

**INQUIRY INTO ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
IN CENTRAL WESTERN NEW SOUTH WALES**

Organisation: Blue Mountains City Council

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Community and Corporate

Reference No: F05839 File: 11/131251

The Director
Standing Committee on State Development
Legislative Council
Parliament House
Macquarie St
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Sir/Madam,

Subject: Submission – *Inquiry into Economic and Social Development in Central Western NSW*

Thank you for your letter of 14 July 2011 inviting a submission from the Blue Mountains City Council to the inquiry into Economic and Social development in Central Western NSW. A copy of the submission from the Blue Mountains City Council is attached.

In summary, we wish to draw the Committee's attention to the fact that the City of the Blue Mountains is located immediately adjacent to central western NSW and provides the major linking rail and road corridor between the Central West and Sydney. As a result any recommendations made by the Committee to stimulate economic and social development in the central west may have implications for the City of the Blue Mountains. Issues of particular importance in this regard include the fact that the City of the Blue Mountains is located in a World Heritage Area, any recommendations arising from the Inquiry need to acknowledge this.

The submission proposes a need for further collaboration between central western Councils to foster further growth in the tourism industry as a means of stimulating economic activity in both the central west and the City of the Blue Mountains. The submission also identifies other areas for the Inquiry to consider in support of economic and social development in the Blue Mountains Council area, as well as in the central west.

I trust that the matters included in this submission will be considered by the Committee. If you require any further information on this submission, please contact Council's Program Leader, Strategic Planning, Martin Beveridge on 02 4780 5000 or

Yours faithfully

ROBERT GREENWOOD
General Manager

Economic and Social Development in Central Western NSW

Blue Mountains City Council Submission

Date: 29 August 2011

The Blue Mountains City Council (the Council) requests that the Standing Committee on State Development consider the following matters in its Inquiry into Economic and Social Development in Central Western NSW:

1) Background: The Blue Mountains Local Government Area in relation to Central Western NSW.

The Greater Blue Mountains Area covers a total area of about one million hectares of mostly forested landscape on a sandstone plateau. The City of Blue Mountains has a population of 77,000, and is located so that it serves as a bridge between the Sydney metropolitan areas and central western NSW, with the main road and rail transport corridors between Sydney and the central west crossing the City of Blue Mountains. In November 2000, the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area (GBMWhA) was incorporated on the World Heritage List, and the City of the Blue Mountains is one of only two cities in the world that is wholly contained within a designated World Heritage Area.

Although not located in the area subject to this Inquiry, the City of the Blue Mountains is adjacent to the Lithgow Local Government Area (LGA) which is within central western NSW for the purposes of this Inquiry. In view of the proximity of the City of the Blue Mountains to the area subject to the Inquiry, and considering also the outstanding environmental attributes of the area, it is likely that some of the recommendations made by the Committee to stimulate economic and social development in central west NSW may have implications for the City of the Blue Mountains. For example, it may mean that some of the recommendations of the Committee to stimulate economic and social development in central west NSW may need to be considered for their impact on the World Heritage and other environmental values of the Blue Mountains. Additionally however, it may also mean that there are some synergies between the City of the Blue Mountains and the central west region that could be identified, and around which recommendations could be made by the Committee that could enhance economic and social development in both the Central West region of NSW and in the City of the Blue Mountains.

2) Specific comments on the Terms of Reference for the Inquiry

Based on the above context, the Council makes the following comments about the specific matters included in the Terms of Reference for this Inquiry:

a) The provision of health, education and cultural facilities;

The Council would support the provision of more health, education and cultural facilities in central western NSW, particularly in Lithgow and other areas of the central west that are close to the City of the Blue Mountains. Presently, residents of the Blue Mountains often have to travel long distances to access health, educational and cultural facilities in various parts of western Sydney, where they also have to compete with residents of Sydney for these services. The provision of health, educational and cultural facilities services in

areas of central western NSW such as Lithgow, as well as benefitting residents of those areas, would also benefit Blue Mountains residents by offering them more choice in the services and facilities that are available to them, and would also take some pressure off these facilities in Sydney. The location of such facilities in Lithgow would also provide significant employment opportunities for residents of the Blue Mountains, as well as residents of the central west.

b) The reasons for population decline or growth in different areas;

As a general comment on this matter, we advise that like many areas of the central west, population growth within the Blue Mountains City is relatively static and has been so for several years. It has been predicted that if current trends continue, the City's population is likely to decline in the future, as a result of limited employment opportunities, changing demographic structure and limited land available for housing as a result of environmental constraints. Any recommendations made by the Committee in relation to the declining population of the central west of NSW and mechanisms to address this matter are of interest to the Blue Mountains Council.

c) The adequacy of transport and road infrastructure;

Access from Sydney to central western NSW occurs via the City of Blue Mountains either by rail, via the Main Western Line, or by two major road crossings, which are the Great Western Highway located on the central ridgeline across the City and which passes through several Blue Mountains townships and villages, and the Bells Line of Road, located near the northern boundary of the City. It is likely that the adequacy of existing road and rail transport will be raised as an issue that is impeding economic and social development in Central Western NSW, and if so, the Committee may recommend improvements to existing transport and road infrastructure located within the City of Blue Mountains. In anticipation of such an outcome, the Council makes the following comments.

