

Good Morning ladies and gentlemen.

I acknowledge the traditional owners of this country where we meet and thank them for preserving the environment here for many 1000s of years so that we can ALL enjoy it today.

In May last year, when I was invited to the Regional Leaders' Conference I felt very honoured. I'd come to beautiful Wide Bay to retire. I'd only been in the region for 4 years and wondered who considered me to be a 'leader' here.

At the conference, I met many interesting people who felt passionately about the region and its potential but I was amazed to see that by the end of the day when time came to commit to taking actions to improve the wellbeing of the region there were very few leaders still present. Further, from the discussion between the few still there it seemed to me that people were saying that 'THEY' had to do something for us and that nothing could be done without 'FUNDING'.

Reflecting on the experience, I wondered why our leaders couldn't see that the 'THEY' that had to do something for the region is 'US', all of US.

I also felt that our region is very rich in so many ways and that we can achieve much from our existing resources without more 'funding' if our priorities are right.

In my experience, real leaders succeed despite less than perfect conditions. Although things are not perfect in Wide Bay and never will be many people and businesses have grown and flourished here to become leaders in their field.

I felt saddened by a process that initially had seemed such a good idea and an uplifting experience but seemed to have turned into just one more 'talkfest'.

I was heartened therefore when, in August, attendees were called back together to decide what should be done next. The organizers had reviewed the comments we had all made on our evaluation forms and had decided to form 3 focus groups, one to look at how we could grow current business and bring more business to the region, one to look at how we should organize and manage the region and one to look at how infrastructure needs to be improved to better serve the region together with determining the lifestyle we want.

Initially, 31 leaders were assigned to the Infrastructure & lifestyle group.

There is a report of our findings available on the WBBROC web site at www.wbbroc.org.au or you can get soft copy from me by leaving your business card with the organizers on the front desk or emailing me at moffatt.a@bigpond.com .

The people assigned to our group are all Leaders in our region. They already contribute significantly to the success of the region in their day to day work. Many also contribute through one or more of the many groups charged with improving aspects of our region.

Our challenge was how to access the wisdom and knowledge in the group to define and improve the infrastructure and lifestyle needed to serve our region today and into the future.

Our first task was to define and agree one Vision for the region so that the 3 focus groups would be working from the same premise. We reviewed the many visions that have already been developed for WBB for many different purposes and agreed a vision which is largely the Wide Bay 20/20 vision with some minor changes.

The vision statement is available at the front desk and in our report. Its summary statement is this.

Next, we defined what we meant by infrastructure and decided it was both hard and soft infrastructure, that is physical structures and support services.

We identified 12 infrastructure areas given on this slide. It was interesting to me to note that no-one suggested that security/law and order services should be included. Possibly that meant that the group felt that area of infrastructure is well served so was not an issue in the region.

We attempted to define what we meant by 'Lifestyle' but had great difficulty bringing the discussion to a focus and reaching a decision on how the subject would be approached.

Trevor Corthorne, who is the Director of DSDI in Bundaberg, suggested that we needed to understand more about the demographics of the region and specifically the effect on our region of 'doing nothing'. The group agreed and a sub committee set about preparing a consultants' brief. After nearly 12 months that study has still not been started.

We discovered that there were many, many reports on the infrastructure of the area. Many made recommendations but no-one in our group fully understood what outcomes had been achieved from any of the studies.

We requested our 2 universities, USQ and CQU to review the reports, the outcomes and the costs of the studies. So far that has not been done.

Many people told me that most WBB studies are done by people from outside the region, from Brisbane or Canberra. It was felt that these people didn't really understand the region so recommendations did not always meet the needs of WBB.

There was concern too about the funds spent on consultants' fees for what was seen to be very little benefit to the region.

There was concern also that many studies focused on the needs of the coastal strip of WBB and that the needs of the 'inland' were often not taken into account.

It was felt that our group comprised mainly members from the coastal strip so we co-opted leaders from inland WBB to our group. I also visited many inland communities with Rosemary Holmes, who supported our group and has worked in agriculture in our region all her life and served in local government in an inland shire. I heard first hand the views of the many local people we met.

By November, it was time to put the past behind us and decide what needed to be done to provide an infrastructure that would support us now and in the foreseeable future. At our November meeting, John Power, who chairs the business group, told us that many businesses believe that inadequate infrastructure was severely restricting business growth and profitability.

