



PALERANG A.C.T. LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE OFFICE	
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Executive Summary

Palerang Council applauds the establishment of the Select Committee on Regional Development. The comments provided in the present submission expand on, but are not limited to the following key points:

- Canberra is the commercial centre most relevant to the majority of the Palerang population;
- 47% of Palerang's working population is employed in the ACT, and as such makes a significant contribution to the ACT economy;
- NSW/ACT inter-jurisdictional issues are recognised, and need to be addressed, but as far as possible should not be allowed to inhibit regional growth;
- We see merit in the establishment of an overarching body to facilitate regional development;
- Integrated development opportunities in the areas of tourism and transport provide a means of supporting smaller regional areas while minimising cost overheads;
- Better coordination of service delivery in the public health and education sectors would help to improve integration between the ACT and regional areas;
- Cooperative procurement policies have the potential to foster economic development throughout the broader ACT region;
- Expansion of opportunities for collaboration on environmental projects will continue to mutually beneficial to the ACT and regional Councils.

Introduction

An underlying tenet of current wisdom within NSW is that local government areas should be established based, *inter alia*, on communities of interest. With only a relatively small proportion of its population located in towns within its borders, the temptation is to conclude that Palerang's Community of Interest lies with one of the adjacent NSW regional centres of Queanbeyan, Goulburn or Yass. In reality, however, the majority of the Palerang population see Canberra as their nearest centre for a broad range of both commercial and social services, and very much as the real centre of their Community of Interest.

Building and maintaining a close working relationship with Canberra and the ACT is thus an essential element of Palerang's future growth and its ability to contribute to develop within the local region. The 2011 census data reveal that 47% of Palerang's working population is employed in Canberra. As such, these people contribute directly to Canberra's economy both through their employment and the fact that they conduct the majority of their business within the ACT. Their children invariably

attend school in Canberra, play sport in Canberra, and Canberra tends to be where many ultimately find employment themselves.

Palerang Council also recognises that a small but significant number of ACT residents work within Palerang, and this is likely to increase as Palerang's economy develops through further renewable energy projects (a 50-tower extension to the Capital Wind Farm and a 100ha solar farm have been approved) and the recently established Dargues Reef gold mine.

Of course, these relationships are complicated by the fact that Palerang is a NSW local government area, and thus not actually within the ACT.

In a general sense, however, the population does not see any fundamental distinction between these jurisdictions on a daily basis—cross-border issues are simply growth inhibitors more than anything else. For this reason, Palerang Council is strongly supportive of any endeavours on the part of the ACT government to build working relationships with neighbouring jurisdictions and is keen to engage in such activities when and wherever they exist. We see the prospect that reinforcing these connections might help to resolve or avoid some of the cross-border issues that have inhibited closer cooperation in the past.

Economic Development

Opportunities and supporting governance structures to coordinate economic development, including tourism and transport across the region

From the outset, we acknowledge that some of the responsibilities that should be shared in the context of regional development will actually be state responsibilities. While, as a local government organisation, we are perhaps not in a position to make commitments with respect to those responsibilities, we are in a position to make representations to the NSW government, and to the NSW Cross Border Commissioner Steve Toms in particular, where we encounter issues that are unnecessarily complicated by inter-jurisdictional conflict. We see this as a positive contribution that we can make in the present context in seeking to improve the efficacy of regional development efforts.

With respect to governance structures, we see some value in the role of an overarching body, comprising representatives from the ACT and each of the relevant adjacent local government areas. In this context, the C+1 region would appear to be a logical grouping, but the ACT may have a broader view of the region. Simply providing a context for regular interaction amongst members of this group would go some way towards facilitating development at a regional level.

From the perspective of a relatively small (in terms of internal resources) local government area, there is considerable benefit in simply having access to training and events that are organised by larger entities such as relevant ACT departments or organisations. Regular interaction within common interest groups would provide access to a much broader range of information and experience than would be possible at a local level. Groups such as those coordinated by RDA, and the recent NSW Population Roadshow, while organised by third parties nonetheless provide examples of these sorts of opportunities.

Tourism

We are aware that there have been attempts in the past to coordinate the promotion of tourism in the region. Certainly there is a wide range of attractions within the Palerang LGA, and the region could benefit from more focused development of the opportunities they provide. In the short term, access to promotional opportunities— involvement with the development of promotional material, or simply events that promote regional tourism—would provide the opportunity to identify local assets that might fit into a broader tourism program. Currently, the more prominent attractions simply undertake their own promotion.

