

Office of Rural Affairs

The Office of Rural Affairs provides support to the Minister for Rural Affairs and Government to achieve the Government's objectives and commitments to the people of New South Wales.

The Office of Rural Affairs largely undertakes this role by providing secretariat and policy support to the Regional Consultative Communities Council (RCCC), which is New South Wales' peak rural advisory body.

The RCCC is an independent body, providing advice on a wide range of community matters and reports to the Premier and the Minister for Rural Affairs.

The Office of Rural Affairs has developed close links with stakeholders and communities across the state. Working within the framework of Government objectives, the Office assists in the identification of issues, policy gaps and opportunities and develops solutions that enhance service provision to the people and communities in country New South Wales.

Senior Manager

Fran Schonberg, Acting Manager, Office of Rural Affairs

Financial Performance

The Office of Rural Affairs became part of the Department of Lands in July 2003. The Budget allocation for the Office of Rural Affairs for 2003-2004 was not included within the Department of Lands allocation, but was included in Premier's Department allocation. A full years' financial allocation was subsequently transferred to the Department pursuant to section 24 transfer under the *Public Finance and Audit Act 1983* later in 2003.

The budget allocation for the office includes funds related to the operation of the Regional Communities Consultative Committee (\$150,000) and employee and related operating costs of the Office itself (\$265,000).

No capital works funding was allocated to the Office in 2003-2004.

The Regional Communities Consultative Council (RCCC)

Established in August 1996, the RCCC is a standing advisory body comprised of thirteen members representing community interests, and chaired by an independent community representative.

Members are appointed for a two year term.

Council Members and their Role

Diana Gibbs, Chair

Lynda Summers, Deputy Chair & Health Sector Interests

John Ainsworth, representing Farmers' Interests

Rev. Bronwyn Murphy, representing Religious Interests

Michael Schultz, representing Environmental Interests

Dino Zappacosta, representing Ethnic Community Interests

Dr Jock Fletcher, representing Business and Industry Interests

Gerald Moore, representing Aboriginal Community Interests

Michael Madden, representing Trade Union Interests

Laura Daley, representing Youth Interests – resigned 2003

Aleshia Oakenfull, representing Youth Interests

Barry Fowler, representing Social Services Interests – resigned 2004

Jessie Quigley, representing Women's Interests

Jenny Bonfield, representing Local Government Interests

Jean Evans, representing Education Interests

Christine May, representing Education Interests – resigned 2003

Some Highlights in 2003/2004

Bringing a rural perspective to the NSW Summit on Alcohol Abuse

A Western Consultation tour, including centres such as Dubbo, Bourke, Brewarrina and Walgett, was arranged for key Summit participants to speak to community members, service providers, Working Parties and Community and Drug Action teams.

Comment on Lifelong Learning, The Future of Public Education in NSW

Providing feedback on the proposed restructure of public education in NSW, the RCCC noted several issues of concern to rural areas related to proposed restructures. It was highlighted that while changes to educational facilities impacted directly on access to and cost of education, the aggregation of educational services would also have adverse affects upon regional transport, access to support services, work force mobility and human capital of local communities.

Goals for 2004-2005

Government Information Rural Communication Strategy

In response to requests across the state for information about accessing State Government information, the RCCC has proposed a rural communication strategy. While a number of Government programs exist to provide access to available information in hard copy and digital forms, comments from rural and regional communities indicate that there exists a degree of confusion about what information is available and where and how information can be accessed.

The RCCC has proposed the formation of a State Government Information Coordination Group, comprising of staff from the Government Access Centres, Community Technology Centres, Government Information Service & Bookshop, NSW Libraries, Service NSW Premier's Department eGovernment, communitybuilders, Office of Rural Affairs, and Regional Communities Consultative Council, to develop and implement a comprehensive communication strategy.

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