



## **Spencer Gulf Cities Call for Government Decentralisation**

10 March 2017

---

Upper Spencer Gulf Mayors have added their voice to a Federal Inquiry investigating decentralisation of Government agencies into regional areas.

Chair of the Spencer Gulf Cities, Port Augusta Mayor Sam Johnson, said the submission sought a far more pro-active approach by both State and Federal Government towards investing their own resources and operations into regional centres.

“Growing our regional centres offers a chance to stop the urban sprawl of metropolitan areas, provide more workers for our rural industries and support a secure future for our regions”, explains Mayor Johnson.

“We would love to see both State and Federal Governments with a clear commitment to increasing the number of public servants living and working outside of the capital cities”.

“Not only would it provide much needed new jobs and a new mix of skills into the community and promote confidence in our regional centres, but it would also provide more efficient, practical and relevant support that will help further grow our regions and add value to our existing contribution to the state and the nation”, he adds.

Port Pirie Mayor, John Rohde agrees, noting the South Australian Government alone employs 100,000 people, amounting to 81,000 full time equivalent jobs, each earning an average salary of \$76,400.

“Whilst the private sector will largely drive investment in most of the growth areas we have identified for the Upper Spencer Gulf, the potential value of the public service sector to both economic and community confidence in regional areas cannot be under-estimated”, said Mayor Rohde.

Whyalla Mayor, Lyn Breuer also points out that the number of government agencies without any ongoing local presence, or senior policy or decision makers in the Upper Spencer Gulf, has declined, resulting in a disconnect that is often reflected in statewide policy and decision making.

“What we tend to see is short-term deployment of capital city-based staff to regions during periods of crisis, as is being experienced in the Upper Spencer Gulf currently”, explains Mayor Breuer. “We would instead love to see a commitment to the ongoing location of policy and decision-makers in our cities across key agencies – particularly those with a role in growth areas we have identified for our economic transition”.

The three Mayors agree that locating regionally-focussed agencies such as (at a state level) Country Health, Country Arts and Primary Industries and Regions SA within the metropolitan capital city does little to build confidence and credibility of State Government in the regions.

“Even agencies with responsibility for energy, mining, manufacturing and tourism” are centred in Adelaide, despite the majority of their activity being based in the regions,” laments Mayor Johnson.

"Similarly, at a Commonwealth level, wholly Canberra-based departments formulating and implementing policy in areas such as agriculture, animal services, water, regions and environment, often with little practical experience and high rates of employee turnover, generates scepticism and disillusionment in communities upon which these policies are imposed."

"This sentiment is equally ascribed to Departments with a broader mandate (ie Industry, Innovation and Science, Arts, Health, Employment, Tourism, Trade & Investment, Communications, Vocational and Higher Education) whose policy decisions are critical to regional areas, but whom often tend to apply 'one-size-fits-all' approaches from afar", he adds.

"Not only does this impact on rural jobs and population, but the more the public service is centralised, the more policy decisions are formed through a 'city' lens and the more Governments lose touch with the impact of their decisions on country communities."

\*\*\*\*\*END\*\*\*\*\*

Contact:

Mayor Sam Johnson, Port Augusta Council	-	Mob: 0423 291 127
Mayor Lyn Breuer, Whyalla Council	-	Mob: 0419 806 415
Mayor John Rohde, Port Pirie Regional Council	-	Mob: 0417 080 961

Photo:

Port Augusta Mayor Sam Johnson, Regional Development Minister and Deputy Leader of the Nationals, Senator the Hon Fiona Nash, Whyalla Mayor Lyn Breuer, Port Pirie Mayor John Rohde discussed opportunities for decentralisation in Canberra late last year.

