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Monday 13 October 2008

The Infrastructure Coordinator
Infrastructure Australia
GPO Box 594
Canberra ACT 2601

(Sent via email to mail@infrastructureaustralia.gov.au)

Dear Sir/Madam,

National Infrastructure Priorities in the Bega Valley Shire

The Bega Valley Shire is located on the far south coast of NSW, encompassing the longest section of coastline of any LGA in the State. The population of 32,000 is distributed across 17 towns and villages with one quarter living in the rural areas of our 6,200sqkm Shire. 75% of the Shire is designated as National Park or State Forest giving rise, in part to the recent proclamation by the Federal Government of the Bega Valley Shire as part of the 'Wilderness Coast' under the Parks Australia, National Landscapes Program.

This Shire has three distinct National Infrastructure priorities that need to be brought to the attention of Infrastructure Australia. These are: the Eden Port, Merimbula Airport and Telecommunication Services.

Priority One – Eden Port

Brief introduction to the priority

The Eden Port is situated on Twofold Bay and has been described since the earliest days of colonisation as one of the finest deep ocean ports on the eastern sea board of Australia. With a long and proud history of maritime activity, Bega Valley Shire Council argues that the Eden Port has great potential continue and expand its roll as a port of national significance.

A 'masterplan' and assortment of specific design projects have been undertaken for the port area. The recent development of the \$24M multi-purpose wharf on the southern side of Twofold Bay is an obvious indication that Council's vision is shared at the State and Federal levels.

The commercial and community maritime 'hub' of Eden Port is located at Snug Cove, tucked into the eastern side of Twofold Bay. The multi-purpose wharf and South East Fibre Exports loading facility represent the industrial elements of maritime activity within the port.

ADDRESS ALL
CORRESPONDENCE TO:

PO Box 492
Bega NSW 2550

DX 4904
ABN 26 987 935 332

Council chambers
Zingel Place, Bega

PHONE
(02) 6499 2222

FAX
(02) 6499 2200

INFORMATION

www.begavalley.nsw.gov.au

EMAIL

council@begavalley.nsw.gov.au

Identification of the problem

The facilities at Snug Cove are currently limiting the further development of Eden Port as a commercial and recreational maritime centre. The existing breakwater wharf limits existing use and potential expansion of the operation of vessels associated with the logistic support of oil and natural gas activities.

This size limitation also impacts on the berthing of passenger ships bringing visitors to the Port and town of Eden. The cruise ship industry has recently 'discovered' the Eden Port and with the National Landscapes Wilderness Coast program coming on line the opportunity exists to attract an increasing number of these vessels to the Eden Port.

Impacts of the problem

As a result of the inadequate berthing provided in Snug Cove at the breakwater wharf, economic activity from both the commercial and recreational maritime sectors is not being fully realised.

How the problem came about

The limitations encountered in Snug Cove with regard to the berthing of vessels have come about by the shifting nature of the fleet accessing this part of Twofold Bay. The traditional smaller fishing vessels are being replaced with larger logistic supply and passenger ships.

Addressing the problem

The solution to this problem is to increase the size of the existing breakwater wharf to cater for large vessels and to enhance the existing slipway and maritime engineering infrastructure. Similarly the rehabilitation of the of the former fuel storage sites represents another opportunity to expand Eden Port's maritime facilities. The continuation of staged developments, such as those described represent focussed and achievable steps in the development of a thriving and sustainable maritime industry for Eden.

Priority Two – Merimbula Airport

Brief introduction to the priority

Merimbula Airport is a vital gateway to the far south coast for commercial, recreational and emergency use. The airport is currently serviced by Regional Express airlines, with daily services to Sydney and Melbourne.

Identification of the problem

Recent times have seen the introduction by airlines of cost efficient, 40 and 70 seat passenger jets. Such planes are increasingly delivering passengers to key tourism and regional economic destinations. Merimbula airport is unable to cater for such aircraft due to existing runway limitations. The runway is currently 200 meters too short and not sufficiently reinforced in key takeoff and landing zones.

Impacts of the problem

As a result of the identified runway limitations, the Merimbula Airport cannot be promoted to the regional jet air transportation industry as a destination. This inability has reduced market competition on the Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra routes. As the Wilderness Coast is marketed internationally under the National Landscapes Program it can be expected that more visitors will be attracted to the area. Quality regional jet air services to

Merimbula would be a positive augmentation to the overall tourist experience that is offered by this region.

How the problem came about

The advent of smaller 40 and 70 seat regional jet aircraft have enabled the cost efficient transportation of passengers and cargo. Smaller capacity propeller aircraft, still requiring two pilots and cabin crew do not deliver the same economic return to the airlines.

Addressing the problem

The upgrading of the runway at Merimbula Airport to cater for the new generation of 40 and 70 seat jet aircraft is a relatively simple infrastructure project that will deliver significant economic benefits.

Priority Three – Telecommunication Services

Brief introduction to the priority

The Bega Valley Shire and surrounding region have long suffered with poor telecommunications services. Poor telecommunications include landline, mobile telephone, television and broadband services.

Identification of the problem

Poor telecommunications to this region are caused predominantly by terrain, distance and geological factors. Mountainous country with dense tree cover, hamper the transmission of telecommunications signals. Traditional wire base telecoms are affected by the conductive granitic soils that are common to this region, especially after rain periods. The physical distance of many residents and businesses from exchanges also impact on the quality of telecommunication services.

Impacts of the problem

The impact of poor telecommunication services are far reaching and wide ranging. Poor telecoms impact on business, especially home based business, with access to broadband universally identified as a vital element. Poor telecommunications also impact on the education, social and health aspects on home and family life, especially in the more remote communities of the Bega Valley Shire.

How the problem came about

As telecommunications have increased in the major cities and regional centres the void between areas with good telecommunications services and poor telecommunication services has grown. Technological advances have been slow to reach the smaller, more isolated communities of the nation, even if those communities are located only a few hours from the national capital. However, it should be noted that government facilities in these areas such as schools or TAFE, often have good quality telecommunications access.

Addressing the problem

Council has been lobbying other levels of government for improvements to regional telecommunications for a number of years. Provision of quality telecommunications to all Australians should be a priority of the Government and this Council waits to assist in any way possible. Council has local population and geographical knowledge as well as consultative networks to ensure any improvement programs is delivered as cost effectively and efficiently as possible.

Potentially opening up the telecommunication facilities of educational sites to the broader community could provide an easy and relatively low cost, short term solution to the currently poor services found in many areas of the Shire.

Further Information

Council is keen and available to contribute to the development of any infrastructure priorities that are identified for this region. Requests for more information on any infrastructure opportunities should be directed to Peter Tegart, General Manager on 02 6499 2103 or emailed to ptegart@begavalley.nsw.gov.au

Yours sincerely,

Peter Tegart
General Manager