

Submission by the Shire of Wyalkatchem Western Australia

This is a statement on behalf of the Council of the Shire of Wyalkatchem, Western Australia. The statement does not address Review Terms of Reference #1-4 as these relate to rate of return to Australia; design and operation of the PRRT; the impact of Commonwealth policy; and future tax and royalty arrangements; each of these are technical in nature and beyond the expertise of the local government. This statement will address #5 'any related other matter' and present a case for consideration of the opportunity to create social and economic benefit to the regions.

Wyalkatchem is located 186km north east of Perth with a local economy dominated by broadacre farming and sheep production. Like many agricultural economies located near major cities this district has encountered significant population drift. This has been exacerbated by reduced government services and economic and technological disruption and these changes have seen the population fall by more than 20% in a decade. In addition this small population has exhibited ageing with more than 30% of the population now aged 65 years or more. While these demographic and economic changes place the resident population under some stress, there is an opportunity for renewal.

The local government is strategically addressing the needs of the current populace but does so with an eye to the future and invests in infrastructure that will contribute to economic growth and creating value adds to existing services. Examples include asset support for a general practitioner which improves practice viability (such as solar panels and support for ancillary health services); the construction of independent living units; the acquisition and improvement of aerodrome assets such as hangers; the installation of new sports facilities such as the recreation centre kitchen, a new bowls surface and renovated tennis clubrooms; and many new services including family day care.

There is an element of support from other tiers of government being required – as a small community of 523, we cannot do all the lifting ourselves – and this local government acknowledges the support of state and federal governments in some of these projects. There is also a balance between doing all of these things for the people who can access and utilise them now but also a need to invest so as to improve and incentivise other investment that will secure the future.

It is the view of this local government that there is great potential for revenue streams of the PRRT to be leveraged in the manner of a Future Fund; in anticipating the long life of projects and their potential worth to the nation, there is value in considering the accumulation of part of these funds into a specific fund to invest in regional communities and so ensure the preservation of services, assets and population into the future. Socially, this will ensure the integrity of a whole Australia and counter some of the effects of population drift to the major coastal cities. This will act to sustain not just regional centres but the cities that will find it more difficult in time to house many more millions and supply water, housing and space. Indeed, this is a call to anticipate and prevent increased levels of poor mental health and social cohesion.

This local government encourages the Government to seize this opportunity – invest in the regions and invest in the long term good of the nation and consider the creation of a suitable fund for the acquisition and preservation of valued assets. It is our view that utilising the PRRT is such an opportunity.

Sincerely,

Ian McCabe
Chief Executive Officer
Shire of Wyalkatchem, on behalf of Council