

South West Times 2 March 2007

THE MONSTER CALLED PERTH IS HUNGRY

Why is it that year after year Perth seems to grow bigger and fatter while the regional areas continue to struggle to survive? Governments of both persuasions at election time make the right noises about investing back into the bush, but for some reason the majority of the \$16.5 billion that the State Government generates always seems to find its way back to Perth.

It is almost as if the 400 000 people living outside of the metropolitan area are there solely to feed this insatiable monster of 1.6m. It's not only a big monster it is also growing. At its current rate of growth by 2030 Perth will hit 2.4 million people spread along 150km of coast line from Yanchep to Dawesville, while the total regional population will have shrunk in number as Perth gobbles up Mandurah.

The combination of one vote one value and the rapid growth of Perth's population compared to that in the bush will see a transfer of more and more power into the hands of Perth based politicians. As a result it will be harder for the regions to attract government money for the infrastructure that is required to ensure that we can continue to produce the mineral and agricultural wealth that ultimately feeds the monster.

Currently the State Government is rolling in a projected budget surplus of \$1.275 billion dollars for 2006/07. Just half of this amount of money invested into key south west road and rail linkages could kick start \$5 billion dollars worth of regional investment into our local coal, alumina and gold mining sectors. Our Port needs upgrading and expanding, the railway lines are at maximum capacity and the roads were designed to handle traffic loads of the 1970s. It is 2006 and we are still working with pre Worsley, Alcoa and Boddington infrastructure.

The day of reckoning is coming when the lack of regional investment will mean that the flow of wealth back to Perth stops and the monster goes hungry. It is no good then rushing out to build a new regional port or railway line as by the time the work is completed the boom will be over and the investors will have gone elsewhere. Opportunities missed are opportunities lost. If Perth wants to continue to live off the fat of the land they might have to learn to invest back into the infrastructure that generates this wealth.