

ACCC,
Re: GROCERY PRICING ENQUIRY,

I would like to take this opportunity to highlight some features of our current retail grocery duopoly, which I believe disadvantages our communities.

Over many years the closure of small independent grocers has contributed to a breakdown in community relationships.

The social structure and dynamics of suburbs, particularly outer suburbs are weakened by the loss of the local (independent) grocer. The grocery store is key to a successful strip or community-shopping precinct. Retail rental is always more expensive near this high traffic store. The independent grocer generally owned and ran the store and certainly gave personalised service. Too few have survived.

Suburban shopping precincts historically grew with the population and higher density housing was close to these shops as often are trams, trains and buses. The development of “Greenfield centres” containing one or two supermarkets and perhaps twenty to forty speciality stores are dependant upon cheap land providing plenty of car parking — they often have little access to public transport.

Victoria’s “Melbourne 2030” (The State Governments planning blueprint) encourages high-density housing near activity centres (often suburban shopping precincts), however many of these activity centres now have a shortage of grocery, fruit and meat retailers.

We have all witnessed the demise of strip and community shopping precincts — the “for rent” signs, the painted out windows, the motor mower repair business operating in what was once a successful retail shop. Often we can trace this to the closure of it’s greatest drawcard — *The Independent Grocer*.

It might be impossible to measure how a suburban retail precinct contributes to a feeling of community and “belonging”. I can only rely on my experience as an outer suburban retailer for 50 years. Shopping for many people involves much more than the purchase of goods and services. To be recognised, addressed by name, to have knowledge of customers families and friends, to mourn with them at times of loss and to share their happiness are important to many peoples well-being. It is my opinion that older people stay independent in their own homes longer if they receive community recognition and support.

A strength of a community retail centre is local ownership. These small business people contribute to the fabric of their community, supporting all sorts of activities and of course spending a large portion of their incomes locally.

A form of market failure is apparent and governments have not taken into account the social and indirect benefits of suburban retail precincts. They are community assets. Planning regulators almost encourage their demise.

Norman Williams Phc.MPS.MACPP.

Owner/Partner retail pharmacist in outer suburban Melbourne

Retail sales and pharmacy staff presenter/lecturer 25 years

Ex Councillor Pharmaceutical Society of Victoria

Ex State Branch Pharmacy Guild of Australia (Vic Branch)

Ex Councillor Shire of Eltham

Foundation member and Vice President Eltham Chamber of Commerce

Attendee of numerous retail and business seminars in Australia and overseas