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

Dear Sir/Madam

INQUIRY INTO A NEW REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUNDING PROGRAM

Thank you for the opportunity to comment in relation to the inquiry into a new Regional Development Funding Program.

The Shire of Gingin was involved, and continues to be so, with the Wheatbelt Area Consultative Committee (WACC) in a partnership that combined research and the preparation of a submission through the Regional Partnerships Program (RPP) for a funding contribution towards the Gingin Regional Hardcourt Facility. This funding contribution, initially revoked by the new Government, is currently under review.

Furthermore, Shire Staff has attended courses run by WACC including Business and Project Planning and Grants Expos. WACC Project Staff has extensive knowledge in formulating Project and Business Plans, as an integral part of the grant application process and as vital documentation support used concurrently with an application.

WACC is a vital information outlet in terms of sourcing alternative grant programs to suit differing initiatives. It is important that other grants programs be sourced to be used in partnership with programs like the now defunct Regional Partnerships program.

Apart from its funding portfolio, amongst other projects, WACC oversees a Youth program. This is an initiative to empower the youth of the Wheatbelt to make a difference in terms of the direction and lifestyle issues for youth of today.

Please see the following response to the four questions that were forwarded:

- 1. Please provide your thoughts on future funding of regional programs in order to invest in genuine and accountable community infrastructure projects.***

The RPP application went through a rigorous assessment by the Regional ACC Board. It was this process that determined if insufficient research had been undertaken as to the project's viability and, concurrently, determined the project's integrity and whether it was worthy of

submitting to Canberra. Retaining this part of the Regional structure, will assist in determining whether the project is worthy of further consideration by Departmental Heads.

The two distinct application processes (Board application and TRAX application) can be considered as overly labour intensive. The combining of the two applications into a single submission format would lessen the application confusion and the doubling up of documentation. It would be advantageous if the new program could develop a single application system that can be presented to the new Regional Development Area (RDA) Boards, Government Departments and the Ministerial Committee.

In the Shire of Gingin's case, WACC supplied the Shire with a wealth of information and advice to enable a well-researched and Board approved application to the now defunct Regional Partnerships Program. By virtue of this rigorous process and subsequent well-researched application, the submitter can assume that its proposal will be given favourable consideration.

2. How should the Federal Government design regional programs in a way to minimise administrative costs and duplication for taxpayers.

This could be achieved by providing a local body (such as a regional RDA) the capacity to act as a direct and major link to on-the-ground initiatives as well as providing research and feedback to the Federal Government. Additionally, such bodies could continue to provide and, where possible, enhance links with all tiers of Government, disseminating and collating data on behalf of regional groups, Government agencies and for their own benefits as an Agency.

Additionally, they could have the capacity to act in project management or contract roles in initiatives where regional requirements have been identified and coordinate local community groups, Local Government, State Government and others to achieve project success.

The defunct WACC has expanded its fundamental objective to include other support services including, but not limited to, facilitating community-based workshops, designing user-friendly templates and running grant writing sessions that sustain regional development and support capacity building.

3. Examine the former government's practise and grants outlined in the Australian national audit office report on Regional partnerships with the aim of providing advice on future funding of regional programs.

Within the suggested single submission format, a defined, measurable, application rating system could be adopted whereby the Regional RDA Board could value rate an application, thereby initiating subsequent re-visiting, if needed, or non-approval. At a local level this would give more empowerment taking into consideration the benefits of local knowledge, on behalf of the Federal Government, to quantify and legitimise the potential of a project. This will undoubtedly give more responsibility to the RDA Boards, whereby a greater understanding of defined and transparent criteria will have to be administered. This could give rise to a

smoother approval process with the benefits of quicker turn-around times if an application is value-rated when submitted to the Department. This will no doubt place greater emphasis on RDA Staff to deliver well-researched and topical advice to Project Managers in regards to the development of applications.

This process would only be successful if regional assessment protocols are defined and a transparent rating system is used through all stages of an application's approval progression. Further, it is imperative that any rated assessment is done in conjunction with local advice and feedback from the Regional RDA given their awareness of local issues that could influence certain aspects of a project's development. It is for this reason that a defined and transparent rating system be consistent through all RDA's when assessing the merits of applications received.

4. Examine the former government's practise and grants in the Regional Partnerships Program after the audit period of 2003-2006 with the aim of providing advice on future funding of regional programs.

It is interesting to note that the anomalies identified in the Audit Report in relation to some of the practises in terms of Departmental Staff making decisions outside the guidelines, were not made by the ACC Board or Staff Members. Using the recommendation of an RDA Board for a project when used in conjunction with a value-rating system could carry additional weight in terms of gaining further Departmental and Ministerial Committee approval for a project.

If the new RDA network is allowed to have further input into a new venture or funding program utilising the application rating system, local issues could be addressed including strategic development and community consultation aspects. This would lead to viable regional and community outcomes through the provision of better quality and sustainable projects.

If you require further information please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely



**LINDA J FIDGE
EXECUTIVE SUPPORT OFFICER**

File: GRA/1

