



SUBMISSION 217

CIVIC PLACE

for everyone

PATRONS:

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14 July 2008

The Secretary of the Committee
House Standing Committee on
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development
and Local Government
House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600
Email: itrdlg.reps@aph.gov.au

Dear Committee Secretary

Enclosed is Willoughby City Council's submission to the *Inquiry into a New Regional Development Funding Program*.

The contact for this submission is Ms Eilis O'Beirne, Manager Special Projects. Ms O'Beirne may be reached on 02 9777 7693 or by email at Eilis.O'Beirne@Willoughby.nsw.gov.au.

The submission addresses the Terms of Reference outlined on the Committee's website.

Yours faithfully

Linda Cardew
Civic Place Project Director



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Willoughby City Council's Submission to the Inquiry into a New Regional Development Funding Program

1. Introduction

Willoughby City Council is making this submission to the Inquiry into a New Regional Development Funding Program, under Committee Activities of the House Standing Committee on Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government. Council's experience with the Regional Partnerships Program was over a period of two years and eight months from 2005 to 2008. This was explicitly at the invitation of the Sydney ACC – GROW.

2. Background

The Civic Place Project

In 2000, Willoughby City Council embarked on a comprehensive program to deliver a suite of performing arts and educational facilities to service the northern Sydney region for the next 50-100 years. Comprehensive user needs and land use studies were conducted, a site masterplan developed and exhibited together with an extensive community consultation program. This process culminated in a Council Poll (referendum) for the project, which the majority of the community supported. Three years of architectural design followed and construction is now starting.

As a local government authority Willoughby City Council is arguably the only authority positioned to provide this much need public infrastructure, not only for its constituents but for the northern Sydney region. This project has the unanimous support of the North Shore Region of Councils (NSROC) and has proved to be one of the most comprehensive cultural infrastructure projects undertaken in Australia by a local community for many years. The challenge for Willoughby City Council is how to meet the needs of not only its own community, but how to meet the needs of the region, possibly for the next century, from its limited funding base. A significant portion of the funding has come from the sale of assets owned by Willoughby Council. The project has received funding from the State and Federal Governments for initiatives in water reuse but only minimal funding from the State

Government for the performing arts, and no funding from the Federal Government for the performing arts.

The provision of regional infrastructure by a single local council is a major undertaking, however, the social, environmental and economic benefits created for the region are significant. Such funding would mean that the 'excellence' of the facility would be achieved, as opposed to an imperative culling of amenity and functional quality in order to meet budget constraints. Funding support from other levels of Government will allow the region to demonstrate leadership in the design, construction and management of public sites and facilities, by going beyond mere compliance with the statutory requirements.

Civic Place will also provide an opportunity to build economic capacity in the northern Sydney region by revitalising the Chatswood CBD. The facilities have been designed to support regional businesses through the conference and business tourism industries. It is anticipated that the employment outcomes of Civic Place will be approximately 482 full time jobs once the building is completed.

3. *Application for Funding*

3.1 *Regional Partnerships Program*

Under the Guidelines of the Regional Partnerships Program funding was supported for projects which

- **Strengthen growth and opportunities** by investing in projects that strengthen and provide great opportunities for economic and social participation;
- **Improve access to services** by investing in projects that, in a cost effective and sustainable way, support communities to access services.
- **Support planning** by investing in projects that assist communities to identify and explore opportunities and to develop strategies for action;
- **Assist structural adjustment for communities** by investing in projects that assist specifically identified communities and regions to adjust to major economic, social or environmental change.

Willoughby City Council's Civic Place Project was considered to fit within these guidelines and after advice from the Sydney GROW ACC, Council proceeded to work with the ACC team to develop its funding application.

3.2 GROW — Area Consultative Committee (ACC)

Willoughby City Council was invited to apply for funding by the Sydney ACC – GROW. It was on its advice and feedback that the application continued.

3.3 Council's Application

Application Version 1

Willoughby City Council's application requested funding to:

"... to provide public buildings with highly accessible features and the necessary policy planning framework to deliver accessible, equitable outcomes that for a sector of the community that have never been provided for in terms of public performing arts venues. The development of Civic Place will also be a catalyst for positive economic development outcomes for the northern Sydney region through job creation in retail, the arts, hospitality, tourism and incentive industries and as a result of use by the corporate sector for business events."

Application Version 2 – after required revisions suggested by GROW Board and DOTARS

"Willoughby City Council's application requested funding to:

Assist in funding the Civic Place Project, Willoughby City Council is seeking Regional Partnership Programme Funding for aspects of the project that demonstrate an advanced attitude towards making facilities easily accessible for members of our community that, for what ever reason, have not been able to access and participate in other cultural venues. The Regional Partnership support will also assist in ensuring that the necessary policy and planning framework to deliver accessible, equitable outcomes for the disability sector will be embedded in the management of the project with direct programming outcomes for the community."

