



LOWER MURRAY LINKED CONGREGATIONS

MURRAY BRIDGE, MYPOLONGA, ROCKLEIGH AND TALEM BEND.

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10th. July, 2008.

The Secretary,
 Standing Committee on Infrastructure, Transport,
 Regional Development & Local Government,
 House of Representatives,
 Parliament House,
 Canberra. ACT.

itrdlg.reps@aph.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam,

I write on behalf of the Murray Bridge Uniting Church and its Property Development Team and acknowledge an invitation to comment on the Regional Partnerships Program previously in place under the former Liberal Government. Our comment is related to item 1 of the 'Terms of Reference' of the Standing Committee, viz:

“Provide advice on future funding of regional programs in order to invest in genuine and accountable community infrastructure projects”.

The Murray Bridge Uniting Church has been embarking on a major project that included an application to the Regional Partnerships Program, to support this community. Murray Bridge is the regional centre of the Lower Murray [SA] and a vast component of the Murraylands and [SA] Mallee. We envisage that the Project will make a significant contribution that will benefit both our local and regional community.

We have previously written to the Minister, The Hon. Anthony Albanese, MP, expressing our disappointment that the Regional Partnership Program has been discontinued. A copy of the letter to the Minister is included with this document.

Our project is an example of one that we suggest, would meet Terms of Reference 1 - of a program “to invest in genuine and accountable community infrastructure projects”.

***We are called by God through Jesus to offer Christ's
 hope, healing, joy and love to all.*** 1

The following outline gives a brief account of our initiative and recognises that such a project not only has a 'bricks and mortar' component [the physical component] but also once completed, will enable both equity and the social components of our community to be enhanced. In providing this example we recognise that any application we make would need to withstand the scrutiny of any future scheme that is pursued by your Government.

There are several aspects that have led us to pursue our vision and subsequent project. Not only have commodity and market downturns had an impact upon our community but we are presently experiencing the worst known drought in this region. Further, the lack of catchment rain and subsequent river flow has impacted on farmers, businesses and individuals. This is presenting significant stress and social issues both for individuals and families.

Correspondingly Murray Bridge itself is experiencing considerable growth, given its close proximity to Adelaide and its diversified base. We perceive that that too will bring with it challenges and issues that we have sought to address.

In pursuing this project we suggest that it will have significant benefits to our local and regional community. Briefly the project intends a building adjacent to our complex that includes

- an area that is universally accepted as a 'public friendly' meeting place. We envisage such a place as a 'neutral' sociable welcoming venue in a non threatening environment and it would be a place where we could build on relationships that would help restore, build and strengthen our community.
- a counseling room – a facility that would be available both to our network and to the community where there is an objective of giving counsel in many aspects of community life.
- children and youth services. This will provide a venue to run entertaining /educational programs through the school holidays and perhaps on a weekly basis. These children are the fabric of tomorrow's community and we can help build on their character and self esteem with values and morals, so that they might become responsible young adults.

We recognize that we did not lodge a formal application to the Regional Partnerships Program prior to the decision to review the program and also understand the terms of previous agreements regarding approval. Nevertheless we have committed significant resources and time to the point that we have consulted widely in our community and have in excess of 30 community groups and potential users that have offered their support to the project and see a need for such a facility in this community as described earlier.

Consequently while we express our deep disappointment that the Regional Partnerships Program has been discontinued we urge this Government to implement a similar scheme to enable support for communities and community not-for-profit bodies [such as ours] as we jointly, with Government, seek to serve and provide for their needs.

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We do not wish to comment on the other 'Terms of Reference' except to say that we would anticipate that in funds distribution that funding should be based on an equitable basis and universally available to all electorates, irrespective of present political persuasion, as we are sure you would agree.

We do not wish to have our submission treated as 'confidential'.

We look forward to the outcome of the Standing Committee's deliberations.

Yours faithfully,

Ken Coventry, OAM, JP.
FLGMA [Ret], DipLG.
Chairman,
Murray Bridge Uniting Church Property Development Team.