Blue Mountains City Council supports State or Federally funded upgrades to the Main Western Line. Of particular concern are funding initiatives aimed at improving the commuter service to Sydney and the Sydney Metropolitan area. Improvements in commuter transport, including the frequency of trains, additional express trains at peak times and improved commuter parking areas are supported by BMCC.

Funding for improvements to the transport of freight via rail are of particular concern as this removes heavy freight vehicles from the Great Western Highway and Bells Line of Road. Heavy vehicles using the Great Western Highway impact significantly on the amenity and environment on the Blue Mountains and its residents. The completion of the Maldon to Dombarton Railway Line would provide an additional link for the freighting of goods from Central Western NSW to Port Kembla. The completion of this project would enhance the freight rail network and combined with upgrades to the Main Western Line would reduce the number of heavy vehicles on the Great Western Highway.

Council also broadly supports State or federally funded upgrades to existing transport and road infrastructure because such improvements would also benefit our own residents and town centres by making them more accessible and thereby stimulating greater levels of economic activity. However any such upgrades would need to be planned carefully, and in consultation with Council and the Blue Mountains community, and would also need to pay careful attention to the following:

- **World Heritage Values:** The City's location within a World Heritage Area imparts a responsibility on any agency associated with upgrading transport infrastructure to ensure that the impacts of its works do not impact on the World Heritage values of the area;
- **Other Environmental Concerns:** Much of the Blue Mountains is located within Sydney's drinking water catchment. Impacts on water quality would need to be managed both in terms of the direct impacts arising from building new transport infrastructure, as well as indirect impacts from additional traffic movements within the catchment area;
- **The unique character of the towns within the Blue Mountains:** The Blue Mountains LGA consists of 26 townships each of varying size, character and built form. It is important that any transport infrastructure upgrades recognise and retain the unique character of the towns and villages;
- **Heritage Items:** The City has numerous heritage items that may be impacted on by such improvements, and which would need to be carefully considered in planning any upgrading works.

d) *Ways to encourage development of local enterprises and the potential of the region overall;*

The Council suggests that the Committee consider the potential for local economic enterprises in some parts of Central Western NSW such as Lithgow, Oberon, Mudgee, Bathurst and Orange to be developed around the existing tourism industry in the Blue Mountains. The Blue Mountains attracts millions of visitors from throughout the world to its magnificent environment, and is one of the top five tourist destinations in Australia. It is the only World Heritage Area in Australia readily accessibility by public transport from a major capital and Sydney airport, the main point of entry for most international visitors to Australia. The Blue Mountains Regional Tourism Organisation already consists of the Blue Mountains Lithgow and Oberon LGA's. However there may be scope to further expand the tourism sector, by a closer collaboration between Blue Mountains Council and some central western areas (Lithgow, Oberon, Mudgee, Bathurst and Orange in particular, but perhaps others as well), to the mutual benefit of these areas. For example, it may be possible to promote more tourism by the following initiatives involving Blue Mountains City Council, and some central west Councils:

- Offering tourists an experience that combines activities in the central west and in the Blue Mountains – for example the scenic and World Heritage attributes of the Blue Mountains combined with the rural attributes of the Central West;
- Areas in Central Western NSW providing facilities to stimulate greater tourism in the Blue Mountains – for example by offering a range of

accommodation options for people who would then visit the Blue Mountains.

More detailed investigations are required to determine the feasibility of these, and other initiatives, but the inclusion of recommendations of this type in the Committee's Report, and a recognition of the Blue Mountains Regional Tourism Organisation could stimulate further tourism in the region which would stimulate economic development in central west NSW and in the Blue Mountains.

e) The comparative level of government business activity located within the region;

Blue Mountains Council generally supports the decentralisation of Government offices to the central west NSW, as this would provide a boost to employment within these areas. However Council would prefer that if any decentralisation of Government activity was to be recommended by the Committee, then locations that are accessible to Blue Mountains should be chosen so that Blue Mountains residents also have access to the employment opportunities and government services that will result.

f) Methodologies for local government to collectively co-operate to achieve increased infrastructure funding and economic growth;

As noted earlier in this submission, the City of the Blue Mountains is located adjacent to central western NSW, and some of the recommendations made by this Committee to stimulate economic and social development (particularly in relation to upgrading transport infrastructure) are likely to have implications for this Council. As a result, we consider that any recommendations by the Committee for new processes or administrative arrangements aimed to enhance greater co-operation amongst central western Councils in seeking additional infrastructure funding should also include the Blue Mountains City Council.

g) Any other factor restricting economic and social development in central western NSW

The Council has no further comments on this issue at this stage.