it is prepared to put into a national bridge upgrade program.

- I had expected the recent Federal Budget to give some indication of the Commonwealth's commitment to fund bridge upgrades, but I note they have only agreed to roll over \$8 million remaining from last year's allocation to fund a national bridge survey.
- The NSW Government's position is that the Commonwealth, as the main beneficiary of the mass limits increase, should take responsibility for 100% of the bridge upgrading and pavement rehabilitation costs that result from this proposal.
- I will need to be satisfied that no unreasonable infrastructure costs are imposed on the State and Local Governments, before I will agree to increase allowable an increase in mass limits for vehicles with road friendly suspension.
- As I have already mentioned, timber bridges are most at risk from any increase in heavy vehicle mass. In order to cope with existing load limits and recognising the need to improve the condition of old timber bridges, the Government will spend \$129 million between 1998/99 and 2002/2003 restoring and where necessary replacing 140 RTA country timber bridges.
- These RTA bridges are generally on the high traffic volume, State roads, with significant exposure to interstate truck travel.
- Examples are :
 - ⇒ Harts Gully on the Princes Highway south of Bega
 - ⇒ Sandy Creek on the Burner Highway east of Tenterfield,
 - ⇒ Camp, Middle and Nogulga Creeks on the Gwydir Highway west of Grafton
 - ⇒ Barmedman Creek on the Temora to Wyalong Road
 - ⇒ Pagans Creek, 2 mile Warmambool & 5 mile Warmambool on the Castlereagh Highway north of Walgett
- The NSW Government will also continue to lobby strongly in national discussions on behalf of Local Government, whose bridges are less exposed to risk but who have two thirds the number of vulnerable bridges.

Pacific Highway

- The Pacific Highway Upgrading Program is providing an average of \$220 million per year over ten years to upgrade the Pacific Highway between Hexham and the Queensland border.
- Of this \$220 million NSW is providing \$100 million for 100% State funded works and \$60 million for joint NSW/Commonwealth projects.

- The 1998/99 budget continues this program with total State funding averaging \$160 million per annum.
- Major works 100% funded by NSW include:
 - ⇒ Upgrading the Pacific Highway to dual carriageways between Raymond Terrace and Karuah
 - ⇒ Continued work on the new bridges for the Taree bypass
 - ⇒ Realignment at Tyndale
 - ⇒ Overtaking lane at Everson creek
 - ⇒ Widening between Bray and Arthur Streets, Coffs harbour
 - ⇒ Realignment and overtaking lanes between Halfway Creek to Truck Stop (south of Grafton)
 - ⇒ The Byron's Lane realignment and overtaking lanes north of Grafton.
- This funding also provides for environmental protection and mitigation measures for water quality, traffic noise and flora and fauna conservation as the projects proceed.
- Major works undertaken under the joint State/Federal program include:
 - ⇒ The Raymond Terrace Bypass
 - ⇒ Ewingsdale interchange
 - ⇒ Lyons Road to Englands Road, Coffs Harbour
 - ⇒ The Bulahdelah to Coolongolook deviation
 - ⇒ Duplication from Coolongolook to Wang Wauk
 - ⇒ Construction of a second carriageway at Eungai
 - ⇒ The Raleigh deviation, upgrading in Coffs Harbour between Lyons and Englands roads and commencement of the deviation from Yelgun to Chinderah.
- A total of \$60 million will be provided by the State for these joint projects.
- The benefits of the Pacific Highway Upgrading Program to rural NSW are considerable.
- Currently, driving safely and taking regular breaks, it takes about 9 to 10 hours to travel from Hexham to the Queensland border.
- When all the upgrading work is complete (we are currently in year 3 of the 10 year program) this journey time will be cut by 60 to 90 minutes.

- The projects completed to date: the Chinderah bypass, the majority of the Taree bypass, dual carriageways at Korora hill and Bangalow, have already cut journey times by around 20 minutes.
- A reduction in travel times will have enormous benefits to industry with resulting from reduced freight transport costs. A reduction in travel times will also benefit tourism in regional NSW.

