



**PO Box 1138 ARMIDALE NSW 2350**  
**Ph: 02 6771 3284 Fax: 02 6771 3286 Email: [nirdb@nsw.chariot.net.au](mailto:nirdb@nsw.chariot.net.au)**  
**[www.nio.au](http://www.nio.au) ABN: 21 621 262 624**

## **Submission To Inquiry into a New Regional Development Funding Program**

### **Background**

The Board is recognised by the Northern community as the leading organisation in relation to regional economic development. It is an independent organisation set up under the New South Wales Fair Trading Act and is responsible to the New South Wales Government for developing solutions and carrying out projects which benefit businesses and residents throughout the region.

The Board has the following seven key objectives to assist with its vision. They are:

- Develop investment attraction strategies;
- Strategic and productive alliances to progress regional development initiatives;
- Act as a conduit for Federal and State government funding specific to regional development activities;
- Disseminate and coordinate information relating to regional development, opportunities and issues;
- Market the benefits of the region;
- Encourage reinvestment in the region;
- Encourage and promote productivity of the business sector in the region.

The Board has ten members from diverse geographical, business backgrounds and community interests and are appointed by the New South Wales Government's Minister for Regional Development for a four year term and provides valuable input to major regional issues through the Board's adopted strategic plan.

The overall running costs of the Board are met by the New South Wales Government through the New South Wales Department of State and Regional Development. However, the Board through its independence and structure is able to develop projects which involve federal government departments and agencies, other state government departments and agencies, local government and the private sector.

Examples of projects managed by the Board in association with its partners and recently completed or currently underway are:

### **Regional Food and Wine Industry Strategy**

NSW Department of State and Regional Development and private sector firms from the industry

### **Art as an Industry**

Arts North West, New England Institute of TAFE, local government councils and regional artists

### **Film New England North West**

NSW Department of State and Regional Development, Arts North West, Department of Transport and Regional Services, local government councils, regional galleries, New England Institute of TAFE Film & Television School

### **Northern Inland Forestry Investment Group**

NSW Department of Primary Industries, Namoi Catchment Management Authority, Border Rivers- Gwydir Catchment Management Authority, local landholders and landcare groups.

### **Regional Business Networking Events**

NSW Department of State and Regional Development, AusIndustry, Federal Small Business Advisory Service (no longer in existence), Business New England North West and local business groups

### **Regional Innovation Awards**

NSW Department of State and Regional Development, AusIndustry, New England North West Area Consultative Committee, University of New England

### **COAG Skills Development Project- Gunnedah Coal Basin**

Developed by Board and handed over to Gunnedah District Development Board due to then federal governments funding guidelines. Partners – NSW Department of Education and Training, New England Institute of TAFE, Mining Companies and private sector training companies. The Board continues to complete sections of the program.

### **Overseas Skilled Migration- Certification Visa Applications**

NSW Department of State and Regional Development and Federal Department of Immigration and Citizenship.

### **Regional Indigenous Economic Development Officer**

Federal Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

### **Indigenous Skills Development Research and Analysis Project- Gunnedah Coal Basin**

Federal Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

### **Regional Business and Community leadership Program**

NSW Department of State and Regional Development and Namoi Catchment Management Authority

The above projects demonstrate the Board's ability to complete regional programs in cooperation with all levels of government and the private sector. This is a successful model which could be utilised to include additional federal government programs. The above projects show the avoidance of duplication and value for money through limited government resources and funding.

### **Comments In Relation to Terms of Reference- Items One (1) and Two (2)**

#### **Item 1. Provide advice on the future funding of regional programs in order invest in genuine and accountable infrastructure projects.**

The Board has been involved in consultations with the Northern community and its many diverse organisations since its inception in 1991. Over that time, this organisation has developed the expertise and operational knowledge to develop, under its strategic plan the necessary outcomes to increase regional investment, wealth and employment against a background of continual changes in climate and national and global economic/market conditions.

