



Super towns on the radar

By Merrel Pond

A PLAN to revive living in the bush has been mooted by state government to turn small towns such as Moora, Jurien Bay, Mount Barker, Northam, Collie and Katanning into thriving 'super towns', allowing tens of thousands of residents to enjoy city standard facilities and take the pressure off the rapidly expanding Perth.

WA Nationals leader Brendon Grylls announced a plan to use Royalties for Regions money to expand regional towns in WA.

It is envisaged that under this plan, major spending on health, education and other government services in these towns would then be comparable to those facilities available in Perth and other bigger regional centres.

Economic projects like the \$3.5 million urea plant planned for Collie, intensive horticulture in Moora and the \$165 million immigration detention centre in Northam were not enough by themselves to draw in and retain residents.

With government investment in key infrastructure this would be an attractive option to private businesses.

Mr Grylls said there were already thriving cities in Albany, Kalgoorlie, Geraldton and Bunbury, but there were a lot of towns close by who could successfully support populations of 20,000-30,000, like

many towns in the eastern states.

Mr Grylls said at the moment there weren't many towns that fitted into this category but it needed to be done.

"There has never been enough money from any government to get into these towns and 'do the lot'," Mr Grylls said.

"We are going to make sure that we have got the schools and hospitals up to the standards that people expect."

"It's all about getting the people to re-locate from Perth, explore the many opportunities, business opportunities and improved lifestyle.

"Most of the towns are already supported by road and rail infrastructure; it's all there just waiting for that boost to make these towns grow into major regional centres."

Shires such as Moora and Jurien Bay have been working on a future plan and opportunities to grow their towns for many years, but without adequate funding it is a very slow process.

Should the state government invest in proposed 'super towns' to improve infrastructure and services, this would have a profound advantage to attracting people and businesses to re-locate from Perth.

Dandaragan shire president Shane Love said the concept of super towns as outlined by Mr Grylls sat very well with many

long-standing planning and investment decisions for Jurien Bay.

He said the Central Coast Strategy prepared by the WA Planning Commission in the 1990s, along with the Turquoise Coast Structure Plan for about 9000 residential lots in the Ardross Estates, both pointed to the potential development of a much larger town at Jurien Bay.

More recently approval to advertise has been granted for the rezoning of 650 hectares of land from rural to special purpose at North Head, which may lead to a further 2215 residential lots being developed.

Last year the state government completed the final sections of Indian Ocean Drive, a project of about \$100 million.

It was the potential population growth and economic impact on the region that was instrumental in convincing the government of the day that this was a wise investment.

Today planning is in place or being developed for many projects including a 98-unit retirement village as well as various composite tourist and residential projects.

"The development of more services such as improved health care and education, along with more business and retail opportunities in a key regional town such as Jurien Bay will enhance the lives of people, not only in the town,

but also other residents of the Shire of Dandaragan and nearby communities," Councillor Love said.

"These residents will not have to travel out of the district as often to gain services and products.

"Consultations between the community, council, business and government agencies at last year's Indian Ocean Drive Summit held in Jurien Bay pointed very clearly to the need for more government services and engagement to foster and encourage the development of the town.

"This is in accord with many aspects of council's Strategic Plan.

"The super town concept is perfectly in tune with these sentiments - the concept would help to overcome the very real lag in many government services that our fastest growing community has experienced.

"I am sure council will support the super town model and look forward to engagement with the minister and government to bring the concept to fruition."

Shire of Moora deputy president Colin Gardiner said council strongly supported the vision and reality check Mr Grylls had recently announced for growth in strategic regional towns.

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Dandaragan shire president Shane Love.



Moora deputy shire president Colin Gardiner.



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“The recognition of long-term lobbying is a breath of fresh air to rural and regional communities that have tolerated city-centric policies for too long,” Cr Gardiner said.

“Developing stronger and more diverse regional towns where employment, water, power, sewerage and affordable land are available as in Moora, the vision instigates a population shift that then complements infrastructure growth in services like health, education and culture.

“The strategic towns need to be carefully identified, driven by population growth, as maybe Jurien Bay, current regional style towns as in Northam, with strategic geographical locations with new industry growth and strong services like Moora.

“The super town policy is a wonderful opportunity for the Moora shire to consolidate strong service delivery and employment growth using the current infrastructure to its capacity and more.”



Wheatbelt Development Commission chief executive Wendy Newman.

Wheatbelt Development Commission (WDC) chief executive Wendy Newman said the WDC

acknowledged that across the Wheatbelt region there were considerable assets that could be built upon to enhance a strong and vibrant region delivering on the state’s needs.

“Already peri-urban growth has impacted on the region and will continue to do so,” she said.

“Across the Wheatbelt there is considerable social and economic infrastructure that, if built upon, will result in significant increases in people living, working, investing and visiting the region.”



Agricultural Region MLC Brian Ellis.

Agricultural Region MLC Brian Ellis said it was an interesting proposal and he was keen to see more detail.

However, he said there were significant employment opportunity differences between the Pilbara and the Wheatbelt.

“While I would greatly welcome any improved infrastructure and facilities for towns such as Moora and Jurien Bay, people who come to live in those towns will need an income, not just more facilities,” Mr Ellis said.

“The Pilbara mining industry has

engendered many supporting businesses which also offer jobs for locals, but I am wondering how this will translate into agricultural areas.

“It is great to attract more people to country centres with better services, but they also need jobs and they need an income.

“I look forward with interest to hearing how Mr Grylls plans to incorporate both aspects of this concept.”



Moora shire chief executive Lynnette O'Reilly.

Shire of Moora chief executive Lynnette O'Reilly said the super towns concept was a brilliant opportunity for Moora and aligned council’s current thinking to work on a regional level and build the capacity of bigger centres such as Moora and Jurien.

“We have the capacity and desire to grow and the additional funding provided under the super town model would enable the provision of infrastructure and services that would attract and retain people in the region.

“We have land ready for residential and industrial development, we are preparing for growth and this would provide the much needed funds to make it a reality.”