

**Australia's
Holiday
Coast
Development
Board**

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Australia's Holiday Coast Development Board
2000 – 2001 Annual Report

CONTENTS

Chairperson's Message	2
Role of the Regional Development Board	3
Board Members' Profiles	4
Regional Development Agenda	6
Board Activities 2000-2001	8
Board Administration	10
Board Finances	11

23 November 2001

CHAIRPERSON'S MESSAGE

This has been the first full year of operation for the current Australia's Holiday Coast Development Board, which first met with a substantially changed membership in February 2000. Under revised operating guidelines from the NSW Department of State and Regional Development, Boards were required to reassess their economic development priorities and take action to secure alternative funding for regional development initiatives.

The Board has largely adopted a strategic approach to regional development, reflecting a desire to play a role in identifying and strengthening the key drivers or facilitators of economic activity in this region. The Board has consulted widely on the major economic challenges confronting this region, and in particular has worked to develop constructive relations with the respective Local Government Areas.

The outcome of this consultation has been the development of a comprehensive regional development agenda, with a series of related strategies intended to drive a number of specific Board projects. Given the Board's limited resources a major and ongoing goal is to extend its influence through the development of regional linkages and structures that involve key stakeholders in cooperative ventures. This remains a significant challenge given the relative absence of established regional structures on the Mid North Coast.

The Board is confident that the planning and consultative work it has undertaken to date will enable it to progress a number of regionally significant industry development projects, and at the same time build an enduring foundation to raise the profile of this region and its unique economic development needs.

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the commitment and professionalism demonstrated by my fellow Board members. All are extremely busy people with diverse responsibilities, yet they are willing to freely volunteer their time and energy towards advancing the interests of our respective communities. Promoting regional development is a complex and challenging task, with outcomes not always evident in the short term, but the constructive, balanced and lateral approach adopted by Board members is to their great credit.

Dr Dennis O'Brien

ROLE OF THE REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT BOARD

The Australia's Holiday Coast Development Board is one of the layers in the economic development cake - in the middle between Local and Federal Governments.

The Federal Government is represented by the Area Consultative Committee (ACC), which has a broad range of responsibilities including Job Network, Work for the Dole, New Apprenticeships, Workplace Relations Reforms and Indigenous Employment schemes. The ACC administers the Regional Assistance Program which provides funding for specific employment and business development projects. The Board works in partnership with the ACC in relation to regional economic development initiatives.

The Australia's Holiday Coast Development Board, one of thirteen throughout NSW, is an independent not-for-profit organisation funded by the NSW Department of State and Regional Development. The Board's responsibilities cover the Local Government Areas of Greater Taree, Hastings, Kempsey, Nambucca, Bellingen and Coffs Harbour. The Board is comprised of ten business and community leaders from across the region, appointed by NSW Cabinet for a 3 year term, and a full time Executive Officer. Profiles on current Board members appear later in this report.

The Board is tasked to progress the economic development interests of the region. Its mission is to "enhance our region by supporting sustainable enterprise". The Board's activities are directed towards broadening and strengthening the region's economic base, supporting private enterprise and employment generation. The Board does not directly assist individual businesses, but industries and areas.

To a significant degree the Board's regional development priorities reflect those of its constituent Local Government Areas. The Board is a resource available to assist LGAs to achieve their economic development aims, and is able to access funds to progress specific LGA initiatives.

BOARD MEMBERS' PROFILES

CHAIRPERSON

Dr Dennis O'Brien is the Head of the School of Business at the Coffs Harbour campus of Southern Cross University. In addition to his extensive university responsibilities, Dr O'Brien has been involved with various community, economic and regional development organisations, including the Mid North Coast Regional Development Organisation. He was a member of the previous Regional Development Board (1997-1999). Dr O'Brien lives in the Coffs Harbour LGA.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON

Ms Jeny Wallace is the manager of the Taree-based Business Enterprise Centre which serves the Greater Taree, Great Lakes and Gloucester LGAs. Ms Wallace has been involved in various community, economic and regional development organisations including as Chairperson of the Northern NSW Regional BECs, as a Councillor on Greater Taree City Council, and as a member of Australia's Holiday Coast Area Consultative Committee. Ms Wallace lives in the Greater Taree LGA.

MEMBERS

Ms Jenny Bonfield is a small business owner/operator who has played an active role in both local government and the business community over a number of years. Since 1999 she has served as Mayor of Coffs Harbour City Council. Ms Bonfield lives in the Coffs Harbour LGA.

Ms Sue Dethridge is a freelance writer with a background in journalism. She has lived on the Dorrigo Plateau since 1974, was elected to Local Government in 1987, and has served eight years as Mayor. Ms Dethridge was a member of the previous Regional Development Board (1997-1999). Ms Dethridge lives in the Bellingen LGA.

Mr Graham Emzin is the Manager/Director of Hawaiian Sands Motor Inn in Coffs Harbour. He has had extensive experience in the tourism and hospitality industry, and has played an active role in the local tourism organisation. Mr Emzin lives in the Coffs Harbour LGA.

