

**SUBMISSION TO THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING
COMMITTEE INQUIRY INTO REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT.**

**BY
THE WAKOOL SHIRE COUNCIL
Tuelka Terrace - MOULAMEIN - NSW 2733**

The Wakool Shire welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to this Inquiry.

Wakool Shire is a small rural Local Government body that has served and worked with its' communities and residents for 102 years. Throughout these years we have worked with and assisted, the not for profit sector, business and industry, the Aboriginal community, the health and education sectors.

Council has gained a great deal of experience in the promotion and facilitation of Commonwealth Government funding programs. Commonwealth regional grants programs are of enormous value and are vital to small rural and regional communities.

(Administration of the Regional Partnerships program) Terms of reference 3 and 4)

The former Regional Partnerships Programme (RPP) provided funding opportunities to establish projects and infrastructure that assisted economic and social participation and stimulate growth in communities.

Regional Development Funding Programmes are essential to establish major infrastructure projects. Most other forms of grant opportunities do not have the capacity to provide the amount of assistance that the RPP provided.

Regional and Rural Communities definitely need Commonwealth funding assistance to assist with the replacement of or refurbishment of many items of infrastructure such as community centres, aged care facilities, health clinics, sport and recreational facilities. These facilities were largely established after WW2 or earlier with most reaching their used by date. A majority of these facilities are not being sufficiently upgraded because of the lack of funds. This is typically acute in small councils (under 10,000 population) mostly in rural areas.

Smaller populated Councils seeking project funding our primary need find it extremely difficult in funding 50% of a community project over \$50,000 due to maintaining essential infrastructure such as roads and bridges.

Other issues encountered:-

- Misunderstandings at the Central level about the complex place-based issues facing communities.
- Unrealistic expectations of the capacity of community organisations to prepare complex grant applications.
- Unrealistic expectations at the Central level about the capacity of community organisations to raise local funds for projects.

- A lack of consideration at the Central level by the delay in decision-making of applications and the damaging impact imposed on community organisations.

Recommendations on guidelines for a new regional funding program (Terms of reference 1 and 2)

- Infrastructure funding for Community facilities such as Halls, Sporting Facilities, streetscapes and community enhancement projects should be a stand-alone program have a continuous funding timeframe.
- Consideration to small-populated councils (under 10,000 population) should be also taken into account for projects over \$250,000 with the maximum local project contribution 10% of the cost.
- It is imperative project funding assistance should be directed through Regional Area Consultative Committees to Local Government direct and with private enterprise projects exempt from these funding programs.
- Small, up to \$50,000 infrastructure grant programs with a quick application turn around assists project applicants when an outside or other partners commit funding for a project:- it is recommended this type of program remains.
- Application processes should be straightforward for regional community organisations in not having to acquire professional grant writers.
- The completion of a Regional Partnerships application was a challenging task even for organisations possessing a high level of expertise and research capabilities. Council staff and /or volunteers had to expend many days with research in submitting applications.
- It is reported the Department was often critical of applications not prepared in a professional manner. This provided a perception that organisations with the best grant writing skills were most likely to acquire grants, rather than the most deserving projects. *A simplified clearer application process with a stronger set of guidelines would help overcome this tendency.*
- Local Government have all the measures in place to assess community organisations and audit the expenditure of funds and therefore are appropriate organisations in seeking Commonwealth funding.
- The Regional Structure to delivering Commonwealth Programs is by the Area Consultative Committees that have been an extremely successful means of contributing to the funding requirements of infrastructure and projects in regional communities where it has the interface and hands on knowledge of applicants.
- Rural volunteer organisations appear to miss out on project funds for a number of essential projects excepting those using the services and expertise of the ACC's.

- It is strongly recommended that the continuation of the progressive ACC situated in our region is retained. It is essential to providing localised service and genuine community engagement of the Commonwealth's programs as a "one stop shop".

SUMMARY and CONCLUSION

To avoid the issues associated with the previous Regional Partnerships program it is recommended that a new Regional Local Community Infrastructure Program should be developed having the following attributes:

- Simplification of application processes that can be readily understood and addressed by applicants, including organisations representing community disadvantaged groups.
- Decision making from competitive or eligibility criteria, rather than from discretionary prerogative.
- Decision-making strictly based on new guidelines that can be readily understood and adhered to by applicants and assessment panels alike.
- Promote genuine engagement with regional communities in delivery strategies including retention of Regional Area Consultative Committees.
- Elimination of the previous lengthy assessment delays to a reasonable timeframe.
- Elimination of private enterprise projects from access to funding through this program.
- The new program has a continuous application period.
- Consideration to lower local input by small populated Councils to funding programs.
- Any projects that require investment in broader community infrastructure be directed through local government.

Implementation of these processes is measured to removing the complexities that existed in the previous system. It would lead to a reduction in administration costs at each level of the required processes.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment in relation to the critical past and future Regional funding programs.

Yours sincerely,



**CHRIS CHAPMAN
GENERAL MANAGER**