



## Push to Decentralise Government Agencies

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Following the lead by the National's Federal Minister for Regional Development Fiona Nash and Deputy Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce, the Spencer Gulf Cities are keen to see a stronger presence of Government agencies based in regional South Australia.

Chair of the Spencer Gulf Cities Association and Port Augusta Mayor, Sam Johnson said decentralising Government employees doesn't automatically mean picking up and relocating whole departments from Canberra or Adelaide to country areas.

"We know that there have been many attempts at decentralising Government departments in Australia and overseas that have failed, but there are also some really successful examples that prove when you can get the policy settings right, it does work."

Examples such as the relocation of the NSW Department of Primary Industries to Orange, the Australian Taxation Office to Albury and Workcover and other similar agencies to Geelong have all worked to boost the local economy and bring in more professional workers.

The success has really been where communities work to leverage this initial influx and make sure there are the right education and training pathways and opportunities for private industry clusters and services to take advantage of a locally based public service sector.

Mayor Johnson also added that there needs to be a good match between the agency or function of government and the regional locality.

"It makes sense, for example, that agencies dealing with fisheries and aquaculture would be well matched to somewhere like Port Lincoln, that functions associated with the River Murray are based in that region and that a much larger administrative and policy function of Country Health is based somewhere like Whyalla."

It just seems illogical that agencies such as Primary Industries and Regions, Country Arts, Country Health are all making policy decisions for regions, but are based in the city.

Mayor Johnson also noted that Port Augusta was one of the few locations in Australia with NBN fibre to the premise, meaning backend administration such as the government's 'Shared Services' unit no longer needed to be based in the capital city.

He said if nothing else, even just increasing the number of regionally based public servants across a range of agencies would generate local economic and social benefit and lead to better policy and decision making for regions.

"We shouldn't forget that Government is a significant employer – the South Australian public service alone employs about 100,000 people on an average salary of \$76,400."

"Redistributing some of this workforce helps spread public sector wages across both metropolitan and regional economies and it also provides a wider range of public sector career options for residents in regional areas."

"Importantly, it also strengthens local decision making and policy implementation for regional issues."

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