

Robyn Faber, Narrabri Mayor – Email 28 October 2011

Narrabri was experiencing a MAJOR accommodation crisis when the MAC proposal was suggested. All motels and hotels full, few rentals and rent price rises, tourists unable to gain accommodation on arrival in town and our traditional base of business reps no longer able to obtain rooms. Minimum 3 weeks notice needed for one overnight room! (Still pretty hard even with 264 rooms at THE MAC). Problem combination of mine and gas construction, new hospital construction, extension to Plan Breeding Institute, and 4 major BER projects. Majority of demand was from construction, mine worker demand is yet to really occur. Note close towns of Wee Waa and Boggabri similarly affected so a Shire wide problem. We have a 10 fold increase in homelessness in the Shire due to people no longer able to afford rents. No government support for new affordable housing and community housing reverting to higher rentals for miners.

The MAC operates and is classified as a Motel. it takes any type of person, is not exclusive to 'miners'. Our village has had ARTC workers, hospital construction contractors and stranded airline passengers!

Majority of construction for The MAC was done by local people (except for the units themselves): they used local plumbers, electricians, fabricators and powdercoaters, earthworks providers etc. The local Homemakers Store kitted out all the units. Local airconditioner firm provided the air conditioners.

Majority of daily needs are supplied locally: fruit and veg, meat from Cargill at Tamworth, all workers except Manager are local, two chefs in kitchen are training 8 locals in cookery and hospitality, with TAFE Tamworth providing on site training.

Initial concern from moteliers that their 100% occupancy would be impacted has not occurred. They recently commented that the MAC was full and they were all still full.

Secret to making it work is to ensure the village is as close as possible to town and integrated with the town. The MAC has no other stand alone services except for meal and laundry provision. The patrons use all other town facilities and they DO use them. This includes town pool, gyms, shops, restaurants and some sports.

We have had no social issues with patrons. The MAC undertakes random drug and alcohol control on the mines' behalf. Patrons are accommodated in grouped areas according to their shifts which are 12 hours to make the stay as pleasant as possible.

The MAC supports community functions and events (such as free catering for a childcare school fund raiser) and is so far a good community citizen. They are good operators. The village is well landscaped and maintained.

They presently have DA awaiting approval to expand to 900 rooms as a staged extension. We are expecting 2000 mine workers by 2014!

The real benefit to Narrabri apart from the patronage of local business, is the ability for the village to take the heat out of the rental market and enable us to once again promote our region to tourists. We couldn't do that lately as we had no room for them!

The key thing for communities is you need to be ahead of the demand; it is too late for action once the mines start: inaffordability of housing and inability to obtain trade services for daily needs will really stress your community if alternatives are not put in place.

MAC has not stopped other investment, we presently have 18 DAs awaiting a rezoning to enable medium density development in residential areas.