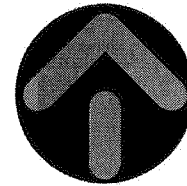


NORTHERN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT BOARD INC.

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26th June 2008

Committee Secretary
Standing Committee on Infrastructure, Transport,
Regional Development and Local Government
PO Box 6021
House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

To Whom It May Concern

RE: INQUIRY INTO A NEW REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUNDING PROGRAM

The Northern Regional Development Board has had a broad range of experiences with the now abandoned Regional Partnerships Program, and wishes to convey to the Inquiry its views on the program and its value to sustainable regional development.

In summary, the Board's experiences with Regional Partnerships have always been positive and we believe it to be a fantastic program that offers realistic and flexible solutions to the challenges faced by regional and remote communities. The guidelines, application and administration process, while stringent and detailed, seemed fair and reasonable as far as we were concerned, and compel organisations and communities to develop and in-depth understanding of their proposed project from the outset.

The real value of Regional Partnerships was that it recognised the realities facing rural and regional communities. Often, populations are small and the quantitative financial or employment outcomes of projects may seem low when compared to more populous areas, but this is all relative, and the potential value and impact of projects on the sustainability of regional communities is often profound.

Unlike many other funding programs, there was an element of subjectivity to the Regional Partnerships Program that allowed small and micro communities to access the large capital investment and infrastructure they need without being forced into unrealistic expectations on financial returns or jobs that may be more appropriate for larger populations.

An example of a recent Regional Partnerships project in the region that has been highly successful is the redevelopment of Steamtown Peterborough into a world class rail heritage tourism attraction. The project is approximately 50% complete, but is already generating significant results for the community of Peterborough, and the seed funding provided by Regional Partnerships is expected make possible over \$1,000,000 in additional investment into the project. This will ensure that Peterborough is able to position itself as a nationally significant and indeed world class rail tourism destination – an absolutely lifesaving accomplishment in a district of only 2000 people with very few options for economic survival in the face of drought and the ending of its past function as a national rail transport hub.

One of the future projects that the Northern Regional Development Board would have looked to Regional Partnerships for assistance with is airport terminals in regional and remote communities across the vast Flinders Ranges and Outback region. These are required in order to capitalise on the potential for high-yield and niche international tourism; and to support small communities in accessing the fly-in/fly-out mining industry across the region, therefore retaining their population bases and sustaining their communities. Another example of a possible Regional Partnerships project would be the completion of Next G telecommunications infrastructure along the length of the Stuart Highway, where a 'dead spot' of approximately 300 kilometres remains and continues to disadvantage the surrounding communities and considerable traffic volume.

All of the above are examples of projects that, in isolation, may not lead to significant financial return in the short term, but without which communities are left forever stagnating, without the infrastructure or opportunities to facilitate growth and maintain wellbeing.

Community sustainability and community growth need to be measured and assessed subjectively, and Regional Partnerships was a mechanism for doing this, recognising that the quantitative outcomes from small communities, whether they be six people, 200 people, or 4000 people, are in vastly different orders of magnitude to larger populations, but that the impacts on any of these regional communities' sustainability and livelihood are real and significant, and must be supported.

Yours Sincerely



Claire Wiseman
Acting Chief Executive Officer

