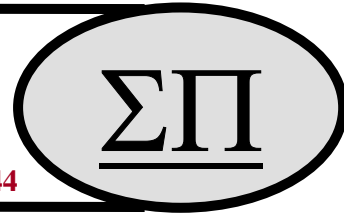


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Our Ref : W2004-0025
Your Ref :

Australia's Demographic Challenges
Social Policy Division
The Treasury
Langton Crescent
PARKES ACT 2600

6 May 2004

Dear Sir / Madam

AUSTRALIA'S DEMOGRAPHIC CHALLENGES

I refer to the advertisement appearing in The Weekend Australian calling for submissions in respect to this matter.

Preface

When people ask what a Planner does, I suggest "They should be able to identify opportunity and put it together with motivation to produce outcome for the general benefit of the community." In the last decade, I have lived and worked in Queensland (Maroochydore & Cairns), Victoria (Mildura & Melbourne) and Western Australia (Perth & Albany), having previously worked in New South Wales.

As a community, we need to empower our elected representatives with the knowledge and understanding of what we are trying to achieve, and for them in turn to lead – vision set – and make effective decisions on our behalf having due regard for the environment. Planning (urban, rural or remote) is the consideration of all relevant issues, emphasising at any point in time economic, social and ecological factors within a political framework, with attendant provision for finance as a process of implementation.

The Big Picture

Even after several years of so-called national prosperity and what can only be considered superior international economic performance compared to other western industrialised nations, it strikes me that this Australian government still is not seeing the big picture – its not about Government – its about private enterprise (for all Australians).

There are several politically challenging propositions built into the Rainbow 2000[®] package for :

- ❖ Federal Government (phasing out unemployment benefits over five years)
- ❖ State Government (the privatisation of State government assets and processes)
- ❖ Regional Government (commercial competition in the strategic planning sector)
- ❖ Local Government (commercial competition in the strategic planning sector)
- ❖ Australians generally (resolution of the Native Title issue via regional S.21 agreement).

The Rainbow 2000[®] Strategy

Smithson Planning of Albany, consultants in Town Planning and Environmental Assessment, prepared a conceptual approach to the review of future planning for the amalgamated Albany City Council and the lower Great Southern Region of Western Australia. Rainbow 2000[®] is a most interesting investment proposition, but also questions the hypothesis – is planning the antithesis of politics.

The regional strategy comprises six main elements being :

- ❖ A planning policy statement (framework for investment programs)
- ❖ A regional planning initiatives statement for the Great Southern Region
- ❖ A metropolitan Albany planning initiatives statement
- ❖ An Albany central business district planning initiatives statement
- ❖ Albany Anzac 2014-18 Re-enactment[©] – a major event (marketing / promotional strategy)
- ❖ Albany 2026[©] – a Bicentennial Celebration of European Settlement in Western Australia.

Some of the main aspects of the regional strategy include a population by Year 2029 of 250,000 permanent residents spread across Albany (150,000), Denmark (30,000), Mt.Barker (30,000), Bremer Bay (30,000) and Cranbrook (10,000), representing a conservative annual population growth rate of 5% in the region.

To sustain economic development, there must be the underlying structure to create employment.

Several prominent development industries have commenced or are in the process of realisation, and these include :

- ❖ Narrikup abattoir for domestic and export meat market
- ❖ Aquaculture product development project
- ❖ Forest product development project
- ❖ Raw materials resource identification project
- ❖ Power enhancement projects (wind power & gas pipeline)
- ❖ Personnel skills identification project
- ❖ Business personnel profile and registration system
- ❖ Industry needs assessment study and market development opportunities project
- ❖ Commercial and industrial land use study
- ❖ Electronic communications enhancement project.

Albany is at a key point in its development. The community has reached a permanent resident population in the town of 35,000 with a wider regional service population of 65,000 plus. There are signs of major industrial expansion; however, there is inherent growth scepticism, and a perception of fear of loss of individuality as a rural community.