The immediate interest within Palerang would be to integrate local attractions into a broader program. In the short term, this level of involvement would probably be driven by pragmatic considerations in that, rather than bearing the entire cost of developing and promoting local attractions in isolation, an appropriate subset of attractions, wineries, cafés or craft shops, for example, might be integrated into a larger program with only an incremental cost outlay.

In the longer term, establishment of community-based support organisations to manage specific areas or attractions might provide a greater opportunity for engagement with the broader community that would, in turn, enhance the experience for visitors. Palerang Council has, in fact recently been approached by such a group wishing to develop and promote opportunities in and around Braidwood, and we will be seeking to encourage a similar approach in other parts of our shire.

Transport

The NSW government itself recognises that Southern NSW is second only to the Hunter Region with respect to population growth and the potential impact on transport infrastructure. While the draft NSW Transport Master Plan (September 2012) attracted widespread comment on the fact that infrastructure needs associated with travel across the ACT border were largely ignored, it is noted that the final Plan (December 2012) at least acknowledges that this traffic flow exists. The report now notes that “improving transport options is complicated by the various jurisdictional regulatory arrangements and operations”.

Certainly, the most heavily used transport infrastructure in the Palerang LGA are those roads leading across the ACT border, the commuter routes and those providing access to the south coast in particular. While it is recognised that cross-jurisdictional issues make this problem difficult to address directly, the opportunity does exist to address this matter in the context of a broader regional development program. Simply assisting in the development and delivery of services that might involve little incremental cost to the ACT, would help to offset the financial burden of maintaining local infrastructure in adjacent regions.

Service Delivery

Coordination of service planning and service delivery, particularly in the areas of health and education

This is a particular challenge within Palerang, particularly for residents in the western part of the shire. The practical reality, of course, is that the facilities provided within the ACT are often the closest facilities of their standard for adjacent regional areas, regardless of whether those areas are within the ACT or NSW.

Health

NSW regional communities adjacent to Canberra have different relationships with the ACT health system, depending to some extent on the services that are provided in individual localities. In many cases, however, movement between the NSW and ACT health systems is problematic and can lead to serious disruption in the delivery of critical services.

Service delivery appears in many cases to be dependent on postcode, rather than any relationship with a particular Community of Interest or local government structure. This is certainly problematic in the context of service delivery in a relatively large and diverse local government area like Palerang.

Patient care can also currently be dictated by ambulance scheduling. The present practice, for example, appears to be that acute care patients are initially directed to Queanbeyan. If they are having a heart attack, for example, they might then be sent on to the Cardiac Catheter Lab in the ACT. Providing a mechanism that would expedite access to critical services has the potential to avoid unnecessary delays and improve outcomes in such cases.

When acute mental health issues arise, Palerang residents are directed to Goulburn, even though the nearest tertiary facility is in the ACT. Early intervention facilities for mental health patients are also available within the ACT, but are difficult, or even impossible to access. Several flow-on effects arise as a result. Patients may be forced to endure disruptive relocation, may be separated from their families at a time when they most need their support, or may simply not receive the treatment they need. These factors all have an impact on the broader community.

The ACT and NSW Local Health District systems involve different access lines for mental health services, which creates further difficulties, for adolescents in particular. NSW residents, even if they attend school in the ACT, are obliged to access services in Queanbeyan, rather than potentially more appropriately in Canberra. The outreach services that can be provided in this environment are also limited with the result that the lack of integration often confounds early intervention.

In other areas of primary care, patients treated in the ACT often find their care lacking when they return home, due to inadequacies in interagency communications. As an example, a patient who recently suffered a stroke and was treated in Canberra Hospital, was initially discharged within the ACT to a rehabilitation unit, but then to their NSW residence. In spite of the fact that the patient was still in need of intensive speech pathology, the services were discontinued because the patient was no longer within the ACT. The required services may have been available within the NSW

system, but the carer was not aware of them nor did it appear that there was any communication between agencies to help in this case.

Anecdotal evidence would suggest that this sort of problem also exists elsewhere in the public health system, particularly with post natal care and children with special needs where it is difficult to deliver the necessary services in smaller population centres.

As another example of the problem, women in the Palerang area used to attend what was known as ACT & Southern NSW Breast Screen, in the ACT. In the event that an abnormality was detected, the assessment was continued at the same facility, apparently with contributions from NSW Local Area Health. This arrangement apparently collapsed in 2011, with the establishment of a new service, offered through a facility in Queanbeyan, but managed from Wagga. The service has suffered due to staffing shortages and as a result patients may be sent to Goulburn or even Albury for further assessment, rather than availing themselves of the services provided in Canberra.

