



# *Pastoralists' Association*

*of West Darling Inc.*

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Friday, 16 December, 2016

Office of Local Government  
The Far West Initiative  
Locked Bag 3015  
Nowra NSW 2541

The Pastoralists' Association of West Darling (PAWD) is an agri-political lobby organization representing landholder members in the Unincorporated Area and adjoining Shire Councils in western NSW. The proposed reform of local government in the Far West region (the Far West initiative) is causing great concern to residents in this area, and this submission will address specific areas of deficiency identified in the reform process. These issues include but are not limited to the following points:

- The Far West Initiative Consultation and Background Papers, which outline the preferred outcome of this process, were developed confidentially by the Far West Initiative Advisory Committee without broad community awareness or input. The Unincorporated Area, despite being 40% of the area under review, was not represented on the Advisory Committee. Several requests from PAWD for a position on the Advisory Committee to represent the Unincorporated Area were rejected or ignored. The ensuing failure to adequately consider the Unincorporated Area is cause for great concern to all stakeholders.
- The subsequent series of community consultation meetings held in the Far West by the Office of Local Government has likewise been of concern. Representatives from the Advisory Committee were conspicuous by their absence, and the Consultation and Background Papers were not provided to the attendees despite requests that copies be made available. Presentations at the meetings centred on adoption of the Statutory Body model, with demonstrated reluctance to entertain taking up alternative options identified by the Advisory Committee. Inadequate efforts to inform and involve rural and remote stakeholders have robbed this process of legitimacy and relevance. It would appear that a preferred outcome has been selected without meaningful and transparent community consultation at any stage, and this approach is clearly unsound and highly unpopular with Far West landholders.

ADELAIDE ROAD, BROKEN HILL, NEW SOUTH WALES 2880  
POSTAL ADDRESS: P O BOX 279, BROKEN HILL NEW SOUTH WALES 2880  
TELEPHONE: (08) 80873322 FACSIMILE: (08) 80882051  
Email [pawd01@bigpond.net.au](mailto:pawd01@bigpond.net.au)  
Website: [pawd.org.au](http://pawd.org.au)

- The apparent failure by the Advisory Committee to identify potential duplication of services already delivered by existing organisations (for example: Local, State and Federal Government and Regional Development Australia) by the proposed Statutory Body is a major concern. Duplication of services increases costs and red tape to the end user for no net gain in service delivery, and should be avoided at all costs. The sharing of functions between existing Councils and the proposed Statutory Body, as outlined in the Consultation Paper, is in effect duplication of these functions (and the associated costs), with Councils required to retain a capacity to deliver these services.
- The Steering Committee has failed to recognise that the region's size and the tyranny of distance precludes sustainable management by a single entity. As a case in point, the huge Western Local Land Services region (based on roughly the same area) was formed in contravention of clear advice given by PAWD that it was too big. Western Local Land Services has since been broken up into three regions, after it became clear that the original entity was too vast to efficiently deliver services. The potential for the Far West Initiative to make the same mistake by creating the proposed Statutory Body is most apparent.
- The Consultation Paper outlines an expectation that Councils (and therefore by association ratepayers) will have to at least in part bankroll the proposed Statutory Body. PAWD fully expects that Councils and ratepayers will not support the proposal once they become aware of this situation. Imposing a Statutory Body on Far West residents without adequate prior disclosure and consultation is likely to have negative consequences for stakeholders.
- The Consultation Paper fails to address how the proposed Statutory Body would be accountable to residents of the Far West. However, the Paper does pose a series of unanswered questions in regard to governance and accountability, and it would be counterproductive to progress this proposal without resolving these issues first. In particular, PAWD is concerned that the Unincorporated Area would not be adequately represented on the proposed governing board.
- The Far West Initiative does not acknowledge the Crown Lands Management Bill 2016 (which includes repeal of the Western Lands Act) and the recently announced Far West Regional Plan. Consequently, it does not address how these three pieces of legislation are intertwined. Given this failure, more time is needed for stakeholders to consider and respond to this complex situation.

In accordance with our understanding of the information to hand at present, the Pastoralists Association of West Darling (PAWD) does not support the creation of a regional Statutory Body. The proposed body is in effect imposing a fourth tier of government on the region, without offering any tangible benefits to landholders. Existing Shire Councils struggle to deliver any worthwhile services to rural areas in return for the rates landholders are obliged to pay, and a Statutory Body would in all probability fall into the same category. Forcing a fourth tier of government on the region would be a flawed response to perceived problems for which there is no broad community agreement. Indeed, the Consultation Paper

identifies “*issues with one size fits all approaches*” and “*centralised structures*” (page 12) as reasons why change is needed, then proceeds to recommend an outcome that would perpetuate those exact same problems.

It should be noted that the Far West is extensively governed and regulated in all fundamental aspects through provisions defined by a wide range of legislation, including but not limited to the following Acts: Western Lands, Crown Lands, Local Land Services, Wild Dog Destruction, Rural Fires, Work Health and Safety, Forestry, Water Management, Soil Conservation, National Parks and Wildlife, Agricultural Tenancies, Aboriginal Land Rights, Rural Workers Accommodation and Native Title. PAWD fails to see how the adoption of a Statutory Body would add anything of significant benefit to the existing regulatory framework for Far West residents. This would be in addition to statutory imposts already levied on our members.

PAWD’s position, in line with the overwhelming response of members, supports retention of the Unincorporated Area. Accordingly we request a clear statement from the Minister that this will occur at his earliest convenience. Furthermore, PAWD recommends that the option to expand the Unincorporated Area, as outlined in the Consultation Paper, is afforded due consideration, given that many landholders currently residing within a Shire Council region have expressed a strong desire to be included in the Unincorporated Area. For that reason, further opportunity must be given for rural residents of Shire Councils to identify the geographical extent of a larger Unincorporated Area.

Expansion of the Unincorporated Area is an opportunity for financially challenged Shire Councils to divest themselves of cash flow negative rural portions of their Shire. Residents of Shire Councils are frustrated with the state of their public road network, as Shires cannot afford to maintain roads to the same standard as Roads and Maritime Services do in the Unincorporated Area - a job they do well. Management of townships in the Unincorporated Area is undertaken by village committees, and this management model could be applied to any population centres finding themselves in an expanded Unincorporated Area.

PAWD appreciates this opportunity to comment on the proposed approach to regional governance in the Far West. However, we are disappointed with the overall conduct of this process to date, and the limited opportunities for our organisation to be involved. Legislators should be aware of the rising tide of frustration with the Far West Initiative at the grassroots level and consider their next move carefully. PAWD reserves the right to engage in further consultation pertaining to this process. Should this not be possible, please notify the Association by return email to [lachlan.langawirra@bigpond.com](mailto:lachlan.langawirra@bigpond.com) before the week ending 23<sup>rd</sup> of December 2016.

Yours faithfully,

Lachlan Gall.

President, PAWD.