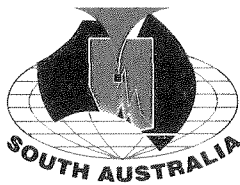


WHYALLA
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT BOARD Inc.

Whyalla Economic Development Board Inc.

ABN: 34 679 963 070

facilitating business growth in Whyalla

Ref: PSJ/dth C9552

File: W011

14 July 2008

The Secretary – Standing Committee
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development
and Local Government
House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr Crawford

INQUIRY INTO NEW REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUNDING PROGRAM

The Whyalla Economic Development Board (WEDB) acknowledge receipt of your correspondence dated 5 June 2008 and thank you for the invitation to submit to the Inquiry into a New Regional Development Funding Program.

The Whyalla Economic Development Board (WEDB) is part of the South Australian Framework for facilitating economic and regional development. The Board was formed in 1980 and is funded in partnership with the South Australian Government through the Department for Trade and Economic Development and the Whyalla City Council.

This submission is made in the context of the Board's long association and working relationship with the Flinders Region Area Consultative Committee (FRACC) and our knowledge of the various funding programs, in particular Regional Partnerships.

In addressing the Terms of Reference, we provide commentary which covers those areas of future funding of regional programs, possible minimisation of administrative costs and duplication and a brief review of the former Government's practices with the aim of providing direction for the future.

1. FUTURE FUNDING OF REGIONAL PROGRAMS

The Terms of Reference seeks advice on funding of regional programs in order to invest in genuine and accountable community infrastructure projects.

Historically the Australian Government has had the capacity to be a key driver of many regional projects and funding often triggers co-investment and in-kind support by State Governments, industry and communities.

Australian Government funding support is critical going forward, especially at this time of building capacity in a region such as the Upper Spencer Gulf of which is one of three (3) cities which are facing major expansion as a result of an impending mining boom.

Our advice would be for Government to consider at least two (2) pools of funding for infrastructure projects.

- *One pool for community based projects.*
This pool could allow for applications from Local Government and community based organisations, for investment in infrastructure projects which build community capacity and which generally enhance the livability aspects of our regional communities.
- *Another pool of funding for economic and regional development projects.*
Those projects could allow applications from Local Government, industry and regional development organisations and the private sector. The primary focus of projects funded from this pool would be as an aid to industry development including infrastructure, investment attraction and employment creation.

We believe that eligibility criteria and guidelines established for those separate purposes, would assist both the application and assessment processes. Competition for funding is always likely to be strong; however, the separate pools could ensure that worthy projects in either category would not be considered against each other in the assessment process.

Where State Governments have funding programs with similar objectives, it would be useful if the application, assessment and reporting processes were complimentary to reduce red tape and assist applicants.

2. MINIMISE ADMINISTRATIVE COSTS AND REDUCE DUPLICATION

This submission contends that there is considerable scope for achieving administrative savings and avoidance of duplication, particularly in terms of the Australian Governments support for Regional Development programs. At a local level, the Whyalla Economic Development Board in partnership with State and Local Government, has effectively established a “one-stop-shop” in Whyalla for the delivery of a range of services, which include:-

- The Board's own economic development and business advisory services.
- Export market development and advisory service in partnership with Austrade and the Department of Trade and Economic Development – SA.
- Support service for the Australian Taxation Office (ATO).
- Support service for the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC).
- Upper Spencer Gulf Common Purpose Group (USGCPG)
- Global Maintenance USG – the regions engineering and maintenance services cluster.
- Links to Tourism Eyre Peninsula - regional tourism marketing body.
- Regional Migration and Workforce Development program – WEDB and Department of Trade and Economic Development (SA).
- SA Works in the Regions program – training and workforce development programs, Department for Employment, Further Education, Science and Technology (DFEEST).

This “one stop-shop” allows for centralised management and shared reception, administration and financial management. It is largely through this shared approach that administrative savings are made and duplication reduced.

Collaboration among personnel and organisations is such that clients can be supported in a way which gives them greater exposure to a wide range of programs and support. A team approach can be taken when delivering business development services and when project applications are made or clients matched to programs.

This submission is made on the basis that the Australian Government could investigate the potential for using this model to deliver its regional development funding program.

3. THE FORMER GOVERNMENT'S PRACTICES

The only comment to be made in this section is related to the application and approvals process for project applicants.

We are aware of examples where projects have been subject to lengthy delays, either as a consequence of satisfying the application requirements at the local level or simply the time taken to assess and for notification of approval or otherwise.

It would be useful if a more streamlined process could be introduced.

4. SUMMARY

In summary, a new regional development funding program would be welcomed by the Whyalla Economic Development Board as such funding often triggers co-investment and in-kind support by State Governments, industry and communities into local projects. A program which allows for two (2) separate pools such as those outlined in section one (1) above would ensure a workable model for supporting both community based and economic development focused projects. Finally, we advocate for a streamlined process for project application and assessment, which ensures a timely response to local needs.

Again, we thank you for the opportunity to submit to this Inquiry and look forward to hearing of the final outcomes. Should you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact Mr Steven Arndt, Chief Executive Officer, Whyalla Economic Development Board on (08) 8645 7811.

Yours Sincerely

WHYALLA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT BOARD INC.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul S. Johnston". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

Paul S. Johnston
Chairman