NSW REGIONAL COUNCILS MEET WITH COORDINATOR-GENERAL FOR REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT

The NSW Coordinator-General for Refugee Resettlement, Professor Peter Shergold, met with a number of NSW regional councils this week to discuss their ability to integrate refugees from Syria and Iraq into their communities.

Regional councils that have settled refugees before, or have indicated that they have a willingness and the necessary support services and infrastructure to invite refugees into their communities, took part in a roundtable discussion in Sydney earlier this week.

The councils included Wagga Wagga, Newcastle, Wollongong, Shellharbour, Coffs Harbour and Armidale. The meeting was supported by the Local Government Association, and NSW Parliamentary Secretary Catherine Cusack attended.

While the council talks are preliminary, Professor Shergold said it was important to note it was not yet clear which communities the Syrian and Iraqi refugees will be settled in. This will be decided by the Commonwealth Government, in consultation with the NSW Government.

“It was very positive to have six regional councils from thriving areas of NSW show such enthusiasm in helping refugees,” Professor Shergold said. “The key is to ensure that the councils are full partners in planning for the new arrivals.”

“There was a lot put on the table for discussion: the provision of intensive English language centres; the challenge of obtaining driving licenses, which is of great importance in regional areas due to distances; the recognition of overseas qualifications and bridging courses; and access to housing, employment, education and training opportunities.

“These council areas already have thriving multicultural communities. What’s encouraging to me the willingness of councils and their communities to welcome refugees and help them establish new lives in NSW.”

The NSW Government pledged to take a minimum of 4000 refugees from Syria and Iraq earlier this year. A small number of refugees may arrive in NSW before the end of the year; however, most are expected to arrive over the next 18 months.

Professor Shergold said collaborating with regional councils – and soon metropolitan councils - is one of many ways the resettlement program can be enhanced to benefit refugees.

“We’re talking to educators, businesses, resettlement experts, NGOs and all levels of government to devise a program that best suits the needs of these particular refugees,” he said.

“There is a lot of work ahead of us. The refugees are coming to Australia to build new lives and leave the worst behind them. My hope is that regional NSW can play a key part in helping to achieve that.”

MEDIA:

Kylie Keogh | DPC Media | 0466 496 785
Lisa Thomas | 0411 481 756