

# GRIP Member Update

## November 2009.

### Important announcement for all Gloucester residents **PUBLIC HEALTH EXPERT to VISIT GLOUCESTER**

Concerned residents in Gloucester and the Hunter will host a series of public information talks by **Dr Dick van Steenis**, an international expert in the health effects of industrial air pollution. **Dr Dick van Steenis (MBBS)** is a retired General Practitioner, public health medical scientist and public educator based in the United Kingdom.

His work has included studying the effects of emissions from open cut coal mining on schoolchildren. He has been an expert witness in many court cases in the UK and US involving coal dust, incinerators and power stations.

***Please note there is a change in venue***

**Date – Sunday – 6th December**

**Time – 2.30**

**Venue – Senior Citizens Centre, 30 Hume Street, Gloucester**

**Free admission All Welcome Afternoon Tea**

**Information phone Jane 6558 7507**

**Residents unable to attend may submit questions by email  
coaldoctor@gmail.com**

#### **Health Effects on local residents**

**Dr van Steenis** will be giving a free public talk to inform Gloucester Shire residents on how emissions from an open cut coal mine might affect them at home, at work and at school. The talk will cover - how coal dust affects the body and what type of illnesses might occur; how far from the mine will the dust carry; and who will be the group most affected.

He will also address the effects on farm animals - which suffer similar risks.

#### **GRIP Christmas Cards**

**Beautiful cards only \$10 a pack of 10.**

The cards are available for sale at Posh Hairdressing, MyLady Hairdressing, Chantelle's Hairdressers at the old squash courts in Queen St and at Kerryb's (the ex Playful Platypus) in between Blakey's and Garners. The Cards will

be for sale at Gloucester and Barrington Markets and the Gloucester Gallery sale days are: Friday 27th and Saturday 28th November and Friday 4th December from 10 to 4. NB Our apologies for not being at the Gallery on the 20th, this was unavoidable and we regret any inconvenience caused.

## Media Release from The Hon. George Souris MP

Below is a media release from The Hon. George Souris, Member for the Upper Hunter in response to correspondence between Hunter Regional Councils and The Department of Planning. Mr. Souris welcomes your comments or feedback.



**George Souris MP**  
NSW Member for Upper Hunter

### **MEDIA RELEASE**

16 November 2009

#### **State Gov Abrogates its Planning responsibility - mining**

The Member for Upper Hunter, George Souris, said the NSW Government had abrogated its responsibility for ensuring the thousands of conditions of consent in the coal mining industry are adhered to.

Mr Souris was referring to the letter sent to Hunter Region Councils rejecting the idea that the Department of Planning and the Dept of Environment & Climate Change should have a full time inspectorate in the Upper Hunter.

The Minister for Planning said that DECCA had an Office in Newcastle but that the Dept Planning handled all issues of compliance with conditions of consent it imposed, at the time of granting of mining leases, from Sydney.

"In view of the daily impacts of mining; blasting, dust fall out, water issues, neighbourhood noise and vibration, traffic congestion and many others, it was a responsibility of the NSW Government to see that the conditions of consent it imposed on mining developments was adhered to and complaints promptly dealt with as they occurred."

Mr Souris said it was not much use an individual landholder sending a fax about a mine blast to a remote office in the metropolis and waiting over a month before any response, usually by a standard letter, finally arrived, said Mr Souris.

The NSW Government collects over \$1.5 billion in coal royalties per annum, mostly drawn from the Upper Hunter of the State.

Mr Souris said, all that is asked is proper attention, for the communities that produce the wealth and who endure daily impacts from mining, in ensuring conditions of consent are met, policed, and if breached, prosecuted without delay.

Mr Souris said it was not good enough for the Minister for Planning to brush off Upper Hunter communities like this.

Do the communities where the State's leading export industry by far derives, deserve better ?

The best way to deal with a complaint, say a purported excessive mine blast, is for inspectors to attend the mine immediately, while the plume is still in the air, interview supervisors, inspect records etc; indeed to do so without there being a complaint from a member of the community.

The arrogance and indifference contained in the Minister's letter speaks for itself.

Ends .....

Contact: George Souris 02 6543 1065, 0427 241 528

## **Economic Development Study for Gloucester LGA**

In the GRIP November Update was a copy of the consultants brief for the Economic Development Strategy for Gloucester LGA. Below are comments from Mr. Gerald McCalden, a committee member, with reference to what the future holds for Gloucester town, the Gloucester-Stroud Valley, and the people who call it home.

### **GLOUCESTER SHIRE COUNCIL CONSULTANT'S BRIEF TO PREPARE AN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOR GLOUCESTER LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA**

#### **Introduction**

Having now had an opportunity to study the above Brief, I would like to put forward some comments for the consideration of others who share my concerns about what the future holds for Gloucester town, the Gloucester-Stroud Valley, and the people who call it home.

#### **Background**

If my memory is correct, the concept of a review of the Gloucester economy was first aired about two years ago. However, it is only recently that financial support from the State Government has become available. The consensus then was that the local economy had recently undergone, and was still experiencing, significant structural change, the nature and implications of which were as yet imperfectly understood.

The shifts in population dynamics, which accompanied the above structural changes, were also seen as meriting detailed analysis.

It was envisaged that the study would appraise the nature, causes, and consequences of social and economic change, and thus provide a factual basis for informed discussion about the community's preferences for its future.