Ms Janet Hayes JP has a substantial record of involvement in community and Local Government, with a particular interest in youth and educational issues. She is on the Board of the Macleay Regional Co-op and has been appointed to the Dept of Corrective Services' Community Consultative Committee for the new \$50M correctional facility to be built in Kempsey. Ms Hayes is currently the Deputy Mayor of Kempsey Shire Council, and lives in the Kempsey LGA.

Ms Carmel Hong is Director, Educational Programs, North Coast Institute of TAFE, Coffs Harbour Education Campus. In addition to her varied educational roles, Ms Hong has had extensive strategic planning experience on committees at local, regional and state levels, contributing to the social and economic development of communities across the region. Ms Hong lives in the Nambucca LGA.

Mr Mark Livermore is the Manager of Hastings Cooperative Dairy Factory at Wauchope. He has had extensive experience in the dairy industry, and in a variety of roles has had to manage the challenges of organisational change. Mr Livermore lives in the Hastings LGA.

Mr Ron McDermott is the General Manager of Taree boat builder Stebercraft Pty Ltd, and has had management experience in the commercial fishing, information technology and health service industries. He is involved with the Manning Valley Development Corporation, Oxley Island Drainage Union, Oxley Island Water Supply Scheme and Lower Manning Landcare Group. Mr McDermott lives in the Greater Taree LGA.

Mr Paul Sekfy is a Development Officer with the Mid North Coast Regional Council for Social Development. He has been active in regional economic and social development policy, projects, management and training for many years. He was a member of the previous Regional Development Board (1997-1998). Mr Sekfy lives in the Nambucca LGA.

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

An outcome of the Board's consultation and planning processes over the last twelve months has been the identification of a range of regional development priorities for the Mid North Coast.

The priorities identified by the Board are to:

- Support and facilitate private investment in forestry plantations, in partnership with key stakeholders and the timber industry.
- Support and facilitate private investment in aquaculture ventures, in partnership with NSW Fisheries and the aquaculture industry.
- Support and facilitate agricultural diversification, in partnership with NSW Agriculture, the Department's Agribusiness Development Manager, LGAs and industry.
- Support and facilitate all forms of value adding - food processing, commercial organic food production, timber processing, environmental benchmarking, arts and crafts.
- Support and facilitate cooperative area branding and marketing, in conjunction with LGAs, Tourism NSW and business and industry associations.
- Support development of the tourism industry (new products, arts and cultural facilities, regional infrastructure) in partnership with Tourism NSW and other industry stakeholders.
- Support and facilitate infrastructure development – transport, telecommunications, roads, energy, health and education.
- Support indigenous enterprise development initiatives.
- Support and facilitate the development of the aged services industry.
- Support and facilitate business, Government and community access to capital and investment funds.
- Support innovation and the development and commercialisation of new products.

BOARD ACTIVITIES & PROJECTS 2000-2001

The Board's primary role is to take effective action to enhance the strategic framework for investment, employment and economic growth in the Mid North Coast region. The Board aims to achieve the mission of "enhancing our region by supporting sustainable enterprise" by identifying and strengthening the key drivers of economic activity in this region, and at the same time progressing a number of industry development projects.

In undertaking its work the Board has adopted a set of principles that guide the conduct of its regional development activities. These principles include that the Board and its staff will:

- operate in an ethical, respectful, transparent, accountable, socially responsible and non-partisan manner;
- determine its priorities in consultation with Local Governments, communities and other economic development stakeholders on the Mid North Coast;
- use partnerships where appropriate;
- undertake initiatives that will be of significant economic benefit and have strategic and environmentally sustainable outcomes;
- progress economic development initiatives that are realistic and outcomes focussed.

In determining its development priorities the Board is committed to meaningful consultation with, and has valued the input of, its constituents and LGA partners. This consultative approach is reflected in its program of meetings with Councils; active participation in LGA economic development forums; public dissemination of information on Board discussions/activities; and conduct of a series of information expos for rural communities across the region.

FORESTRY INVESTMENT PROGRAM

In February 2001 a new partnership agreement was signed between the Federal Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Australia (AFFA) and the NSW Department of State and Regional Development (DSRD) to jointly fund a two year program intended to progress the 2020 Vision and build on the previous work of Regional Plantation Committees.

The primary goal of the Forestry Investment Program is to facilitate investment in the establishment of forest plantations in the Mid North Coast region. Secondary aims include the removal of systemic obstacles to the development of the timber industry in this region; and the realisation of opportunities for the more effective utilisation of existing timber resources including enhancing processing facilities, use of by products, and recognition of the commercial and environmental value of private native forests.

By mid 2001 the Board had established and promulgated a set of performance indicators for the new Forestry Investment Program; arranged to seek public expressions of interest in participation on an Advisory Committee; and determined the duties and selection criteria with the aim of recruiting a suitably qualified Project Officer. It is expected that the program will be fully operational by the last quarter of 2001.

REGIONAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS ISSUES

Along with many other telecommunications stakeholders across regional Australia, the Board contributed to the Federal Government's Telecommunications Service Inquiry (often referred to as the Besley Inquiry). The Besley Report confirmed the existence of significant disparities in service levels between the major urban centres and rural and regional areas. The Government's response to the report has seen a significant shift in national telecommunications priorities, with the introduction of a range of programs and initiatives intended to redress identified deficiencies.

The Board has continued to play a significant role in engendering discussion on opportunities to improve telecommunications services on the Mid North Coast, particularly in relation to the issue of adequate access to acceptable broad band services in areas outside the main urban centres. The Board has been widely canvassing the option of establishing a telecommunications stakeholders group for the region that can act as a proponent to take advantage of various new Federal telecommunications initiatives.

WOMEN IN BUSINESS MENTORING PROGRAMME

The Board sponsored Women in Business mentoring programs being run by Port Macquarie and Coffs Harbour Business Enterprise Centres. These highly regarded six month programs have facilitated the professional growth of over thirty mentorees.

DAIRY INDUSTRY INITIATIVE

In partnership with the Area Consultative Committee the Board coordinated and conducted a region-wide information dissemination program for rural communities impacted by the deregulation of the dairy industry. The program, which involved the conduct of six major information expos at venues across the region, attracted more than 1200 rural residents. Feedback from both exhibitors and visitors on the value of the information and expertise made available to rural communities at local venues was very positive.

The forums assisted a number of the emerging agricultural industries to increase membership of their local associations, and to share their practical experience with prospective investors. A further series of workshops on specific agricultural diversification opportunities of interest to rural communities will be conducted with the aim of further assisting land holders to determine the viability of alternative land uses.

REGIONAL PLANNING

The regional development priorities identified by the Board, and those of other economic development stakeholders, can be integrated into a Regional Economic Development Strategy that can provide a strong and enduring basis for regional coordination . A regional strategy can provide a framework to advance economic development by defining specific roles, delineating relationships and responsibilities, and facilitating consensus on regional priorities and appropriate strategies.

In concert with the Area Consultative Committee, other relevant State Government agencies and the LGAs the Board is exploring the options for initiating and integrating regional planning processes in order to progress the development of a Regional Economic Development Strategy for the Mid North Coast. The development of a credible and comprehensive regional strategy is likely to be a medium term goal that extends beyond the tenure of this Board.

ADVOCACY

As an independent body with a regional perspective the Board has made representations to relevant authorities on a number of issues such as the impact of the deregulation of the dairy industry on rural economies; the impact of telecommunications deficiencies on business opportunities; the adverse impact of the withdrawal of air services etc.

BOARD ADMINISTRATION

The Board meets at different venues throughout the region every two months, and at these meetings considers ways in which it can make a significant and effective contribution towards regional economic development. The Board normally meets with local Councils at the same time as it conducts its bi-monthly meetings.

During this financial year the Board met at:

- Taree in August 2000;
- Macksville in November 2000 (also Annual General Meeting);
- Bellingen in January 2001;
- Port Macquarie in March 2001; and
- Coffs Harbour in May 2001.

The Board seeks and welcomes submissions from both the public and private sectors on opportunities to facilitate regional economic development, and can seek funding to undertake or facilitate specific projects from DSRD. Projects are typically undertaken in partnership with other Federal, State and Local Government bodies and the private sector.

The Board is supported by a full-time Executive Officer, Bill Calcutt, who can be contacted on 6583 5647, facsimile 6583 5285, email ahcdb@betterbusiness.nsw.gov.au. Further information on the Board's activities is available at www.betterbusiness.nsw.gov.au.

BOARD FINANCES

Regional Development Boards are provided with an annual (financial year) grant by the Department of State and Regional Development in order to maintain an administrative/functional capacity independent of the Department. This funding enables the employment of a full time Executive Officer and facilitates the operation of the Board. DSRD also assist by providing (gratis) office facilities at Port Macquarie for the Executive Officer and some administrative support.

The Board can and does seek funding from DSRD and other sources to undertake or participate in specific regional development projects. Applications for project funding are considered on their merits by DSRD on a case-by-case basis. DSRD funding guidelines indicate the Department will supplement funding of projects with \$1 for every \$2 obtained from other sources up to \$60,000, and will match dollar for dollar for amounts obtained over \$60,000.

During this financial year the Board secured funding of \$33,000 from DSRD under the Regional Economic Transition Scheme (with matching funding of \$33,000 from the Federal Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business) in order to conduct a series of major information expos for rural communities. The Board secured funding of \$10,000 from DSRD to support Women in Business mentoring programs in Port Macquarie and Coffs Harbour. The Board also secured funding of \$34,375 as the first instalment (from a total of \$250,000 allocated over two years) as part of the Federal/State sponsored Forestry Program.

Specific details of Board income and expenditure during the 2000/2001 financial year are provided in the accompanying auditor's report.