The effects of these changes have been constant and significant on the northern region. Strong leadership has been needed which has in part been provided by this Board in association with its many partners over that time. The Board is therefore able to provide advice on matters on regional programs and related accountability.

There are many local and regional organisations that consider they are best suited to advise on projects worthy of federal funding and accountability issues. However, often many of the groups are locally based with the associated bias. This can cause considerable wastage of funds and time for federal departments and agencies as the lobbying process proceeds through the community and political system.

The Board would therefore suggest that in the northern area of New South Wales based on the previous project details in this submission, that it is ideally placed to provide the organisation which could be used by the federal government in future regional activities. It has the ability to involve all three levels of government and local/regional organisations and communities. No doubt the indicated model could be developed in other areas of New South Wales (if not already in operation through similar regional development boards) as well as other Australian states.

As an example, the Board is currently considering what process should be adopted to develop a regional transport strategy including infrastructure issues. It would be helpful if the federal government was prepared to utilise this organisation's capabilities as it has the necessary networks and credibility to provide the initial advice to government and then partner the various government departments and agencies to achieve the required outcomes and value for money in the adopted strategies.

This region in the next five years will see significant growth in the coal, gas and related industries which will have major effects on all forms of transport. To achieve an overall plan for this development, there is a need for a regional approach and this is already available through this organisation. There is no need for another regional organisation to be formed such as the previous government's area consultative committees. An expansion of this Board's responsibilities would see the duplication avoided (which has been raised at many forums in the past) and also avoid the local bias which would occur if local government was given the responsibilities of what is a regional role (there are thirteen local councils in this region alone).

This example can be extended to other regional issues where the federal government has a related leadership and funding role. It was significant that when the Board was involved in regional meetings to discuss the development of the New South Wales State Plan, that there was a significant desire by communities to have more direct input in government decisions which affected their lives and businesses. If the Board was given this role, it would preserve accountability for the federal government but at the same time give more regional autonomy for advice on funding programs and investment in infrastructure.

## **Item 2. Examine ways to minimise administrative costs and duplication for taxpayers**

This organisation would ask for consideration of the proposal that the present New South Wales Government Boards be appointed to carry out the functions of advising the federal government and the administration of related programs by an agreement between the federal and state governments.

The previous area consultative committees were set up to advise the previous coalition government on whether projects to be funded by the then Department of Transport and Regional Services were suitable and value for money. In many cases (including applications from this Board for matching funding supplied by the State government) there was a long approval period (if indeed, the applications were approved at all). This was also reflected (in many cases) in applications from the private sector in this region where long delays affected invested by the indicated company concerned.

If the state/federal process was combined through this organisation the resulting cost savings would be significant. If additional membership was required to represent federal government interests then this could be accommodated, provide related financial resources were provided.

There has been considerable discussion in New South Wales on the opportunities for local government to become more involved in economic development and infrastructure investment. It would seem this may be ambitious when the current discussions on the ability of this level of government are considered. It appears local councils are not coping with their present responsibilities for various reasons.

If the important aspects of administering regional economic and infrastructure programs were added, there would be very little chance there would be successful outcomes based on many of the smaller local councils not being able to complete their present tasks. The cost in this region for continual liaison with thirteen local councils would be very high for the federal government in relation to regional programs.

The Board believes the regional model achievable through organisations such as this board, would be more accountable, minimise costs and not be duplication for taxpayers.

### **Summary**

The Northern Inland Regional Development Board has a track record to provide a model for the federal government to consider in association with state government and regional organisations. Regions within Australia are facing challenges due to national and global developments in relation to climate change, communications and economic conditions. It is obvious that funding for regional development from government will continue to be less than the amount required to complete economic programs and infrastructure projects.

On this basis, a new regional structure involving one regional board should be considered to minimise costs and avoid duplication.

D L Tydd  
Executive Officer