

When it all gets too much, take \$7000 to escape the rat race



Never happier than since they moved to the country ... Troy, Logan, Jayne and Steve McCarthy at Tamworth Oxley Lookout yesterday. Photo: Robert Chappel

Alexandra Smith

STATE POLITICS

STEVE McCARTHY knew it was time to escape Sydney when he realised he loathed the city more than he liked it.

Mr McCarthy and his young family fled Erskine Park in western Sydney for Tamworth, for a life without traffic congestion and crowded public transport.

And the state government hopes others will do the same. It is offering a one-off, \$7000 grant to encourage frazzled city dwellers to leave Sydney, Newcastle or Wollongong for regional NSW on the condition

they do not spend more than \$600,000 on a home.

The four-year relocation scheme will start on July 1 and be capped at 40,000 grants.

But while the government's definition of Sydney stretches from the Hawkesbury to the Blue Mountains and the central coast, Newcastle and Wollongong are restricted to their local government boundaries.

In an embarrassing loophole, this means that a move between suburbs or even across the road in the Hunter or Illawarra could land a family in the neighbouring local government area, making them eligible for a \$7000 grant.

CASH TO GO

- ▶ One-off \$7000 grant to move from Sydney, Newcastle or Wollongong to regional NSW.
- ▶ Four-year scheme starts on July 1.
- ▶ The new home must cost less than \$600,000.

The Wollongong MP Noreen Hay said she was absolutely astounded that the government was encouraging people to move to a neighbouring suburb that was potentially a "seven-minute

drive if you hit bad traffic". But the Treasurer, Mike Baird, said the government would keep a close eye on the allocation of grants.

"We will monitor this process on an ongoing basis through the Office of State Revenue to ensure that applications reflect genuine relocations to regional NSW areas," Mr Baird said.

"If examples start to emerge where the process is being distorted or people are taking advantage of it, we will look for appropriate opportunities to address these concerns."

The government expects the scheme will cost about

\$47 million a year, depending on its popularity.

Mr McCarthy, who left his job as a production manager at an electronic systems company to buy a mobile cafe franchise in Tamworth, said his two young sons had never been happier.

"It got to the point in Sydney that there was nowhere to go to avoid something that I didn't like," Mr McCarthy said.

Their move in December was too early to qualify for the grant but he is sure it will encourage others to leave Sydney. "We spent \$5500 just on removalists. That \$7000 certainly would have been handy," Mr McCarthy said.