The residents and visitors alike seek improvements in lifestyle, education, housing choice, retail convenience and employment opportunity, but not at the expense of crime, traffic congestion, pollution, etc.

The Albany Central Business District is under pressure to accommodate change. The Albany Commercial Strategy (written in 1994) estimates that the regional population catchment in 2001 will exceed 60,000, “and that Albany is tending towards the high projection (63,000) in the short term to 2001”. In our estimate, the regional population catchment in 2001 was more likely to be in the vicinity of 75,000 permanent residents, with about 300,000 annual commercial accommodation nights in the region.

Harbouring an historic image, and presuming that the Port's industrial service activities can successfully be relocated to Vancouver Peninsula, the Albany CBD would assume an 'English Quarter' status similar to the 'French Quarter' in New Orleans (USA) and the 'Portuguese Quarter' in Malacca (Malaysia).

The current deep water berths would be retained for visiting Cruise Liners and Naval Warships, as these would essentially involve tourist interaction with the town area, and resupply of provisions. The existing grain handling facilities would be converted into two major five star hotels with attendant casino, exhibition space, entertainment, cultural, and convention centres, and commercial service outlets.

Albany Anzac 2014-18 Re-Enactment[©]

If the community of Albany is prepared to adopt Rainbow 2000[©], then the task requires presenting the City of Albany and the Great Southern Region to the world to encourage economic investment (capital and recurrent).

The 100th celebration of the Anzac tradition will be a five-year period of substantial tourism development, and the City of Albany has resolved to make Albany Anzac an icon event in the program of tourism events for Western Australia.

Albany 2026[©] – A Bicentennial Celebration of European Settlement

The relationship between Albany and Perth in terms of the establishment of politics, economy, community and environment, is viewed as hostile and tumultuous.

Development trends were profoundly changed by the establishment of the Swan River colony by Captain James Stirling in 1827, and the proclamation of Western Australia in Perth as the capital city in 1829.

Further, Lord John Forrest as the Governor of Western Australia orchestrated the construction of the Port of Fremantle in 1897 by a notable engineer (C.Y.O'Connor), and the transfer in 1901 of the mail route from Albany to Perth as a function of federation, better communications and state development.

Sustainability is an emerging currency in Australian urbanism, and considered debate would suggest that all cities exhibit their relative strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. In our opinion however, change is a fundamental prerequisite for growth and development.

However, what happens when the State Government is non-committal to regional development, and the political horizon to resolve an issue central to the future urban development of a smaller regional city is extremely contentious, and extends beyond the election cycle of four years.

Planning – A Business Development Tool (or Not)

There are two principal Town Planning Schemes guiding subdivision and the development of land in the City of Albany, being the :

- ❖ Town of Albany Town Planning Scheme No.1A, which was gazetted on 30 December 1983 (~21 years old) – and to date, the Albany City Council (former Town) has resolved to initiate 142 amendments
- ❖ Shire of Albany Town Planning Scheme No.3, which was gazetted on 15 February 1980 (~24 years old) – and to date the Albany City Council (former Shire) has resolved to initiate 232 amendments.

The Town Planning & Development Act 1928 requires a comprehensive review of a District Planning Scheme every five years. The age and condition of these two planning instruments should be considered unacceptable in today's economic circumstances, and it is suggested that this situation has severely hampered business development and reduced investment confidence in the lower Great Southern Region over the last decade.

The State government through the Western Australian Planning Commission (and former namesakes) has coordinated a number of planning strategies in order to advance development, including :

- ❖ Albany Regional Rural Strategy – October 1991
- ❖ Albany Residential Expansion Strategy – June 1994
- ❖ Albany Regional Strategy – June 1994
- ❖ Albany Commercial Strategy – August 1994.

On 11 April 2000, the City of Albany resolved to prepare a new comprehensive Town Planning Scheme to replace and update their District Planning Scheme (covering the entire municipality – Government Gazette 25 January 2001), but that process has come to a grinding halt for reasons that will become apparent.

In the interim, the City of Albany have published two informal strategic planning documents :

- ❖ Albany 2020 – Charting our course (2001)
- ❖ Albany's 3D Future (2003).

