

In relation to the draft proposal and the arguments presented for and against, I would like to submit the following:

I have been employed by the Department for Education in South Australia for 30 years and spent all of that time in country service throughout the South Australian outback. Preceding that time I grew up and spent my first 15 years of 'working life' in and around the suburbs of Adelaide.

The benefits of living in close proximity to the city meant I was rarely unemployed and if I remained so during my 'twenties' it was largely by choice. I entered uni to study teaching at the age of 31, with no education behind me other than I had participated in year 10 (or 3<sup>rd</sup> year Tech School, as it was back then).

I entered through the mature age scheme and completed my degree after four years – all costs heavily subsidised whilst remaining in the city suburbs. At the time I was purchasing a house in the northern suburbs of Elizabeth.

Upon completing the degree I was offered the opportunity of a four-year contract but on the proviso I re-located to a coastal town called Haslam – no shop, no services and a population of about fifteen. The school that I was to teach at was 20 plus kilometres away and over country dirt roads, corrugated and dusty. I did that journey every school day for three years and replaced one car 12-months in and as good as wrecked another during the following two years – both were reasonably new vehicles that I was heavily in-debt for.

The country lifestyle offered advantages – many were 'lifestyle' though and very few, if any were economical. During that first three years I tried to maintain my home in Elizabeth and make rental payments for the house in Haslam. But with a family of seven we had a largish house and the subsidies were quickly eroded by the higher rent costs involved in the renting of a larger house.

Shortly after my second posting to Gladstone SA, I was forced to relinquish the house in Elizabeth as I could not afford the rent of the house in Gladstone (which was considerably higher than the one in Haslam due to location and proximity to Adelaide) and the mortgage.

I have rented ever since as I never fully recovered from the expense of vehicles needed for country living and the rent needed for homes. One of the drawbacks of opting to stay in the country – good, reliable vehicles are a necessity and lack of housing options meant those two items were always high expenses for our family. I remained in Gladstone for a few years but lack of services, opportunities for my growing family and decent housing contributed to our re locating to nearby Port Pirie, where I remained for fourteen years.

Port Pirie provided medical, food, entertainment and community benefits not available in Gladstone, but meant that I now had a thirty kilometre drive to work each day. More wear and tear on yet another vehicle. The rebates for travel using my own vehicle were extremely low during the nineties – 17 cents per km I could claim from the Department I think it was. Running costs and devaluation of my vehicle was much greater.

At this point we were resigned to country life but not for any economic or social reasons – now it was convenience – I would still find it hard to get a position on the metro area anyway and the costs and work involved in relocation put me off moving.

Following a marriage break-up (yes, my partner wanted to go back to the city), I stayed around Pt Pirie for a number of years before accepting early retirement and the chance to relocate to country Queensland to operate a small business. Located about 200kms north of Brisbane I operated a fruit

n veg business for a short while. Unfortunately, un-seasonal rains brought flooding to the town and six months of bad weather was not good for the fruit and veg industry. This particular stint in the country cost me dearly and it was the weather that did the damage – flooding of this magnitude was severe.

I chose to go back to what I know teaching and I returned to take up a position at the Roxby Downs School in outback SA. The conditions were good – heavily subsidised housing (which it needed to be as average rents were in excess of \$400 weekly) – I still paid more than housing was costing in the city.

I stayed there for five years and lost my Country Incentive Allowance – I was now living in a town that was extremely expensive to live in but that gave me not much more incentive than my city colleagues were getting. Fuel was an extremely expensive necessity – the nearest town of any note was over 250 kms away. Plane fares were too expensive to use as the BHP mine had a monopoly on its use. Medical specialists were not available with any kind of regularity and I had specific medical needs at the time.

I began to become very disillusioned with life in Roxby and sought a change as it was proving just too expensive and I was not enjoying the luxury of a highly-paid mine job. I accepted a 12 month tenure as Principal at Woomera, 80 kms closer to civilisation but still extremely remote. In Woomera there was no service station. Basic medical services came to town only twice a week and shopping meant a trip back to Roxby each week. But at least I had received a small pay rise.

