



MEDIA RELEASE

Wednesday 8th December, 2021

Mallee Family Care Responds to Inquiry Report

Mallee Family Care has welcomed the release of the Report prepared as a result of the Victorian Government's *Inquiry into the use of school buses in rural and regional Victoria*. Whilst the Organisation continues to hold concerns regarding any changes that may prioritise rationalisation over child safety, it is gratified to note that its Submission has been considered and features among the Report's Findings and Recommendations.

Mallee Family Care produced a lengthy Submission to the Inquiry and consequently, Chief Executive Officer, Ms. Teresa Jayet, was invited to participate in the Public Hearing in July, 2021.

Key to the Organisation's Submission was that a review of public transport in the Mallee, including school bus services, was long overdue and that the needs of community were being largely unmet, by current services.

"It has been over two decades since our region has had any meaningful review of its public transport and anyone can see that our communities have changed a lot over that time. The services being offered to people in the Mallee have not kept pace with our development and needs, and this speaks to a disregard for people living outside the metropolitan area.

"In our Submission we called for an immediate review that looked to provide better community links, as we know that as it stands currently, many people cannot access health services, essential services and retail, education and employment due to a lack of accessible, affordable, and reliable transport options."

Both in its Submission and in the Public Hearing, Mallee Family Care called for a trial of an on-demand bus service, similar to ones being trialled in regional areas of New South Wales, arguing it could provide a cost effective solution for a flexible model of public transport, particularly in outlying areas such as Manangatang.

This proposal generated discussion and Ms. Jayet says Mallee Family Care is pleased to see that it has been listed among the Report's final Recommendations.

"Giving consideration to innovative transport models that are determined by local context and need would be a valuable step forward for communities that have long been at the mercy of policy developed and informed by city circumstances."

In its Submission, Mallee Family Care expressed concerns about school buses, particularly those running in remote areas, being used by the general public.

"While we accept that school buses are routinely used by the general public in city areas, we do believe there is an increased risk for rurally based children who may travel for longer periods and be picked up and dropped off, in isolated areas.

"It is important that we find solutions for public transport in regional areas that do not compromise the safety of our young people."



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Mallee Family Care has in recent years, intensified its advocacy on a number of crucial areas impacting the region and is increasingly seeing its Submissions referenced in Reports. The Agency's work has driven significant reforms and Ms. Jayet says they will continue to advocate for place-based policy that will support better outcomes for people living in regional and rural Australia.

"Our message to Government is that all people, regardless of where they live, deserve quality services and supports."

ENDS



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