

House of Representatives Inquiry Submission Wheatbelt Region

Closing Date for Submission - Monday 14th July 2008

Please complete as many pages as required

Name: Jim Fraser
Position Role (if applicable): Chief Executive Officer
Organisation (if applicable): Shire of Lake Grace
Region: Wheatbelt Region
Signature:
<p>1. Please provide your thoughts on future funding of regional programs in order to invest in genuine and accountable community infrastructure projects.</p> <p>Areas of regional Australia will decline unless funds for community infrastructure projects are provided at a federal level. Co-located facilities have limited input from the State government so are created through partnerships with local government and federal government. The Shire of Lake Grace is committed to the best utilisation of its assets, creating multi-use facilities through these various partnerships.</p> <p>Local government cannot sustain itself while it has responsibility for the road networks. For example, approximately two-thirds of Shire of Lake Grace general rates are allocated to maintain 2491 kilometres of sealed and unsealed roads. Without this responsibility, we would have sufficient funds to maintain and grow our own community-based assets. This commitment by Council recognises the social benefits of the road network to the community (so people can move freely around and participate in community events), the importance of road to farmers to transport grain and stock to market and conversely for inputs such as fertilises, fuel and seed. However this does not leave enough funds to spend on other community infrastructure.</p> <p>We acknowledge the Roads to Recovery programme has been an excellent source of funding. However, we still require an avenue to federal funds, albeit on a competitive basis, to ensure our community has adequate infrastructure, particularly medical facilities. The State government does not provide support for these projects and so Federal funds are the only source for smaller rural communities. These funds also provide opportunities to expand our economic base to address such areas as natural resource and water management, youth migration, develop biodiversity and encourage innovation. Those funding programmes have to be made available for sub-regional centres such as Lake Grace.</p>
<p>2. How should the Federal Government design regional programs in a way to minimise administrative costs and duplication for taxpayers.</p> <p>We support the concept of the Area Consultative Committees transition to Regional Development Australia committees as a one stop shop for all federal programmes, thus ensuring less costs and duplication for tax payers.</p> <p>We have always found the service provided by the Wheatbelt Area Consultative Committee and staff to be positive, supportive and professional. We value and rely on this service.</p> <p>Lake Grace is located 350 kilometres south-east of Perth and 160 kilometres from the small regional centre of Narrogin. The geographical and experiential distance between Canberra and isolated communities such as ours is great. The professional support and networks provided by the WACC lessens this distance and the professional isolation experienced by many working in the regions. WACC allows our communities to provide feedback to the federal government on regional issues and the various government programs and services. WACC's local knowledge means the sometimes complex grant application process can be expedited or the decision not to proceed made by the applicant. This local knowledge needs to be recognised and utilised by the federal government in the development of the new funding programmes by giving the ACC's the opportunity to contribute to this process.</p> <p>We advocate the role of the RDA networks to be expanded to include facilitating community development strategies (for example, project planning, capacity building, community engagement, leadership and mentoring, research, workshops,</p>

Forward Submission to –

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Email: itrdlg.reps@aph.gov.au

Post: Committee Secretary; Standing Committee on Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government; PO Box 6021; House of Representatives; Parliament House; CANBERRA ACT 2600
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It is critical for the success of the network for RDA project officers to be based closer to these communities. The Wheatbelt region covers 154,862 square kilometres and project officers from the various state and federal government agencies servicing this area are often responsible for an unrealistic number of communities separated by hundreds of kilometres. These drawbacks discourage people from applying for these positions, and leads to their burn-out and dilution of the services provided.

3. Examine the former government's practices and grants outlined in the Australian National Audit Office report on Regional Partnerships http://www.anao.gov.au/director/publications/auditreports/2007-2008.cfm?item_id=40BC1C6C1560A6E8AAA43AAB96708E61 with the aim of providing advice on future funding of regional programs.

4. Examine the former government's practices 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.

Whilst the previous Regional Partnerships allocations to rural areas may have been politically motivated, they still provided rural areas with infrastructure that would not have been created without that particular funding.

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