It is recognised that these issues are more complex than might be solved by a simple regional planning arrangement, but a solution may be developed as part of a broader recognition, on the part of the NSW government, of the dependence of regional areas adjacent to the ACT on services provided in Canberra.

Education

The current practice of identifying catchment areas for individual schools is a concern for families who do not reside in the ACT, as there is no ultimate correlation between their place of residence, or the parents' place(s) of work and their children's school(s). It is of course recognised that this issue again is complicated by cross-jurisdictional considerations.

Nonetheless, with only a primary school in Bungendore, most Palerang students attend high school and college in Canberra. Many also attend primary school in Canberra.

In recent times, it has been increasingly difficult to gain placement in the ACT public school system, with priority given to ACT residents. This is probably not an entirely unreasonable position if there is no subsidy being provided by the NSW government, for NSW residents attending school in the ACT. Nonetheless, this matter should probably be considered in the context of the economic benefit that these families bring to Canberra, through both working and shopping in the ACT.

With the changing demographic in parts of Canberra that have traditionally received out of area students, this problem is due to escalate in the future. In the context of regional development, and service delivery to the greater ACT region, consideration of this issue would be beneficial.

Collaborative Procurement

Opportunities for collaborative procurement by ACT Government with surrounding local governments

The ACT, as a city-state, has true responsibility for many services that are similar to those provided by local government in NSW, the only real difference being the scale of operations of the ACT compared to those of its neighbouring Councils. The similarity in service offerings provides the opportunity to share information and procurement processes, although we recognise that the disparity in scale does provide some challenges.

We also recognise that the ACT may choose to use different delivery mechanisms for some of those services. The most obvious example is the ACT government owned utility ACTEW and its role with ActewAGL. This perhaps limits some of the opportunities for shared procurement activities, given that, for example, the joint tendering for the supply of energy has, typically, been one of the easier, and more successfully shared procurement processes for local government.

Many of the ACT's neighbouring Councils also undertake significant civil works including road construction and maintenance, and the construction and maintenance of water and sewerage reticulation networks. Palerang Council believes that both the ACT and Palerang would benefit if Palerang Council were able to undertake such civil works for the ACT government. There is a perception, however, that the procurement policies within the ACT are a barrier to Palerang, and other regional Councils, successfully bidding for work within the ACT.

Environment and Conservation

Further cooperation at the local government level on environmental and conservation matters and building community resilience to deal with natural disasters, extreme weather events and climate change

Neighbouring Councils and the ACT are clearly linked through their shared local environment. The most obvious example is the fact that a large part of the catchment of Lake Burley Griffin lies within the Palerang LGA.

The ACT and Palerang, together with other Councils, have a history of cooperation in a number of areas. The regional State of the Environment report that grew out of the Regional Leaders Forum is an example, and the support received by Palerang from the ACT to undertake inspections of On-Site Sewerage Management Systems in the Googong / Lake Burley Griffin catchments is another.

Palerang Council has also worked in loose collaborative arrangements, exchanging project information with the ACT Office of the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment. Council staff have been involved with the establishment of the Lake Burley Griffin Water Quality Taskforce and efforts to secure funding to continue studies on water quality issues in the rural catchments upstream of Lake Burley Griffin. Our environmental services group is also developing projects for erosion gully mapping and/or road crossing assessments in the Googong catchment, two key pollutant sources whose assessment would benefit from improved data.

With limited resources in smaller Councils such as Palerang, cooperative agreements with larger organisations are invaluable, and would ideally be expanded. The projects listed above are of direct relevance to the ACT and cooperation has clearly provide a mutual benefit. When undertaking any such studies within the region, there are thus clear benefits in involving any relevant NSW local government organisation(s). Cooperation provides the opportunity for the ACT to take advantage of resources with local knowledge, and at the same time help to broaden the experience of local employees, making them more valuable assets for both organisations.

Other Matters

Any other relevant matter

The mutual benefit to be derived from simply working together on projects or within groups such as the RDA workshops on Renewable Energy, the recent ABS demography workshop, SEROC activities etc., cannot be overestimated. These opportunities provide a forum for representatives to learn about projects that are being undertaken in adjacent regions, building relationships and broadening experience that feed into other application areas. These sorts of opportunities should be encouraged whenever possible.

Palerang Council appreciates the opportunity to provide input into these important considerations being undertaken by the Legislative Assembly of the ACT.

