

AUSTRALIAN RURAL ROAD GROUP

NEWSLETTER NO.5

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EXTRACT FROM AGM CHAIR'S REPORT

The latest ARRГ report is titled ***Australia's Road Infrastructure is in Crisis (But For Once, The Answer Isn't More Money)***. It builds on previous well-received studies by the group and advocates a mandatory reporting regime on the true condition and cost pressures facing roads in every local government of Australia. This would allow a national roads picture to emerge that shows where funding needs to be targeted for best effect – to give access to the most isolation-prone communities and industries and improve the safety and productivity of the nation's most important road corridors. The group's approach was endorsed by Infrastructure Australia in its 2011 Report to COAG Communicating the Imperative for Action (pp. 55-56 of that report refers).

"We see the reform as fulfilling a contract with the taxpayer", said Coulton, "We all want to see where the money goes. We want to see more priority going to stop communities and freight being isolated by rains and we want to see the most dangerous and outdated portions of the network given priority. We can't do that now. Nobody in Canberra can tell you the first thing about the road conditions. They just hand out money based on head of population and length of road network in your shire. Then polities come in and throw a bit more around if you're lucky when they need your vote. We can do better. It will just take politicians to commit to the reform. It isn't necessarily about more money. It's about using the money we have now a lot smarter".

As well I would like to thank the administrative and executive staff of both Gwydir and Moree Plains Shire Councils for an outstanding job in addition to their normal tasks and in particular David Aber, Richard Jane, Kellie Gill and Max Eastcott. Cr Sue Price has demonstrated total commitment to the cause and I thank her for her enthusiasm and support. Our group is very fortunate to have a partnership with Mr Luke Fraser, who has now drafted three very powerful and highly regarded Reports. This year our group has continued to boast over 90 members from across Australia. Our group has had the privilege of meeting with a great number of Ministers, Federal and State Members, and top Government officials. Thank you to Mark Coulton, the member for Parkes, for arranging many of these meetings and for allowing us to invade his office while in Canberra. In addition, our group was invited to present 'our case' at a number of national conferences. All of these meetings and conferences raise our profile and give us a chance to put our case to those who make decisions.

This is obviously important, but, I believe that our highest achievement is when we actually stand in front of the decision makers; we are able to present a thoroughly researched and statistically valid argument. We do not rely on rhetoric but cold hard facts; it is through our ability to professionally argue the 'local roads' issue that we have become, in less than two years, the highly respected and nationally valued Australian Rural Road Group.

The ARRГ is a non-partisan alliance of all rural-based local governments across Australia concerned about the lack of planning and management of our road infrastructure and tired of the lost productivity and lost and damaged lives that result. To see the group's policy publications including *Australia's Road Infrastructure Is In Crisis (But For Once, The Answer Isn't More Money)* visit www.austwideruralroadsgroup.com



CORPORATE SUPPORT

Our group has the corporate support of Cotton Australia Ltd.

NRMA is a member of our group and has recently allowed us to use their logo on our letterhead and website. It is a privilege to be entrusted with such an esteemed brand.



In addition, the Victorian Farmers' Federation has shown fantastic support by allowing us to use their logo too.



MEDIA COVERAGE

In March of this year, The Land newspaper cited the Australian Rural Road Group as a source for one of its feature articles. In a nutshell it highlighted the 'local roads' issues with extracts from our Reports. The Land stated: Local roads represent 80 per cent of all public roads in Australia by kilometres. Rural local roads comprise 68.7 per cent of the total but receive only 34 per cent of local road maintenance and upgrade funding. The 2003 Federal Parliament inquiry into local government and cost shifting estimated the stock of local roads to be worth more than \$90billion. By 2006 total federal grants to local government for road maintenance for local roads were less than \$2billion and total expenditure on local roads only \$3.3billion.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT CONSTITUTIONAL RECOGNITION

The vast majority of our members are local government bodies. The ARRГ needs every local government body to lobby for constitutional change so that Local Government is recognised.

Why is this reform necessary?

Source: Australian Local Government Association

Including local government in the Constitution is about recognising its role in Australia's system of Government and, more practically, about securing funding sources to deliver the services communities need. Put simply, local government is an essential part of Australia's system of government. Its contribution to our national wellbeing can be measured in economic and social terms, and more intangibly by the way it enhances our democratic way of life. It should be recognised in our national Constitution, alongside state, territory and Commonwealth governments.

In order to carry out its responsibilities, local government relies on a range of funding sources, including its own revenue measures, as well as grants from state and territory governments, and the Commonwealth. The High Court cases of Pape and Williams put into serious doubt the Federal Government's ability to directly fund local government projects. The ALGA President, Cr Genia McCaffery said, when referring to the recent Williams case, 'This decision indicates that funding currently provided to local government through programs such as Roads to Recovery is clearly open to constitutional challenge'.

The Hon. Simon Crean, Minister for Local Government has indicated that the Federal Government will need to make a decision concerning the need for a local government constitutional recognition referendum by October.

This is the time to act.

All of us need to lobby our local State and Federal members now about the importance of this issue.

The ARRГ has shown that as a group we are making a real difference; this needs to be another joint initiative.

When writing to your local member please state that your Council is a member of the ARRГ or supports our cause and send us a copy. We will then collate all of the response letters and present them again to the Federal Government at the end of August.