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# The Rural Scene

News from Primary Industries and Energy Minister John Kerin

July 1988

## RURAL INDUSTRIES AND RURAL COMMUNITIES: LIVING AND WORKING TOGETHER

There is a special relationship between industries and communities in country areas, perhaps caused by the fact that they share a common setting. In country towns the farms, mines, tourism and retailing activities are inextricably linked with people's homes. A significant proportion of people in the country work from home; and others work in plants, depots and factories which are visible and integrated parts of the local community.

The Federal Labor Government recognises this special relationship between industry and community through its Rural and Provincial Affairs activities. The thrusts of these activities are:

1. 'access': to ensure that people do not miss out on information or services because of their isolation in country areas;
2. 'advocacy': to see that the special characteristics of country areas are catered for in the Government's programs; and
3. 'action': to deal with special issues in country areas as they arise from time to time.

Rural and Provincial Affairs are therefore of concern to all Federal Departments. Recent developments have included moves to co-locate the offices of Commonwealth agencies in order to provide more accessible information to clients, and a number of special reports on various aspects of rural (including agricultural) education. These have already led to programs to improve community access to education, and to encourage co-operative approaches by regional educational institutions and industry.

The efforts of the various Departments in Canberra have been enhanced by the establishment of a branch in the Department of Primary Industries and Energy to deal continuously with rural and provincial affairs. The staff of this branch have an interest in 'access', 'advocacy' and 'action' across all the Commonwealth Government's activities: education and training, transport, rural community development, communications and broadcasting, health and welfare, and care for the aged and the young. This means that they spend much of their time liaising with staff of the Departments with direct responsibility for these issues.

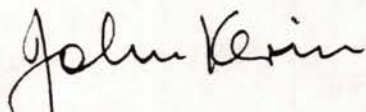
Put simply, staff of the Rural and Provincial Affairs Branch have the job of trying to improve the match of Federal programs to country areas.

The Department in which the Branch is located - Primary Industries and Energy - has responsibility for over 80 per cent of Australia's exports, including our wool, coal, wheat and iron ore. And this is where the special relationship of industry and community comes in. Those who work in these industries, whether in the wheatbelt of NSW or the Pilbara of Western Australia, would like the same level of services and quality of life as enjoyed by those in Sydney or Perth.

The Pilbara and Perth can never be the same. But equity and fairness demand that governments reach out to all communities, and provide the best levels of service they can to all of them.

The Federal Government's Rural and Provincial affairs work is part of Labor's determination to give a fair go to all Australians, whoever they are and wherever they live. Peter Cook, as Minister for Resources, and I, as Minister for Primary Industries and Energy, attach considerable importance to this work. Industry policies, which naturally take up most of our time and energy, encourage the economy to become more productive and competitive. This growth in turn has a number of desirable effects. First, it provides fulfilling and productive employment. Second, it provides the basis for the policies and programs which give us a fair society. Rural and provincial affairs are about making sure that people living outside the big cities share in these benefits.

The attached page, reproduced from our recent 'Policies for Growth' document, provides some details of the rural and provincial work underway.



JOHN KERIN  
Minister for Primary Industries and Energy

## **Rural and Provincial Affairs**

### **Defining Needs**

- **The Rural Australia Symposium 1987 provided a unique overview of the issues concerning rural Australian society as a whole and ways of responding to the changes it is undergoing.**
- **The Survey of Women in Rural Australia, a joint initiative by the Office of Status of Women and the CWA, has provided for the first time a comprehensive statement of the needs of many country women.**
- **Continued funding of the Rural Development Centre attached to the University of New England provides for research into social and economic adjustment issues in non-metropolitan Australia.**
- **The access to and delivery of community services in remote communities and the provision of housing in non-metropolitan Australia have been reviewed by the Department of Community Services and Health.**
- **The Government is proposing to establish a national policy on women's health. A Special Consultant has produced a discussion paper and community comment is currently being sought. The needs of rural women are well represented in the discussion paper.**
- **The National Advisory Group on Local Employment Initiatives has reported the potential for small-scale experimental job creation activities, initiated and controlled at the local level.**
- **The Schools Commission report 'Schooling in Rural Australia' and the Report of the Working Party on Post-secondary Rural Education have recommended strengthening education and training in rural Australia. The Rural and Allied Industries Council has affirmed the importance of this and emphasised Government consideration of the report and the Green Paper on Higher Education Policy has stimulated debate about rural education and training.**

### **Improving Access**

- **The Review of the Co-ordination of Commonwealth Services in Rural Australia encouraged the co-location of services in rural areas and identified a need for better communication of information on Commonwealth programs to rural people.**

- **The Commonwealth Services Information Program trialled ways of delivering comprehensive information on the full range of Government programs to people outside metropolitan areas. Trials included:**
  - **an 008 information line which covered the full range of Commonwealth programs and services likely to be of interest to people in non-metropolitan Australia;**
  - **a series of displays in small rural towns and agricultural shows;**
  - **a series of radio promotions on rural commercial stations about particular Commonwealth programs; and**
  - **an upgrading of the database on Commonwealth programs which will be made available in Commonwealth Offices in rural areas.**
- **Publication of the Rural Book provided people living in non-metropolitan Australia, for the first time, with a guide to government services. Over 40 000 copies have been distributed and requests are still being received.**

#### **Meeting Needs**

- **The Rural Counselling Program continues to provide a community based advisory service to farm families in need of financial counselling.**
- **The Rural Women's Access Grants program has provided women's groups outside the major cities with increased access to information, education, communication and health services.**
- **Provision of \$1 million to the Country Centres Project has shown that communities can identify and react positively to local business and economic opportunities based on the particular strengths and natural advantages of their areas.**
- **Government labour market programs have provided a wide range of training opportunities in non-metropolitan Australia. They recognise the special needs of workers from restructured industries for retraining and assist displaced workers to relocate. The special problems of implementing the Australian Traineeship System in rural areas have been recently examined.**