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

Dear Committee Members

**RESPONSE TO TERMS OF REFERENCE;  
 INQUIRY INTO NEW REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUNDING PROGRAM**

In response to the Terms of Reference for the House of Representatives Standing Committee Inquiry into New Regional Development Funding, the Golden Plains Shire would like to draw your attention to the following important points:

The Regional Partnerships Program (RPP) has played a critical role supporting the social and economic sustainability of Golden Plains Shire, other Rural Local Government Areas and their respective communities.

In the Golden Plains Shire, examples of this include:

- The Bannockburn Family Services Centre

The Centre provides a new home for the Bannockburn Kindergarten as well as long day childcare, maternal and child health, allied health consulting rooms, open plan offices for health professionals and a multi-purpose community meeting space. It provides a "one stop shop" for family services and is a central meeting point for families from not only Bannockburn, but the surrounding towns including Inverleigh, Teesdale, Meredith and Lethbridge.

Golden Plains Shire contributed \$910,000 to the centre, plus the land, with the Federal Regional Partnerships Program and State Governments Small Town Development Fund contributing \$410,000 each, as well as a \$40,000 contribution from the Bannockburn Kindergarten.

- The Smythesdale Business, Health and Community Hub

The Hub draws together the outcomes of a number of processes in which Council and the local community have been engaged in recent years, including the Smythesdale Urban Design Framework, Smythesdale Community Plan, and Council's efforts to attract a doctor and allied health services to the region. The project includes four small business offices, tourism information centre, four medical and allied health rooms, pharmaceutical drop-off facility and community meeting room, along with shared kitchen facilities and amenities. A parking bay for the Shire's community transport vehicles and mobile library service is also located at the site.

Council's approach to funding the project was innovative, as it relied on strong partnerships between all of the funding agencies. In addition to Council's contribution of \$200,000 the Federal Government contributions included \$400,000 from the Regional Partnerships Program and \$200,000 from its Rural Medical Infrastructure Fund, whilst the State Government contributions included \$250,000 from Regional Development Victoria, \$200,000 from the Department of Human Services and \$150,000 from the Department of Planning and Community Development.



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- The Ballarat to Skipton Rail Trail

The Ballarat-Skipton Rail Trail project resulted with the construction of a high quality tourism and recreational Rail Trail. The project has built a trail suitable for recreational walkers, bike riders and horse riders with a strong emphasis on family involvement. The project included trail surfacing, major road crossings, minor road crossings, signage, and traffic barriers.

A key feature of the project has been the partnership between three local government authorities (City of Ballarat, Golden Plains and Corangamite Shires), volunteer groups (Rail Trail Management Committee and Ballarat Bicycle User Group), and state-wide advocacy group (Bicycle Victoria) as well as State and Federal Governments.

This \$680,000 project included contributions of \$230,000 from the State Government's Small Towns Development Fund, \$230,000 from the Federal Government's Regional Partnerships Program and \$220,000 from Local Government.

These and other initiatives would not have been possible without funding support from the Federal Government, in which case both the social and economic health of our communities and the financial sustainability of Council would be severely diminished.

In this context, consideration of a new regional development funding program should ensure the following features are delivered:

- Project Specification and Assessment Criteria

Council would like to emphasise the importance of maintaining the program's community development and economic development focus, with an emphasis on cross government support for project initiative such as those described above. Co-contribution from Federal, State and Local Governments, in partnership with communities has been a cornerstone for the success of regional development projects in the Golden Plains Shire.

In addition, the program's broad focus and variable scales of assessment are important features that should be retained and enhanced. In order to maximise opportunities for collaboration on regional development projects the program must continue to be open to a wide variety of proposals that improve community and economic wellbeing. As a result, Council would like to see that both the project specification and application process includes a simple expression of interest before a full project submission is required to be prepared. Furthermore, the complexity of the application should reflect the scale of the project proposal and the level of funding sought.

In order to ensure that grant applications can be made in a timely and coordinated way it is desirable for the program to continue as a rolling program. Payment in advance of project commencement should be maintained to assist Councils with cash flow management.

Council would like to emphasise the importance of the role local commonwealth government staff play in providing advice at the project development, expression of interest and preliminary assessment stage. Local assessment should remain a key feature of the program, ensuring that the full project context can be clearly understood and communicated effectively when project submissions are sent to Canberra for final assessment. At this stage it is important that the program ensures "reasonable" timelines for decision making on final submissions.



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- Project Outcomes and Methodology

In addition to the project specification and assessment criteria discussed, Council would like to emphasise the following points with respect to the types of outcomes that should be sought by projects funded from the program.

The project examples presented earlier in this submission highlight the importance of creating places that promote and integrate community and economic activity centres. The Bannockburn Family Services Centre and the Smythesdale Business, Health and Community Hub achieve this by providing infrastructure at a local level enabling flexible delivery of key services from a multitude of local, state and federal agencies and the private sector. The childcare, community health, GP and allied health services, small business offices, hot desks, tourism facilities and meeting spaces provide infrastructure and services in communities that link and stimulate social and economic wellbeing. The Ballarat to Skipton Rail Trail project highlights how regional development funding has delivered enhanced tourism, economic and recreational opportunities in the Golden Plains Shire. Council would like these methodologies and outcomes to remain a strong focus of the new regional development funding program.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Commonwealth Government and the Geelong Area Consultative Committee for the opportunity to present a submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on this important issue. Federal Government regional development funding is critical to the social and economic sustainability of Golden Plains Shire, other rural local government areas and their respective communities. I trust that the submission presented will guide your decision making on new regional development funding.

Yours sincerely



**ROD NICHOLLS**  
**CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER**