

SOCIAL PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS – PORT AUGUSTA AND UPPER SPENCER GULF

Summary

1. BACKGROUND

Over recent years, major investments in renewable energy, along with minerals processing, arid agriculture, defence and event tourism are providing Port Augusta and the Upper Spencer Gulf with a strong base from which to grow opportunities that help the region become cleaner, more innovative, liveable and economically diverse regional cities.

With an estimated \$5 billion in private investment in and around the Port Augusta district alone, development construction over the coming five year period is estimated to require a significant workforce – numbering in the thousands - ahead of gradual transition to ongoing operational resourcing levels.

2. DISCUSSION

Over coming months there needs to be a significant focus on strategies to meet the looming workforce needs in Port Augusta and the Upper Spencer Gulf.

Whilst key developers in the region have taken a pro-active lead in initiating these discussions, coordinating this incoming workforce will also need to be part of a much broader and more integrated approach to ensure flow-on impacts and any unintended consequences are managed ahead of time and the positive benefits of this significant economic growth can be maximised.

Considerations will need to include:

Workforce

Ensuring timely access to the right mix of skilled migration to meet immediate and specialised construction requirements that aren't available locally, recognising there may be a need for FIFO and international visa workers, but also considering the impact on existing employers in the region who are likely to lose skilled staff to new developments, along with both short and longer term opportunities for training and upskilling local workforce, targeting both school leaver and career-upgrade levels.

Accommodation

The social and economic impacts of various workforce accommodation options must be investigated, including construction of new residential dwellings vs temporary worker camps and whether these facilities should be located on site or integrated into the local community vs encouraging additional motels/cabin parks vs currently unoccupied private dwellings vs utilising capacity across neighbouring centres such as Port Pirie and Whyalla.

Recreation

Understanding the likely temporary and permanent workforce requirements and preferences will be critical in enabling local authorities to undertake informed forward planning to ensure adequate recreational opportunities are available for both workers and their families, including parks and open spaces, gymnasiums, sporting facilities, arts, libraries, walking/bike trails, public toilets etc. This is an important consideration to improving the aesthetics, functionality and liveability of Port Augusta and the Upper Spencer Gulf and attracting more permanent residents to the region.

Policing and Behaviour Management

The substantial influx of both temporary and permanent workers to Port Augusta and the Upper Spencer Gulf will invariably bring potential for anti-social behaviour, with additional local resourcing required to encourage positive civic behaviour and maintain law and order as the changes in community dynamic and population growth occur in the region.

Community Services

Forward planning for appropriate levels of health/medical, childcare, family support, schooling and tertiary education services will be required to allow both public and private providers to respond in enough time to ensure availability for workers and their families and encourage more permanent relocation to the region.

Communications

Potential congestion, service coverage, cost and quality for both mobile and internet services will require analysis to ensure both continuity for existing businesses and residents, along with affordable and reliable service for new developments, workers and families.

Traffic

Transport authorities will need to understand the likely impact of workforce movements in order to plan for increases and directional flows of commuter and development construction and maintenance traffic, develop new funding models to adequately upgrade and maintain local and arterial roads and airport facilities, provide adequate local carparking and facilitate options for both intra-city public transport and USG inter-city shuttles between Port Augusta – Port Pirie – Whyalla.

Impact on Existing Industry Sectors

Compounding the issues expected during the forthcoming extended construction phase, the workforce, services and infrastructure impact of existing sectors must also be thoroughly analysed and managed. Port Augusta and the Upper Spencer Gulf relies heavily on periodic peaks of inflows associated with Defence training exercises at Cultana, nature-based tourism/travel season and major events/conferences. Careful attention must be given to minimise any economic or workforce displacement of these important sectors.

Whilst individual developments will clearly need to undertake their own strategies to fulfil their workforce needs and maintain an advantage over their competitors, the sheer scale of development activity in and around Port Augusta and the high risk of adverse impacts to the local community and existing economic sectors will necessitate a strong level of collaboration both by industry and with all levels of Government.

3. NEXT STEPS

Government Coordination

Ongoing discussions have been held with the Upper Spencer Gulf Common Purpose Group and South Australian Government with regards to appointment of the 'Commissioner for Kangaroo Island' as a single point of contact to provide coordination of input by agencies. Working under the Minister for Planning and Local Government, the Commissioner has approval to work with Spencer Gulf Cities to progress this government engagement and coordination in the short term.

Whilst often a case manager is appointed from one agency to undertake this coordination work, the advantage of the Commission model is that it has statutory authority underpinned by legislation to specifically:

- improve the management, co-ordination and delivery of infrastructure and services provided by government agencies
- ensuring co-ordinated delivery of infrastructure and services to businesses and residents

Joint Planning Board

Port Pirie, Port Augusta and Whyalla Councils are currently considering whether to progress establishment of a Spencer Gulf Cities Joint Planning Board under the *Planning, Development and Infrastructure Act 2016*.

At present, the three cities are split across three different State Government planning regions - Port Augusta within the Far North, Port Pirie in the Mid North and Whyalla in the Eyre Peninsula planning region. This dilutes the significant economic, industrial and structural issues facing the region, increases duplication of resources and hampers the ability to take a more strategic view of development across the three cities, which have strong commonality in industry, land-use and community.

A Joint Planning Board will enable the three cities to be formally recognised as a single group for the purpose of land-use and development planning and consolidate focus and effort by agencies on the specific future needs of the three cities taking into account their commonality of land-use, economy and social structure and their strong reliance on the marine environment of the Upper Spencer Gulf.