

13 March, 2017

The Hon Barnaby Joyce MP  
Deputy Prime Minister  
Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources  
&  
Senator the Hon Fiona Nash  
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Dear Deputy Prime Minister and Senator Nash

RE: Submission to the Australian Senate Inquiry “The operation, effectiveness, and consequences of the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability (Location of Corporate Commonwealth Entities) Order 2016*”

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this input in response to your invitation for submissions. The Regional Development Australia Townsville and North West Queensland (RDA) Committee understands acutely the current challenges of high unemployment, and in particular very high youth unemployment, in regional Australia and the associated need to create new employment opportunities.

RDA works across the 15 local government areas in north and north-west Queensland, an area that covers nearly 26% of Queensland. To put our comments in context, I make the following comments about our region.

- In June 2015 the population was approximately 274,000, however due to industry downturns it is expected the population has decreased since then or at best has remained stable.
- 70% of the population is located in Townsville, Northern Australia’s largest city.
- Unemployment stands at 10.2% (13,213 persons) in the September 2016 quarter<sup>1</sup>
- 8,905 of these people are in Townsville; 1,031 are in Mount Isa
- Youth unemployment in the eastern Townsville region was 20.8% in January 2017<sup>2</sup>
- Youth unemployment in the Queensland Outback region, much of which is in our region, is 36.6% in January 2017
- Palm Island, Burke, Doomadgee and Carpentaria have the highest unemployment rates ranging from 51.8% to 29.3%

<sup>1</sup> Townsville and NWQ Regional Profile; [qgso.qld.gov.au](http://qgso.qld.gov.au); 13.3.17 (Page 45)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.qgso.qld.gov.au/products/reports/reg-youth-unemployment/reg-youth-unemployment-201701.pdf> 13.3.17



- Industries in which the region has a high employment specialisation ratio are agriculture, mining, utilities, public administration, education<sup>3</sup>
- The region is a strong beef cattle, sugar and horticultural producer with significant volumes of these products going to export markets, often directly from the Port of Townsville to nearby Asian markets.

As a regional economic development focussed not-for-profit organisation, made up of skilled, experienced and well-networked volunteers and staff, we are keen to be a participating and contributing stakeholder in the development of Australia's regional development policy and programs including consideration of the relocation of government departments or entities, or units within them.

On this basis we make the following comments in accordance with the Terms of Reference.

**a) The process leading to the making of the order**

Nil comment

**b) The policy of relocating corporate Commonwealth entities with Agricultural policy or regulatory responsibilities, including:**

**i) The identity of corporate Commonwealth entities that could be affected;**

While we have not had the resources to do a full assessment of all entities, we make the observation that all Agricultural entities would ideally have a presence in regional Australia relevant to their closest stakeholders to ensure strong and relevant policy and program development as well as creating local jobs and career pathways.

In the case of Northern Queensland, we would recommend consideration of the Australian Fisheries Management Authority, the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority, Fisheries Research and Development Corporation and Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation as examples of those that have significant relevance and opportunity for regionalization.

A number of other government departments also have relevance in supporting agriculture, innovation and development in the sector and the management of its supply chains and access to markets. We make comments below in this regard.

**ii) The policy's effect on the ability of affected entities to perform their functions;**

Locating Commonwealth entities, or their divisions, close to their agricultural stakeholders, should enable more regular and effective engagement that can result in policy and program development that is "ground-truthed" before implementation.

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<sup>3</sup> Townsville and NWQ Regional Profile; qgso.qld.gov.au; 13.3.17 (Page 47)

In this digital age of improved technology as regards communication, none of these site offices will be disadvantaged by not being located in Canberra. It is still acknowledged that travel will be necessary to engage with stakeholders regardless of an office location.

Agricultural production activities are based outside Canberra and other capital cities and accordingly those entities with policy and regulatory responsibilities do not need to be so heavily concentrated in Canberra or other capital cities.

**iii) Economic, environmental and capability implications of the policy;**

The value for money savings on the national budget because of the better purchasing power in regional locations and the benefits of the higher leveraged multiplier effect of this expenditure in the regions will create economic development and stem the current trend of regional and remote communities suffering from the population move to capital cities and urban areas.

Average commuting time for employees will generally be much lower in regional centres, allowing for a better quality of life, and usually at a lower cost.

There is also the potential to reduce carbon omissions through decreased travel if entities are located in regional, less populated and less congested cities.

The location of Commonwealth entities in the regions will potentially improve the capability of management to make informed decisions that can , because there is less time delay in obtaining relevant information and making decisions to address issues/challenges as they arise.

**c) The application of this policy to the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority, including:**

- i) the plan for relocation:  
Nil comment
- ii) The ability of the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority to perform its functions from its new location, and any consequent risks to:
  - A. Human and animal health;  
The predominant use of pesticides and veterinary medicines is always outside capital cities, and accordingly the above points on agricultural policy and regulation are even more relevant.

- B. Productivity and profitability to the agriculture and fisheries sectors:  
The co-location of this authority in close proximity to agriculture and fisheries areas is expected to improve the productivity and profitability of these sectors by the ability to more immediately monitor and address bio-security issues as they arise. One could review and compare new and past experiences such as managing Hendra virus, fruit fly infestation, white spot prawn disease, Lyssavirus and SARS virus.
- C. Chemical industries;  
No additional comments to make in this regard
- D. Australia's trading reputation:  
Australia has an excellent reputation for quality control in agricultural production and exports. By improving the effectiveness of operations by being closer to key stakeholders, Australia's reputation can only be enhanced.

**d) Any other related matters.**

We observe that many other departments and government entities would benefit from a regional presence as would local communities benefit from the creation of local jobs across a range of skills and salary levels. While there is some regional presence in some cases, we recommend consideration of increasing regional offices for the following departments and their entities to not only improve employment outcomes, create career pathways in regional Australia but also to increase knowledge, experience and skills to inform policy and program development.

Infrastructure and Regional Development – it would be relevant to have more presence in significant regional economic regions such as Mount Isa and the North West Mineral Province and Townsville and the North Queensland region. This would also support the objectives in the White Paper on Developing Northern Australia.

Finance and Treasury – many functions could be managed and facilitated in administration centres around Australia. In the north, Townsville is already an excellent service centre that has potential for significant growth.

Environment and Heritage – we recognise and value the positive impact of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority being headquartered in Townsville; other opportunities for regional representation would exist in the department and entities, in particular in the Climate Change Authority given the region's strong scientific research base.

Industry, Innovation and Science – increasing the presence of this department and its entities across regional Australia will be critical for creating new industry opportunities and leveraging our scientific

capabilities that are housed within regional universities; we recognise and acknowledge the importance and local significance of the Australian Institute of Marine Science being based in Townsville.

RDA encourages you to travel to the Townsville and North West Queensland region and other parts of regional Australia to engage on this topic and we would be pleased to attend and promote such an event as appropriate.

I wish to thank you for this opportunity to make a submission and once again congratulate you on addressing our need to sustain and create jobs in regional Australia. I will be happy to provide any further information required or to answer any questions you may have and can be reached c/ our CEO Ms Glenys Schuntner on 07 4410 3655 or at [ceo@rdanwq.org.au](mailto:ceo@rdanwq.org.au).

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Angelo Coco". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**Angelo Coco**

Chair