With the change of State government in 2001 (Labor replaced the Coalition), Albany elected a Labor member for the first time in 27 years) and Stirling retained their National member with support from the Greens.

The current Minister for Planning & Infrastructure – the Hon. Alannah MacTiernan MLA, then directed the WA Planning Commission to prepare a new Regional Planning Strategy for Albany and the lower Great Southern region. However, that process too has come to a grinding halt for reasons that will become apparent.

Interestingly, the Council of the City of Albany formally resolved via its Town Planning Scheme Review Advisory Committee not to investigate the prospect of port relocation, and the Minister for Planning & Infrastructure respectfully declined to be briefed on the Rainbow 2000 project.

More recently, the Western Australian Environmental Protection Authority recommended to the then Minister for Environment & Heritage – the Hon. Judy Edwards MLA, that an informal level of assessment (non-statutory community consultation) should apply to the transport of woodchips by various independent forestry groups between various Great Southern timber plantations and the Port of Albany.

That decision was appealed by the Hon. Dr Christine Sharp MLC (Member for the South-West Region and WA Greens Party) and various other individuals, but supported by the City of Albany in the face of mediocre community opposition.

The Minister for Environment & Heritage dismissed the appeal, and upheld the level of assessment, acknowledging the cumulative impact of port related transport operations and the strategic planning work being carried out by the Minister for Planning & Infrastructure to facilitate future heavy haulage in the region.

A port access solution comprising two rail lines and a four-lane grade separated controlled access road is the minimum acceptable risk management standard to any industrial port in Australia. Based on this expectation, there are several specific constraint points between travel modes that will require short or long-term traffic management solutions, but in the mean time pose a risk management threat.

If the State Government continue to support Road Transport B-Trains and Triples and introduce Quads, it should be self-evident that given the nature of some of the volatile products, there is substantial potential for a even a minor accident to give rise to a major transport incident with attendant need for emergency management.

We could ask industry and the State & Federal Governments to spend millions of dollars to make a bad location workable, but why should they – Albany is the original hard rock and a wall.

Port Relocation : The Central Initiative

There are several commercial propositions identified in the Rainbow 2000[©] regional planning strategy; however, the single most important outcome influencing the intensity of future development is the relocation of the Albany Port Authority industrial handling facilities (tourist facilities to remain where they are and enhanced significantly).

The proposed location for the industrial port facilities on Vancouver Peninsula is approximately ten (10) times larger in land-backed area and considered more cost effective to service than the existing port location, providing a one hundred (100) year growth path for the Port of Albany.

It is estimated that to relocate the existing industrial asset will cost in the order of \$1.0 billion. However, once these aspects of the port are relocated, the entire city foreshore is made available for redevelopment, which is conservatively estimated to be worth in excess of \$2.0 billion.

Under Rainbow 2000[©], the proposal is to privatise the Albany Port Authority / Albany Airport, and form an Albany Ports Corporation, with private investment taking a sixty (60%) percent share holding in the business through the sale of State government asset (estimate minimum subscription of \$400 million).

The Rainbow 2000[©] regional planning strategy effectively separates two conflicting land use activities and provides for more efficient use of land / water resources, using the commercial process to facilitate relocation and development.

There is sufficient room in the existing port area for current anticipated port development activity. However, the biggest weakness is the highly constrained narrow land-bridge corridor across the city foreshore to the rural hinterland (road & rail), which is directly opposed to potential future town development and expansion.

With a change in State government came the commitment from the new Member for Albany – Mr Peter Watson MLA, that a \$12.8m marina / small boat harbour would be established on the Albany foreshore to service various aspects of maritime development (eg. Fishing fleet, private yacht / cruiser pens, commercial harbour tours, HMAS Perth dive wreck operators, etc).

Social Reform – A Hidden Agenda ?

It is plausible that the current system of social security (which some would view as social or political dependence) could be replaced with a system of employment insurance, and over a prescribed time frame (eg. five years) phase out unemployment benefits by annual increments of twenty (20%) percent.

The savings generated to the government would be transferred in to a Capital Works Development Fund, and used for the construction of major government projects to support development – a very large ‘work for the dole scheme’.

The strategy also contains a unique proposal for resolution of Native Title based on employer contributions from existing taxation based on annual staffing levels (with an allowance for current Noongar employment). Funds raised would be administered under a competitive arrangement within the region between Noongar employment development groups based on demonstrated performance to create and retain jobs.

Political Process

Rainbow 2000[®] started as a challenge from the business community to “take off the blinkers and have a really good look at what might be achievable”. More than six hundred actions have taken place to facilitate community participation and promote the Rainbow 2000[®] Project.

Over the last seven (7) years, relevant political groups in the community have rationalised into three dominant philosophical areas :

- ❖ Pro-Port – advocating rural issues as the major focus for the future
- ❖ Pro-City – advocating urban issues as the major focus for the future
- ❖ Anti-development – advocating no development as the future focus.

The Albany Chamber of Commerce & Industry on 10 August 1999, did resolve unanimously to encourage Smithson Planning to refer Rainbow 2000[®] to both the Albany City Council and the State Government of Western Australia for a comprehensive technical and financial evaluation.

There is correspondence on file from the former Premier Richard Court dated 10 November 1999 stating in part “Albany City Council as the appropriate body to present the Rainbow 2000 Strategy to State Government for consideration look forward to the City’s approach to me about this matter.”

There is further correspondence on file from the Premier Geoff Gallop (then Opposition Leader) dated 15 June 2000 stating in part “Regional economic development on a sustainable basis is an important issue for us all and I await with interest the technical and financial evaluations that are being done of the Rainbow 2000 concept.”

There is a further letter dated 10 July 2000 from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister John Anderson stating “it is encouraging that visionary ideas are being proposed for regional Australia”.

It is proposed to settle the question via referendum so that no political party in State government can ignore the mandate (which is part of the problem). In this way, there is a decision relating to the future of development of Albany regardless of which way the community vote, and a direction to all levels of government at this time as to the priority between conflicting land use activities.

Final Analysis

In suggesting that the port relocate, it was simply a matter of maximising the opportunity (and investment return) to the community of Albany based on predictable development patterns, and providing a long-term growth path for a range of export / import industries related to the region.

Since the port has constructed six new hectares of prime waterfront real estate on the city side of Princess Royal Harbour, this means that either it gets an effective transport access route along the city foreshore, or it has a limited operational life for industry.

Looking to the future, it is the Port that is under threat, not the City. There is case evidence around Australia where eighteen cities have had to negotiate port relocation because of urban encroachment in situations that were far less 'delicate'.

The railway corridor serving the current port location passes between two buildings that are listed on the register of the National Estate and the State Heritage Register, and together form an integral part of the oldest European heritage precinct in Western Australia.

While local politics changes periodically, both Labor and Liberal Governments in Western Australia have supported Albany foreshore development (noting that the National Party has never formed government in its own right but essentially opposes any activity that would compromise port accessibility).

Foreshore development should eventuate sometime this century, and historically there is :

- ❖ America's Great White Fleet 2007-08
- ❖ Albany Anzac 2014-18 Re-enactment
- ❖ Albany 2026 Bicentennial.

The motive behind Rainbow 2000[®] is simple, and relates to getting the economy moving again – but the process demands community support – and if given may constitute the largest community participation / empowerment process in Australian political history since Federation and Conscription.

In conclusion, a straw pole survey – when I present Rainbow 2000[®] in any particular forum, I always ask hands up those who would :

- ❖ Relocate the industrial Port
- ❖ Build the road / rail freeway along the foreshore.

More information is available at www.smithsonplanning.com.au

Thank you for the opportunity to comment, and if you require further assistance please call.

Yours faithfully,
SMITHSON PLANNING

NEIL R. SMITHSON

Managing Director
PIA, EIANZ, NELA, LGPA, AAPC, NTWA, FDI, CSC