People from our group were allocated to workgroups for each of the infrastructure areas depending on expertise or interest. In some areas the initial group comprised mainly service providers. In other areas we had no group member allocated. We set about recruiting leaders to join the groups to provide knowledgeable balance to the providers and or much needed expertise.

Over the summer period the groups worked informally to define the 10 most important changes that needed to be made to each infrastructure area and the consequences of not making that change. We also aimed to define changes that, whilst not THE most important, could be provided at low cost for high benefit or would address a need in a specific area. Groups were encouraged to contact people in their networks for ideas so that as many people as possible could contribute to the exercise.

Groups reported back at the February meeting. In some areas there were many, many suggestions. One group only made one suggestion but that one will be very important for the region.

People identified strategic plans for each area and how and where to make suggestions for changes. Our report either contains published plans or links to published plans for each area of infrastructure. If these are kept up to date this will be a valuable resource for our region.

The full detail of all our findings is given in our report. There is only time today to give the highlights of the outcomes.

So what did we discover?

Communications

This workgroup identified over 50 areas for improvement. These are listed in our report.

Initially, the most important perceived need was broadband for internet access. This is my area of expertise and it was very obvious to me that few people in the region, including our government advisors, knew that broadband access is now available ANYWHERE in Australia at prices similar to those in major cities.

During the study period we were able to help people in the region to gain a better understanding that broadband is now available to everyone throughout WBB and that the federal government's Higher Bandwidth Incentive Scheme known as HiBIS subsidises broadband infrastructure for people, businesses and regions where without subsidies, infrastructure costs would not be commercially viable.

Services are available from any of a number of Internet Service Providers. Details can be found on the DOCITA web site. During the study period, many of the townships in WBB have taken advantage of HiBIS and now have, or will soon have, broadband services. People and businesses outside the areas covered by those services can get broadband by 2 way satellite as I do. This too is subsidised by HiBIS.

However, in discussion with people demanding broadband access it is clear to me that education is desperately needed to empower them to understand how to use broadband.

I am concerned that IF our government advisors do not know about available communications services, an area I understand, where else is their knowledge lacking?

Although more bandwidth for broadband was still seen to be an area of need, by far the greatest number of requests were for improved mobile coverage.

Community Support Services

It was felt that the establishment of good community support services was vital to a vibrant community.

In WBB many people, both volunteers and professionals, contribute to community projects from running arts and drama groups to supplying business mentors, mentors for the Youth at Risk program, providing 'pro bono' legal services and family counseling, to name but a few services.

WBB has a high 'retired' population, especially in the coastal fringe. Many retirees have both significant skills and time to spare to support community projects. This is a very valuable resource that could provide significant community support. A register of retiree skills could prove a valuable asset to the community where retirees are often seen as a drain on resources.

The Wide Bay 2020 Regional Growth Management Report has a section on Human Services and Social Justice. This is provided in our report.

Education and Training

A well educated population is seen to be a significant factor, maybe the MOST significant factor determining the wealth of a society. Economies such as Ireland, Scandinavia and Singapore that have significantly improved the education of their people have much more robust societies in terms of financial viability, improved health and lower levels of social dysfunction.

In WBB we have CAMPUSES of 2 universities, TAFE colleges, a variety of schools both public and private and many private sector trainers who support vocational and trade courses. We also have a wide array of 'hobbyist' organizations providing learning services for their members and the University of the 3rd Age for our older citizens.

Despite the range and number of education establishments there is a feeling that WBB is not particularly well served by education services. There is a severe shortage of skilled labour, especially in the inland areas which is severely restricting business growth and yet we have very high unemployment and especially high youth unemployment. Many of our schools contain asbestos and whilst our prisons are air conditioned, most state schools are not.

There have been several changes at senior levels in WBB education so, although there are some suggestions in our report, the workgroup did not reach a conclusion and more work needs to be done in this very important area.

External Factors

Workgroup members endeavoured to identify things external to our region that could affect the effectiveness of Infrastructure.

A recent report produced by the Australian Bureau of Agriculture and Resource Economics (ABARE) states that communities who have considered these issues and developed strategies to address 'future proofing' are better positioned to meet these threats. Further, it states that the better educated communities are the better they are able to survive such threats.

The workgroup provided a list of areas for further study.

Because of reliance on tourism and large travel distances in the region, WBB may be very significantly affected by the 'Peak Oil' situation.

Health Services

The opinion of many people in WBB is that Health services do not adequately support our region. Following unsatisfactory patient outcomes, there are currently significant reviews of hospital services in Bundaberg, Hervey Bay and Maryborough and hospital services in

western areas of the region are considered well below requirements.