Woomera is considered a Defence town and Defence personnel are heavily subsidised – I am not Defence though. At Roxby I believe the tax was Zone A – but unless that was provided by the ATO by default, I would not have benefitted as I only once made mention of it in a tax return? I certainly lost any claim to it when I relocated to Woomera – so no tax incentive to be in this very small community. There was definitely no medical incentive to be there, unless you consider the fact it was eighty kms closer than Roxby to Adelaide.

Whilst at Roxby, we were allowed to end our school year one week earlier than a lot of other schools due to its remoteness – Woomera is more isolated than Roxby, yet it is not eligible for that extra week off as it is 80kms nearer to the next largest town. I relocated to a new town yet received no new Country Incentive Allowance – been in the country for so long I'm apparently 'not eligible' or some such nonsense.

Every year of service in the country should be recognised and rewarded with incentive – there are teachers (and those in other mobile professions) in the city who have sat on their cushy little jobs for so long and never done any country service, that others become 'trapped in the country lifestyle' and just cannot be bothered fighting the 'red-tape' for their rightful entitlement to a 'city-job'.

I am now in Woomera for three more years having completed nearly three and winning a 5-year extension to my tenure (with no incentive whatsoever). All benefits are gone for me and I am near the end of my teaching life. What next for me in the country? What hope of relocating to a city dwelling when I finish teaching? I don't own property anywhere and having already retired and lost my savings due to unseasonal weather (and no compensation) I now have what little super I have stashed away in the past ten years to live off.

The points to take from the above background is that incentives for living in the regional and remote areas are little enough – please be extremely careful if re-defining them:

- 1) Most career-sponsored incentives run out, causing significant drops in income, or standard of living in some cases.
- 2) The Federal tax incentives through Zone or other allowances are not clearly communicated and I sincerely doubt many Australians, other than perhaps military personnel and miners, do anything about claiming it – unless it is automatically applied by the ATO?
- 3) There are no medical benefits or other vital services, for many isolated or rural areas so if considering a re-zoning approach, or redefining boundaries, please do not lump in the small surrounding towns with the larger regional cities. PAT Funding incentives do not cover costs and make no allowance for any form of ‘living-away-from-home’ costs other than those charged by hotels etc Why can't patients choose to stay with family if they can and be recompensed like anyone else?
- 4) Roxby Downs is a wealthy mining town according to many, but Woomera is not and we are 80kms from there – yet a rezoning of Roxby will in all likelihood include Andamooka and Woomera and my argument is that it should not – we do not enjoy the same lifestyle, we do not receive the same benefits, we are not supported by industry and we certainly do not have the same facilities. And why should it be assumed we would fall under ‘their jurisdiction’ in matters of benefits? We do not.
- 5) The argument is put forward that many Australians choose to live in isolation – I suggest to you through my own case that many of us accept our situation and make the most of it – it does not mean we would not like access to other options – if you remove what incentives there are to staying then many of us might start to reconsider the value of ‘staying put’.

Please consider each place affected by any change as an ‘individual case’ if re-defining boundaries.

If adjusting the ability to claim incentives, please consider the outdated practice of ‘no claim forms for alternate accommodation and food’ other than by private provider (on one occasion I could have saved the Ed Dept over \$600 in motel and food expenses but there was no form for me to claim \$100 to cover costs of my food at a relative’s house) – multiply that by the 000s of people in the same boat and you would save millions over time.

Instead of just focussing on what you save by re determining isolation allowances, look at how much good you can do by re allocating from those who don’t need it now, to those who genuinely do – and look at each town in isolation of others.

If the government is serious about a review then do not generalise or assume based on where a town is located in relation to others.

Any savings made by the government from country incentives should be funnelled back into services that do support those places – country hospitals, country schools and services such as Flying Doctor should receive greater assistance – these services are needed to save country lives and these should be considered as equally important as their city counterparts, who mostly enjoy closer access to vital services.