#### **The Brief**

The Brief, as it has emerged, appears to be strongly focussed on the issue of future growth of the district's economy. This is not only implicit in the title, but the term "growth" appears twice in the first sentence of the Introduction, where it is suggested that the study should provide insights which ". . . would enable future growth to be driven with clear direction . . ." (emphasis added).

This is reinforced in Section 3.1, where four of the six listed points refer to growth. Yet, nowhere in the

Brief are the connotations of the term "growth" considered. The Brief might thus be construed by the Consultant as a mandate to take certain goals for granted, and to focus on means for their achievement, rather than on the choice of the goals themselves.

One might have thought, noting the prominence given on page one of the Brief to the statement of Gloucester Council's Vision, viz.:

"To enhance the quality of life in the Gloucester Shire through the provision of services based on sound economic, social, and environmental planning." and the addendum to the effect that the study was being commissioned to support this Vision, that a clear nexus would have been established between the nature of the future growth envisaged for the Gloucester district, and the quality of life which residents might hope to enjoy.

#### **The Study Area**

For both practical and political reasons, it is probably necessary that the study area be designated as the Gloucester Local Government Area. However, the functional hinterland of Gloucester town extends beyond this geographic entity.

To the west and north the town's service area is clearly bounded by high and rugged terrain, with a sparse population. However, to the east, although physical barriers may still be identified, the boundary is less clearly demarcated, and some fieldwork would be required to identify the break-even line between Gloucester's sphere of influence, and those of Taree and the twin towns of Foster-Tuncurry.

To the south, where the broad strath of the Avon and Karuah headwater systems supports a relatively dense rural and village population, Gloucester's service area extends deeply into Great Lakes Shire. Here again original fieldwork is required to determine the limits of Gloucester's field.

The essential point is that, in order to provide a complete description and assessment of the "Gloucester Economy", account must be taken of areas outside the Shire boundary. This issue is touched on in Section 2.2 of the Brief, though the main concern expressed there is with escape spending.

#### **The Current Situation**

At several points in Section 2 of the Brief, headed Context, reference is made to various sectors in the local economy. Employment numbers, both direct and indirect, are cited, as are dollar values for the

“contribution” which the sector is believed to make to the Gloucester economy. Many of these estimates have been bandied about for years, and are of uncertain origin and questionable reliability. I feel that it would have been better not to have introduced them into the brief.

Rather, a primary task for the Consultants should be to make a completely fresh start, and develop a new set of internally consistent estimates based on reliable data sources. In fact, an assessment such as this was a major component of the study as originally conceived, but, while it is still present as the first listed item in Section 3 of the Brief, it is no longer emphasised.

### **Tourism**

The Brief (Section 4.2.7) correctly notes the importance of tourism to the local economy, and specifies an audit to determine the financial contribution it makes. This is certainly an essential element of the study, as existing estimates appear to be based on macro scale allocative models, rather than on specific local data. Under these circumstances it is quite possible that the significance of tourism to Gloucester is being underestimated.

Within this framework, a discussion of the contribution of the Visitor Information Centre is also appropriate, as is the role of the NPWS in attracting visitors to the district.

However, the Brief additionally calls for a review of the adequacy of existing tourist facilities in terms of quality, service, and pricing; a review of current marketing activities; and recommendations for future development of this sector. I feel that this represents an extension of the scope of the study into an area which would be better catered for by a separate specialist study. There is also the concern that this extension might divert resources from other, more critical, requirements of the Brief.

### **Agriculture and Agri-Tourism**

I fully endorse the relevance of the study tasks specified in Section 4.2.2. There would seem to be good grounds for believing that full realisation of Gloucester’s potential as a food producing area is presently being restricted by planning and marketing factors.

### **Industrial Activity**

The study tasks identified in Section 4.2.5 stress promotion of additional manufacturing industry, including heavy industry at the proposed Stratford site. There appears to be an inbuilt assumption that

industrial expansion in any form is a desirable element in the future economy of the Gloucester–Stroud Valley.

I feel that the Consultant should be required to address this question directly, and to take into account negative externalities, such as traffic, pollution, public health, and the housing market, to name but a few, in addition to any social and economic benefits which might possibly accrue from future industrial expansion.

### **Community Consultation**

Apart from a couple of references to “consultation with stakeholders” (unspecified), the Brief does not require that the Consultants canvass the opinions and attitudes of community members with regard to future directions. I feel that this omission should be rectified, and clear guidelines established to ensure that a comprehensive and representative consultation programme is incorporated into the study.

### **Conclusion**

There appears to be an inbuilt flaw in the Brief, in that it apparently invites the Consultant to conduct a “One Pass” investigative exercise, culminating in a single, and very final, Report.

My view is that, in order to achieve the intended outcomes as originally conceived, the study needs to be conducted in three phases. These should be mainly sequential, though there might be some overlap.

**(1)** The initial phase would involve a transparent analysis of recent social, economic, and demographic change, based primarily on publicly available data sources. The outcome from this would be an interim report which would be widely publicised within the Gloucester – Stroud Valley.

**(2)** Phase two would involve extensive community consultation, offering a variety of input channels. The findings from this exercise should also be disseminated widely.

**(3)** Finally, taking the present situation as their starting point, and the revealed preferences of the community as direction, the Consultant should identify feasible alternative scenarios for Gloucester’s future. A description of these, accompanied by a thorough analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of each, would form the core of the final Report.

**Gerald McCalden**

9th November 2009