It should be noted that health employees & volunteers generate many positive outcomes in our communities. Such good news stories are often overshadowed by stories of 'doom and gloom'. Many people working in inpatient and community health services like the Home and Community Care Program and Aged Care Assessment should be congratulated for their positive contributions to health services across our region.

For people who have the luxury of choice, good health services are one of the most significant factors in choice of place to live or locate a business.

Our report provides a summary of Health priorities gathered from the heads of services in two of the health regions in WBB and a link to a government report providing information on Health demographics, challenges and services in the 4 areas of our region, North Burnett, South Burnett, Fraser Coast and Bundaberg.

There is currently an independent review of Queensland's Health systems. Links to that review are given in our report.

Initial findings from some of the current studies are that our government provided health services are 'overly administered'. In this and other government provided services in WBB there is a feeling that too high a proportion of expenditure goes on administration and too small a proportion is spent on practitioners. Also that process is valued over outcomes.

Practitioners from many service areas, from nursing to teaching tell us that they spend more and more of their time entering data on computers to satisfy demands from administrators when they really want to sit and hold the hands of the sick or help our children to learn.

And who uses this data? Does its collection really improve services?

Housing

The workgroup reviewed the draft strategic plan developed by the Wide Bay Burnett Regional Housing Board

Workgroup members felt that the strategy contained in the document adequately meets the housing needs of the region

The full draft is in our report.

Industrial Land

The Industrial Land workgroup made only one suggestion but it will provide an extremely valuable resource for WBB.

The group worked with others in the region to develop a comprehensive database of all available industrial land in WBB, private and public including details of services available on the site.

A CD giving details of all Industrial Land in WBB will be available in the very near future. A prototype system can be viewed at:-

http://www.wb2020.qld.gov.au/ind_disclaimer.htm

Information Technology

Information Technology is an enabling technology. Today, most successful businesses rely on some element of the technology. In addition, the use of technology can assist businesses to overcome disadvantage through distance. Our region could provide the lifestyle many knowledge workers are seeking now they can live and work successfully away from congested cities. As you will hear this afternoon, we have already developed software in this region that is used throughout Australia. I believe our Silicon coast, with its world famous silicon island, could become Australia's own Silicon Valley.

There are many good suggestions detailed in our report. In the time available I can only list those considered most important.

- Conduct information sessions to help our leaders make more informed decisions about IT.
- Increase ICT expertise, especially in smaller centres – it's really hard to get a PC repaired properly in many of the smaller towns.
- Increase ICT awareness, especially for SMEs.
- Establish technology ICT 'demonstration' facilities in all centres of population. Some very good, e.g. Monto.

Land and Air Transport

One Regional Leader in our group, a senior executive of a road haulage company, said that although the road and rail services in WBB are not perfect by any means she knows who to lobby when she sees areas that need improvement. She said she has no hesitation in contacting transport planners or members of state or federal parliament to give them her views. She feels they value her comments and although she knows that there is insufficient funding to make all the changes she suggests she continues to lobby where she feels changes are needed.

These comments are in stark contrast to comments from other Regional Leaders who feel that road and rail transport infrastructure does not serve the needs of WBB. They are frustrated because they feel planning is done by people outside our region who do not fully understand our needs.

In the end the group decided on the following statement:-

‘The group has agreed that the current process for developing Land and Air Transport infrastructure in WBB is as good as possible.’

Many people have contacted me to tell me they disagree with the statement and feel that planning for transport infrastructure is poor in WBB. I have endeavoured to encourage these people to contact the transport planners to express their views and suggest improvements either to the planning process or to the infrastructure. Most say they feel their views would not be heard.

There has been considerable discussion about the lack of public transport to take our people shopping or to doctors’ appointments yet I see no lack of free transport to take people to clubs play the pokies. This seems to me not to be a lack of resources but a question of where we put our priorities.

The transport infrastructure plan is available to all. A summary of the Wide Bay Regional Integrated Transport Plan is in our report. It is important that people feel that they can voice their opinions and be heard and so be as empowered as the lady I first spoke to.

Power

The availability of a good, reliable power supply is an essential element of infrastructure in any region.

Anecdotal information about the suppliers of power to WBB, predominantly Ergon with a small area in the south of the region being supplied by Energex, was that they are not very responsive to enquiries about power supplies from business owners and the public in general.

We were very fortunate that Ergon agreed to assign their Regional Asset Manager for Wide Bay to the Power workgroup. Additionally, we have a retired executive living in WBB who has significant experience in power generation and distribution in Indonesia and the Northern Territory.

