

House of Representatives Inquiry Submission Wheatbelt Region

Closing Date for Submission - Monday 14th July 2008

Please complete as many pages as required

Name: Kylie Whitehead
Position Role (if applicable): Development officer
Organisation (if applicable): Wongan-Ballidu Shire
Region: Wheatbelt Region
Signature:

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

1. While this comment is likely to be dismissed (either because of a genuine, strategic problem or because it seems "too strange") it must, nevertheless, be suggested because it impacts us so very much: Set up the complete office, which manages these funding programmes, in Western Australia – to handle all other States' requests from WA. Now imagine what that would be like for you in the Eastern States. Are you appalled? Doubtful you would ever be properly understood? Disgusted that a body so influential for your projects should be located so far away? Examine your reaction to this suggestion then realise this is how it affects us ALL THE TIME. Without making alterations to the process for deciding who gets the funding and who doesn't (how many of the Members on the deciding panel are residents of WA?), this scheme is always going to lack integrity and will never be genuinely accountable – anything to the contrary is icing on mud.

2. Examine the current make up of WA Local Government funding availability coming from Federal and State bodies, in connection with both the Constitution AND the actual, real-life flow of funds to Local Government – as it now exists and as it has evolved since Federation in the face of what "duties" Local Government now takes on for our taxpayers and citizens – then see where there are gaps, where our citizens are not receiving funds for services from the taxes they pay. Eg: health and building by-laws set and imposed by Federal and State governments must be handled, paid for and dealt with by Local Government personnel – no funding from Fed and State Govt for that.

3. In the wash of Federal and State Govts pointing their finger at each other and saying "It's your responsibility, not ours", we are still faced with NOT ENOUGH ELECTRICITY, ageing water lines, ageing sport and recreation buildings, health services we have to pay for.

4. Currently, in the majority of Shires in the Wheatbelt of WA there is a huge imposed prohibition on our developing and growing the population and enterprise due to: i. not enough electricity supply to meet any extra demand for power; ii. land availability for new buildings – both housing and industrial; iii. lengthy waiting for Govt paperwork to be completed for the land developments we are undertaking.

5. There is a very great need for financial assistance to Local Government Authorities in the Wheatbelt in order that they may undertake land development and provide infrastructure (roads, electricity, water, sewerage and telephone) basic and vital for people to build here.

This is most certainly THE greatest need for LGAs who are keen to grow and develop. An incentive mechanism, set within a scheme, to allow LGAs the capacity to build the arterial roads, dig the channels, lay all the pipes and cables, install sewerage lines and provide the cross-overs, is completely necessary in the face of the enormous demand there is for housing AND the overwhelming NEED there is for people – to live and work in the rural towns. We need people: we have more jobs available than people to fill them (in a town of 900 people we have over 90 jobs available – that's a twist: we don't have 10% unemployment, we have 10% unfilled positions). We can't get those people because they have nowhere to live – we don't have enough houses – we can't build them because we don't have the land – because it takes anything up to 2-3 years for sub-divisions to go through State Government and because it is up to the LGAs to pay for the infrastructure. There is a need for finance to pay for the infrastructure – it is an investment into the future of our country, but LGAs just do not have the revenue-raising capacity to pay for this up-front expense.

Forward Submission to –

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
(Note- In order to facilitate electronic publishing of submissions, the Committee would prefer posted submissions to be sent on disk or CD-ROM in Microsoft Word® or Portable Document Format (PDF).

6. Similarly, we NEED more electricity and we need new/up-graded powerlines because they are now 50 yrs old. We need a supply that doesn't pollute (ie. NOT one that uses fossil fuels and causes carbon emissions). Now, we actually DO, right now, have the space and natural resources we can draw down on to set up sustainable, renewable power stations, right here, however..... no funds. We could build within 18 months, 10 power stations in rural and regional Wheatbelt locations to meet all now-and-future needs for electricity (so we don't keep meeting brown-outs and black-out due to lack of adequate quantities of electricity) which would SAVE more than \$100 million in conductor up-grades, alone – and not even taking into account the savings on fossil fuel purchases or the expenses caused by carbon emissions. This is a genuine, community infrastructure project we must invest in and Federal funding is vital.

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

Firstly, it must be said that sometimes administration centres MUST be duplicated IF we are to have integrity in our statement that we are here to serve our taxpayers EFFECTIVELY. This relates to the comments made above – no-one can be of genuine and effective service to WA rural/regional communities if they don't live here, if they have an office 5,000kms away, live and work in a city (with traffic lights and traffic jams and over 3 million people to contend with for space within a boundary less than 1/300th the area we have for a mere 72,000 people)... it would be like us trying to effectively serve the people of Singapore. Our climate is different for a start, let alone population density and job profiles!! It is hugely costly to taxpayers when money is spent/dolled out unwisely, as is caused through decisions being made by people who have NO relationship with the conditions and circumstances being faced by those asking for the funds. This MUST be weighed up wisely against the very obvious and well-known duplication practices, such as - Canberra/Sydney has the head office, which is devoid of any sense of relatedness to another State, so a State office is set up (in the city, of course) which is devoid of relatedness to the rural area, so an other office is set up there and each of them draws down wages and office expenses and building costs. But this does NOT have to be.....

Administrative costs can well be reduced while there are the necessary duplications going on, just the same. For instance, the large engineering company, GHD Engineering, has NO headquarters; and, employees, managers and executive staff do not have to go into an office to work. Communication is now so advanced that they can do away with the cost of a building and instead merely set up broadband computer lines, video telephone systems, etc, and be equally as effective as causing everyone to travel to a huge office where telephones are still needed to speak to someone in another department as close as the next room.

Another duplication aspect is that of Federal and State govts offering funding for the same programme – however must say that from the viewpoint of Local Government, it is such a bonus to have more than one funding body offering grants for similar projects. Sometimes the criteria and people who sit on the selection panels are diverse, so an application may slip through one body, but be deemed appropriate by the other.

Duplication can exist also in terms of who is able to receive the funding and it is negative in this regard when we are competing with State and Federal Government bodies/agents and when those departments use the funds to pay their staff – eg: Greening Australia, Department of Environment and Conservation contest funding in NRM grants and receive it over LGAs and use it to pay their staff, over LGAs being able to employ NRM officers.

Natural Resource funding is an area where we could well do with funding for employment of full-time personal operating out of Council offices.

Similarly, funding to afford full-time wages for Development Officers could well be supplied via funding from Federal Govt. Especially in Wheatbelt Shires where there is a great need to grow and develop their communities and create sustainable practices for the future viability of those communities. These officers/Managers could well be funded with the LGAs offering their Strategic Plans as the reasoning and

Forward Submission to –

2

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
(Note- In order to facilitate electronic publishing of submissions, the Committee would prefer posted submissions to be sent on disk or CD-ROM in Microsoft Word® or Portable Document Format (PDF).

authenticity behind their requests for funds, as well as a list of projects and the expected budgets for each project (given that the development Officers/Managers will be employed to fully budget each project).

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.

Must apologise for not starting this response in time to give this question attention.

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.

Must apologise for not starting this response in time to give this question attention.

Forward Submission to –

3

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
(Note- In order to facilitate electronic publishing of submissions, the Committee would prefer posted submissions to be sent on disk or CD-ROM in Microsoft Word® or Portable Document Format (PDF).