

Region's residents are the State's poor cousins

Families struggle with low wages and high cost of living

By **REBECCA LOLLBACK**
Reporter

WHILE residents of ritzy Mosman in Sydney's North Shore have an average income of \$130,000 a year, workers on the Northern Rivers are among the lowest paid in NSW.

Tenterfield has the lowest total average income in the whole of the state at \$27,247.

This is closely followed by Kyogle at \$29,182, Richmond Valley at \$31,224; Byron Bay at \$33,438 and Lismore at \$34,461.

Of all of the local government areas on the Northern Rivers, people in Ballina earned the most, with an average income of \$36,844.

But that is still about \$12,000 less than the state average of \$48,755.

These new figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics show people in this region are continuing to struggle because of the low wages and high costs of living, says Tony Davies, the Northern Rivers Social Development Council's chief executive.



Tony Davies

"The income gap nationally is getting wider," he said.

"Incomes in our region are about 60-70% of the state average and often half or a third of the average Sydney wage.

"Traditionally our region has very high unemployment.

"In the past that has been offset by housing costs being a lot lower than in other areas.

"But in the last five or six years we have seen the cost of housing going up considerably – rents and the prices of homes.

"Also, people do face significant travel costs because we have to rely on private cars.

"So increasing fuel costs is another thing that has an impact.

"People's disposable incomes – the money they use to have a good life in our region – have dropped.

"We have also seen downturns in

key industries such as tourism."

That's the bad news.

But Mr Davies believes there are solutions to our income woes.

"There are roles for all three levels of government to support affordable housing developments and public housing," he said.

"With transport, what we are going to see is that people will really suffer because we don't yet have effective options.

"NRSDC has been advocating very strongly that the State Government urgently develops an integrated transport strategy to come up with a modern, best practice solution.

"There's a young woman I know who was training to become a childcare worker.

"But she had to travel from Kyogle to Lismore every day, and it cost her \$10 a day.

"When you don't earn much, that is a lot of money."

The development of the National Broadband Network is also important in bridging the gap between regional and metropolitan incomes, Mr Davies says.

"We have very skilled people in our region," he said.

"Fast broadband will help us to look at how these people can access what used to be city-based jobs."

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NORTHERN RIVERS INCOMES

Wages & salaries

LGA NAME	EARNERS	INCOME	AV. WAGE & SALARY INCOME
Ballina	15,999	585,518,260	36,597
Byron	11,756	386,186,638	32,850
Kyogle	3,279	110,982,542	33,846
Lismore	17,642	627,452,237	35,566
Richmond Valley	7,730	268,440,789	34,727
Tenterfield	2,154	70,211,881	32,596
Tweed	30,694	1,154,754,544	37,622
NSW	3,052,327	150,397,127,830	48,793

NORTHERN RIVERS INCOMES

Own Unincorporated Business

LGA NAME	EARNERS	INCOME	AV. INCOME
Ballina	5,015	76,089,547	15,172
Byron	5,609	75,344,625	13,433
Kyogle	1,679	7,568,125	4,508
Lismore	5,596	63,537,972	11,354
Richmond Valley	2,557	17,624,577	6,893
Tenterfield	1,248	2,270,036	1,819
Tweed	8,602	125,676,650	14,610
New South Wales	589,811	11,409,707,069	19,345

NORTHERN RIVERS INCOMES

Other income (excl. govt pensions & allowances)

LGA NAME	EARNERS	INCOME	AV. OTHER INCOME
Ballina	2,676	8,384,403	3,133
Byron	1,953	8,880,606	4,547
Kyogle	437	768,367	1,758
Lismore	2,035	4,986,004	2,450
Richmond Valley	790	1,810,262	2,291
Tenterfield	336	724,166	2,155
Tweed	4,669	14,450,112	3,095
NSW	375,936	1,972,095,770	5,246

NORTHERN RIVERS INCOMES

Superannuation and Annuity

LGA NAME	EARNERS	INCOME	AV. SUPER & ANNUITY INCOME
Ballina	1,048	24,441,008	23,322
Byron	554	12,368,603	22,326
Kyogle	146	2,871,453	19,667
Lismore	706	16,793,552	23,787
Richmond Valley	310	6,506,128	20,988
Tenterfield	113	2,344,280	20,746
Tweed	1,855	42,200,778	22,750
NSW	106,315	2,460,001,556	23,139

NORTHERN RIVERS INCOMES

Investment

LGA NAME	EARNERS	INCOME	AV. INVESTMENT INCOME
Ballina	15,944	138,354,727	8,678
Byron	12,005	106,437,409	8,933
Kyogle	3,143	15,751,411	5,012
Lismore	15,513	78,589,462	5,066
Richmond Valley	6,654	23,950,940	3,599
Tenterfield	2,242	10,959,930	4,888
Tweed	29,442	199,237,714	6,767
NSW	2,508,704	20,639,275,025	8,227

NORTHERN RIVERS INCOMES

Total income (all sources excl. govt pensions & allowances)

LGA NAME	EARNERS	INCOME	AV. TOTAL INCOME
Ballina	22,003	832,787,934	36,844
Byron	17,681	591,217,862	33,438
Kyogle	4,727	137,941,897	29,182
Lismore	22,964	791,359,227	34,461
Richmond Valley	10,195	318,332,696	31,224
Tenterfield	3,175	86,510,293	27,247
Tweed	43,259	1,538,319,797	35,514
NSW	3,833,009	196,879,207,250	48,755

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Women turning to domestic violence

AN APPARENT increase in women being charged with domestic violence-related assaults will be one of the issues explored by a new State Government inquiry.

The NSW Legislative Council's Standing Committee on Social Issues is calling on all interested people and stakeholders to contribute to the inquiry which will investigate strategies to reduce breaches and improve compliance with Apprehended Domestic Violence Orders.

Lennox Head-based Liberal MLC, Catherine Cusack, who sits on the committee, said the committee will also look into new technologies such as GPS bracelets.

"We have picked up some disturbing trends that we don't understand and the minister wants that looked into," she said.

"I've been involved in (domestic violence) inquiries before but unfortunately it just keeps going on.

ASSAULT TRENDS

Domestic violence related assaults 2010/2011:

Ballina:	137/128
Byron Bay:	96/89
Lismore:	249/205
Richmond Valley:	151/118
Tweed:	301/270

"It's not an issue we seem to be able to find the answer to but we have to keep updating our legislation and our technology and I'm hoping this inquiry will focus on things that work and will help ensure that the government is better focusing its resources.

"Domestic violence, family violence – it appears that there are more women perpetrators, that police are having to act against more women and we don't understand that. Is that because more offences are being committed, or because the laws are not being used properly or is it that more resources are directed to men

and more are needed towards women?"

"Perhaps we didn't understand the problem correctly in the first place.

"There are a lot of questions there and I'm hoping this inquiry can find some answers and by talking to local communities – I know our community has a tremendous amount to gain by understanding this better."

The committee will also look at early intervention strategies to prevent domestic violence and whether existing penalties for domestic violence are adequate.

Initial hearings will be held on October 21 and December 5 and a report is expected mid next year.

For further information, guidelines for making submissions and terms of reference, visit www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/socialissues, or phone (02) 9230 3509.

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