



Upper Spencer Gulf Social Services Planning

Background

The availability and development of critical minerals in the north of the state, combined with renewable energy and potential hydrogen power to facilitate the development of downstream processing and other industry, represents a significant opportunity for major development of the Upper Spencer Gulf region. Planning SA estimates that this development could see between \$20b and \$70b in capital investment in the region, creating up to 20,000 jobs in the construction phase and around 3,000 additional long-term jobs with a population increase of up to 69,000 by 2036. To manage and promote this development a range of plans are being developed by state government and local councils.

This is the type of big-picture, forward-looking government intervention in the economy that SACOSS called for in our 2023-24 budget submission, but while this approach is welcome, there are some limitations in the planning work to date. Most of the plans focus narrowly on economic growth and the infrastructure and workforce required to enable that growth. They do not consider the social implications of that growth and the health and community services needed to ensure that the growth makes a positive contribution to existing communities and that no one is left behind.

Planning Gaps

Planning in SA is subject to the *Planning, Development and Infrastructure Act 2016*, the *State Planning Policies (2019)* and regional plans prepared by the State Planning Commission. This legislative and policy framework does not include social services, with the sole exception of public and affordable housing.

In relation to the Upper Spencer Gulf, a substantial planning effort for the region is underway, with State Planning Commission regional plans in development, and a set of council plans:

- Spencer Gulf Cities – Regional Partnership Priorities (2022)
- Whyalla City Council – Economic Development Strategy (2022)
- Port Pirie Regional Council – Master Plan (not yet available)
- Port Augusta City Council – Growth Plan (not yet available)

Most of the actions in the council plans are directed towards stimulating investment and supporting industry, although noting an intent to use economic growth to foster social initiatives, such as training for long-term unemployed and the expansion of aged care facilities. While attention to these issues is welcome, it falls well short of a comprehensive planning effort for social services. It is also concerning that social planning is being largely left to councils – the tier of government with less resources than the State government.

Planning is needed to provide for a broad array of social impacts and services, including:

- The local economic impacts of booms and busts in the construction phases of the development plans;
- The impact of increased population on:
 - Demand for childcare, schools and the qualified staff in those professions
 - Demand for health services including GPs, community health services (including mental health supports) and hospital infrastructure;
 - Demand for other community services such as disability supports, homelessness services, gambling help and family supports;
- The impact of increased demand and inflationary pressures on current residents on low and fixed incomes, and the support services for those residents;
- Additional social services demand likely to arise from an influx of people with limited connection to the area and fewer support networks.

Even if it is considered that much of the new workforce will be FIFO workers, this still has implications for local communities and for social services there. As one local service provider told SACOSS, FIFO workers will take up hotel and temporary accommodation that we need and would normally use to temporarily house people in crisis.

Proposal

While it would be better if these social impacts were all considered as part of the initial planning and development process, this planning is now urgently needed. Accordingly, in consultation with our members who provide health and community services in the Upper Spencer Gulf, SACOSS is calling on the state government to commit to the development of a collaborative social service plan for the region. ***The government should fund the first stages of such a planning process and SACOSS proposes the following approach.***

Phase 1: Audit of all USG Plans and Modelling of Future Needs

The first step would be a full audit of all USG plans to identify where they deal with social planning and the provision of health and community services, where there are gaps, and a full scoping of social service areas where further planning is required. This could be done by a relevant government agency (e.g. Planning SA, or DHS in collaboration with SACOSS and key sector organisations in the USG), or as an outsourced project, and would also need to model future needs based on the population projections.

Phase 2: Consultation on an ongoing planning and engagement mechanism

Phase 2 of the project would use the research from Phase 1 and begin a process of consultation with health and community service organisations operating in the Upper Spencer Gulf, USG councils, regional development boards and other relevant stakeholders. This consultation may include or culminate in a major regional conference, and would have the aim of agreeing the scale and prioritisation of issues and making recommendations for the best mechanisms for ongoing engagement in service planning and coordination.

Phase 3: Implementation of the plan – uncosted and ongoing.

This would depend on the outcomes of Phase 2 but some mechanism for ongoing engagement, monitoring and planning is required.