

Submission to the Review of the Local Government Act 2003

Thank you for the opportunity to lodge a submission to the review of the Local Government Act 2003.

I live in the Buloke Shire, own my own business, home and investment interest all within Buloke.

Buloke Shire has for a larger number of years been in severe financial difficulties, this in my opinion is due to a number of factors both externally from the shire but certainly from within the organisation of the shire council.

Buloke shire in its current form is not financially sustainable going forward, with crippling debt, low socio economic rate base, poor returns to its farmers, declining and ageing population and infrastructure (public) that requires major capital investment to maintain.

In recent times ratepayers have had rate increases of a minimum 6% per annum and are currently the highest rated shire per capita in the state of Victoria. This combined with the shire council withdrawing services, closing offices and the major decrease in shire staff has left many ratepayers seeking answers to the question of where does our rate money go.

Buloke shire council has a policy of no new infrastructure work unless fully funded from outside sources, no business / shire can continually put up its prices / rates and reduce products / services and expect to survive. Finding solutions to the current problem is not easy but certainly for Buloke outside intervention is needed now before the major financial collapse happens.

The above is an outline of the current situation in Buloke

The way forward.

For a number of years since amalgamation both state and federal government have been increasingly pushing more and more services onto local government to perform and whilst the set up fund was adequate to run these programs the follow up funds have not kept up with either the demand or the supply of these services and council has had to use ratepayers funds to fund the shortfall. This cannot continue and in Buloke's case we have seen the withdrawal of services especially in the areas of health and community service area, youth support and transport. With the limited services available living in rural and remote parts of Victoria becomes very difficult and this lack of services does result in population shifts to more larger regional centres, putting greater strain on their services and breaks down the hub of the structured family.

Whilst I fully understand that the pool of taxpayer fund can only go so far, there needs to be a greater emphasis on grass root local government funding from both Federal & State Governments. A minimum set of standards for all Local governments across the state should be adopted and these standards should be fully funded and while some Shires will require nil funding many rural & regional Shire will require top up payments to run programs and deliver basic services.

Country Victoria is a great place to live, work and raise a family and with our many varied communities across the state and greater push towards decentralisation would help restore the current imbalance in the population. The infrastructure is out here, land is readily available to build, road & rail networks are here, we just need the investment in capital growth and incentives may help attract the investors.

I am willing to discuss my thoughts and ideas further and would be willing to participate in any working group that may be established out of this review.

Sincerely Your

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