The benefits to all highway users will be a significant improvement to road safety resulting from divided dual carriageways (where possible), safer overtaking opportunities, and the removal of notorious accident blackspots.

50km/h urban speed limit

- The 50km/h speed limit initiative was trialled from October 1997, involving 26 Local Government areas across the State and was conducted in cooperation with NSW Police, the NRMA, and the Institute of Municipal Engineers.
- This approach to the trial recognised the important role of local government in implementing road safety measures, especially in residential areas.
- Therefore, the trial involved local government in assessing the impact on the community of a 50 km/h urban speed limit and acknowledged the importance of local government support for a change of this magnitude.
- The trial found evidence to suggest that there was a slowing down and some road safety improvements associated with the reduced speed limit. However, it is uncertain how sustainable and substantial these benefits would be over a longer period.
- Overall, support from Councils and the general community for the full introduction of a general urban speed limit of 50km/h is mixed. There is generally opposition in rural and regional NSW and many councils, throughout the State are undecided on their position on a 50 km/h speed limit.
- Therefore, the evaluation of the trial demonstrated the need for further expansion and review of specified 50 km/h speed zones.
- Further exposure of local government and the community to a reduced urban speed limit will allow a better understanding of the initiative and will test the sustainability of potential road safety benefits.
- Therefore, I will be inviting all NSW Councils to introduce 50 km/h precincts, where appropriate, to be established in consultation with, and funded by the RTA.

- A 50km/h Implementation Taskforce will be established, to include representative of key stakeholder organisations. The Taskforce will monitor and report on the precincts in twelve months time.

This will enable an extensive and comprehensive evaluation of the benefits of a 50km/h urban speed limit, in concert with other key stakeholders.

Air Transport Legislation Repeal Bill

In April the Government introduced the Air Transport Legislation Repeal Bill to deregulate the intrastate air industry.

There are clear benefits for regional air services from deregulation. The NSW Farmers Association, for example, endorses the benefits of deregulation. Regional centers such as Albury and Wagga Wagga would benefit from deregulation.

In the course of the debate on the Bill concerns were raised by regional councils regarding the effect of deregulation.

These concerns have been heightened by changes proposed by the Federal Airports Corporation to the operation of Kingsford Smith Airport.

There is uncertainty due the Federal Government's policies and there are concerns in the country. I want to make sure that these concerns are investigated and that the future of less patronised air services are assured.

The Government has therefore referred the Air Transport Legislation Repeal Bill to the Parliament's Standing Committee on State Development. The referral to the Standing Committee on State Development means these concerns can be assessed.

The terms of reference require the Committee to inquire into and report on the provision and operation of rural and regional air services in NSW, and in particular the impact on country communities of:

- Landing fees at Sydney (Kingsford Smith) Airport
- Landing fees at regional airports
- The allocation of slot times at Sydney (Kingsford Smith) Airport
- Proposals to limit access to Sydney (Kingsford Smith) Airport and direct country services to Bankstown Airport

- Deregulation of NSW air services on the provision of services to smaller regional centres and towns in NSW including consideration of measures to ensure services

Conclusion

The 1998/99 Budget continues this Government's commitment to rural and regional NSW, to maintain and improve our roads to deliver economic benefits to this State and to improve road safety for commuters and their families

The Government is listening to the needs of country people and responding to their needs by:

- Initiating a new \$129 million program to restore or replace 140 RTA country timber bridges
- Delivering the Government's commitment to assist Local Government fund regional roads
- Increasing the level of funding for maintaining roads and bridges on regional roads by 14% in real terms compared to the annual average for the previous Government
- Maintaining the total roads portfolio funding for country councils in real terms compared to the annual average for the previous Government
- Ensuring that an equivalent level of funding continues to be made available to the RTA to target 3x3 objectives
- Delivering the Government's commitment to the Pacific Highway
- I trust that you will appreciate the extent of this Government's commitment to manage the country road system in a manner which serves regional and local communities while promoting a partnership between the RTA and Local Government.