These two people worked together to review power generation and distribution systems in WBB. They concluded that the systems in place provide adequate power now and for the foreseeable future. Furthermore, in view of the challenges facing WBB in terms of weather patterns and sparse population in a rugged environment out west, the distribution systems are excellent.

The strategic plans for Ergon and Energex are available on their web sites. These plans include extensive statistics on generation capacity plus service statistics and targets. There is a full report from the workgroup in our report.

Water and Effluent Management

This was another area where the members of the group had very different opinions about the current state of the infrastructure in WBB and the need for change to support future needs.

The workgroup member from Wide Bay Water firmly believed that, although there is much discussion about the capacity to meet the needs for water in WBB, plans in hand, technological improvements, and sound management will ensure that water and effluent management services adequately support us now and into the foreseeable future.

Other workgroup members are concerned that, without significant policy changes, the region cannot support current and future needs in an ecologically sustainable way. Concerns of those members are detailed in our report.

Water Transport

The full list of suggestions and points for consideration/discussion to improve this area of infrastructure is in our report.

3 significant findings are:-

- Road transport needs 18 hp to carry 1 ton.
Sea travel needs 1 hp to carry 1 ton
- Water transport puts less carbon emissions into the atmosphere than road transport.
- Water transport leads to reduction in damage to the roads

A member of this workgroup has told me that our local state Member, Andrew McNamara, supports an increase in water transportation.

So to summarise

Many of the members of the focus group found it easy to define what was wrong with the Infrastructure in WBB. They found it more difficult to agree what needed to be done.

Many did not fully understand the planning process, how to access information on what is currently planned or how to make their views known to those developing the strategies.

Many had tried to make their views known but felt their contributions were not valued by the strategists.

Many were frustrated because they felt that many of the people making strategic decisions for WBB were consultants or government departments based in Brisbane or Canberra and did not understand the needs and wishes of people in WBB.

We have identified strategic plans for each infrastructure area. Where they exist these are published in our report. This is a very useful resource. It needs to be kept up to date and enables everyone in WBB to access these plans and make contributions to improvements. Additionally, we have identified many changes that need to be made to infrastructure to serve our region now and in the future.

Where to next?

We have made 9 recommendations.

Recommendations

- A. That the Vision statement be promulgated to everyone in WBB. That it be reviewed and updated as required by contributions from everyone in WBB.

- B. That the many groups defining infrastructure for WBB be rationalised and that each group focus more narrowly on a specific area. That information on the purpose of each group and decisions they make are disseminated to the people of WBB.
- C. That there be co-operation and collaboration between planning groups such that all elements of infrastructure fit together well.
- D. That people in WBB be empowered to understand and contribute to Infrastructure planning now and in the future.
- E. That at least the 'top 10' suggestions in each of the 12 infrastructure areas are considered for adoption and implementation.
- F. That where there are no suggestions for an infrastructure area, the RLC process continues until Leaders are happy that they understand and accept strategies in place or make alternative suggestions.
- G. That all Infrastructure reports which have been developed for WBB in the last 5 years be reviewed and summarised by one of the 2 universities in the region and the findings made available to everyone in WBB.

- H. That the suggested 'Lifestyle' study be completed and reviewed by the RLC focus group. This should lead to the development of a strategy to ensure Lifestyle meets the aspirations of the people of WBB.
- I. That the findings in this report be made available to everyone in WBB. Most especially that people understand how to access current infrastructure planning documents.

The current exercise was carried out by leaders in our region. It is important that all our people, especially our young people, are educated and empowered to contribute their ideas for the future of our region.

To quote Peter Kenyon:- who will be speaking to us this afternoon,

“The key to revival lies within that community. It's to do with some of those intangibles, like the presence of local leadership, the ability of that community to come together, to start looking at what it is they've got as a community, what they want and how they get it.

Its very much about starting to mobilise that community, its about starting to generate a sense of participation and involvement by the whole community in planning a new future.”

To quote from a Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC) publication by Rosie Simpson on the impact of the Internet in Regional Australia:-

“While not everyone can devote a significant time to leading their community it is vital that as many members of the community who want to participate, can. Their ideas and opinions need to be sought, ongoing steps are articulated to the community and further debate held. That result is a broad base of ownership of the chosen path.”

So what of the future?

One of the significant findings of my focus group is that decisions about our region are often made by people outside our region. It is now time for us all to take ownership for our own decisions and make our own future.