



MAYORAL MEMO - 17 MAY 2023

The NSW Decentralisation Taskforce was created in November 2012 consisting of the Hon. Thomas George MP as the Chair along with the Hon. Richard Torbay MP; Greg Aplin MP; Craig Baumann MP and Paul Toole MP.

I was invited to present to the Taskforce and did so on 28 February 2013.

Along with some commentary about the Regional Relocation Grant and Restart NSW I was very keen for the Taskforce to take on two ideas that I believed could make a dramatic difference to regional locations.

The first related to the idea of State Government employees working in regional locations. At the time many people were calling for entire departments to be moved to regional locations. State Water had moved its head office to Dubbo along with 310 jobs. A branch of the Fair Trading Department had been moved to Bathurst (40 jobs) and the State Debt Recovery Office went to Lithgow along with 70 jobs. It was an easy argument from a regional perspective. Move an entire department along with its jobs and boost a regional economy.

I took a slightly different approach though. I understood that moving an entire government department to a regional location was fraught with danger. Some staff may not be in a position to move (circumstances of other family members for example) and forcing people to move to retain their jobs can lead to a drop in staff morale.

Instead, I pitched the idea of a CATO (Combined Agency Teleworker Office). Firstly, to make it appealing, I understood it needed an acronym. Tick! But the main argument I had was that government office space in Sydney was expensive and with the upcoming connection of the NBN, many employees, given the choice, would be happy to move to Dubbo and perform their work remotely. Particularly considering they would be earning the same wage but the cost of living was lower.

The final report was released in April 2013 and recommendation 17 said the government “should consider not only whole agency relocations but partial agency and co-location of services” or, to put it more succinctly, a CATO.

Fast forward a few years, connect the NBN and add in a pandemic where we worked out how to work remotely, and we are about to have a CATO built in Dubbo. Approval has just been given by the Western Regional Planning Panel for a \$48 million building in Carrington Avenue that will house over 700 NSW Government employees in the one building. It will be known as the Dubbo Workplace Hub and will allow employees from a range of government agencies to work in the one building side by side.

It only took ten years from the Taskforce recommendation to complete the final planning!

My second idea was Payroll Tax exemptions for regional businesses.
We are still waiting...

Councillor Mathew Dickerson

Mayor of Dubbo Regional Council

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