4. Funding Process and Application Status

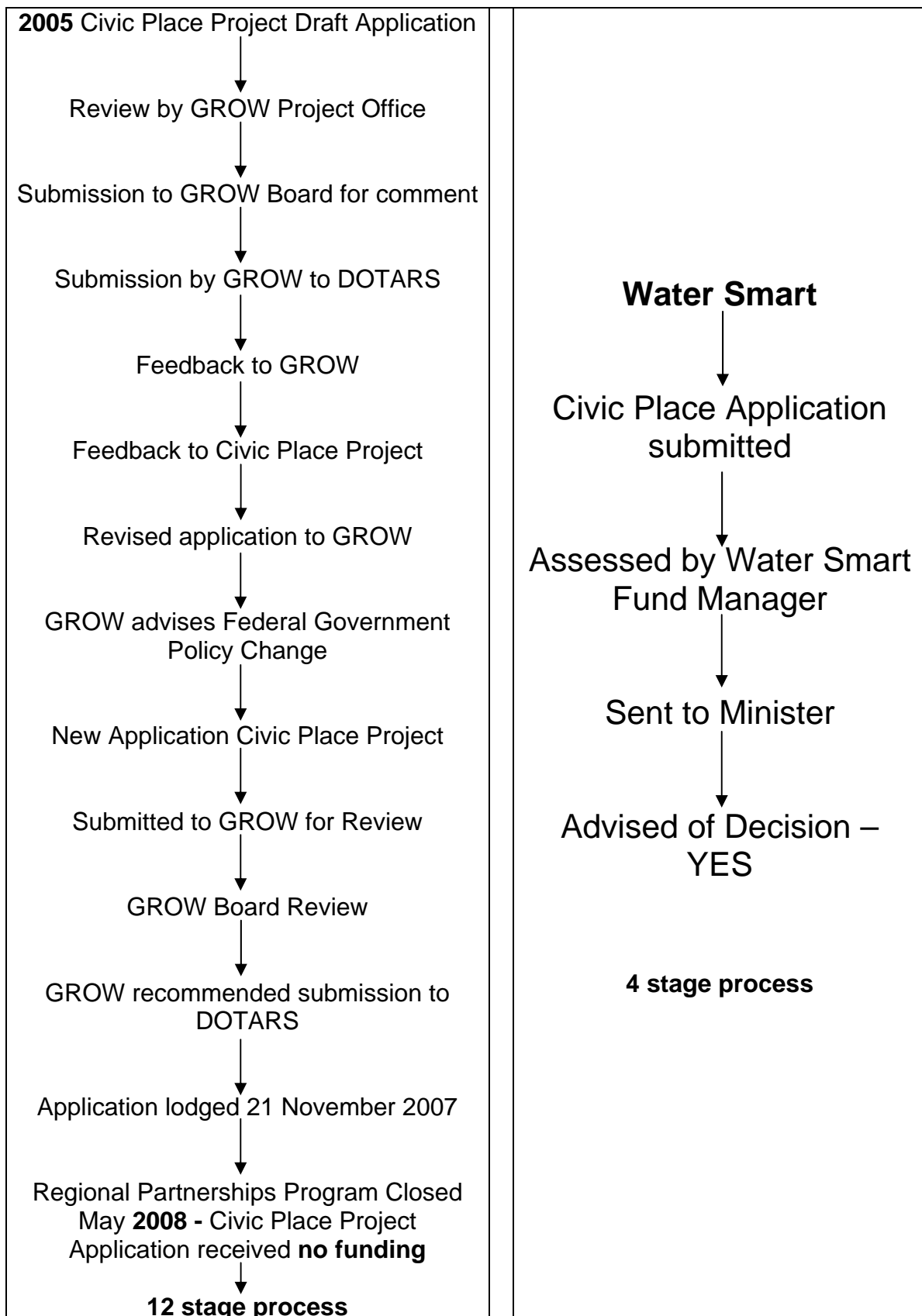
In 2005 Willoughby City Council was invited by GROW to make a submission for grant funding throughout the Regional Partnerships Program for the Civic Place Project. This process was, in the end, a drawn out one. After many meetings with, and guidance from the GROW ACC, from September 2005 to March 2006 Council's first application was submitted on 26 April 2006. Feedback from GROW, the GROW Board and informally from DOTARS was given on this application and after funding priorities and policies changed a second application was resubmitted after many revisions at the direction of GROW on 21 November 2007. Council was advised in May 2008 that the Civic Place Project application would not be funded as the Regional Partnership Program had ceased. Council understands that the application was not assessed.

Willoughby City Council's experience with the Regional Partnership Program dates back to 2005 for **one** application. A history of the \$500,000 grant application is as follows:

| | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| September 2005 | Started process |
| September 2005 | Met at the <i>Northern Sydney 2020</i> workshop |
| | Planning meeting with Sydney GROW representatives |
| October 2005 | Attended business functions about regional development. |
| 14 October 2005 | Email from a GROW team member expressed " particular interest in Civic Place and a desire to help facilitate the Regional Partnerships funding ". (A copy of the email can be provided). Invited to give a presentation on the project. |
| November 2005 | Project planning workshop Parramatta |
| 23 November 2005 | Presented to the GROW Board, Northern Sydney team |
| 7 December 2005 | Regional Partnership Program Workshop |
| 7 December 2005 | Advised that no part of the new Willoughby City Library would be funded even though funding for the library was not requested. |
| 7 December 2005 | Embracing the Accessible Era Workshop. |
| February 2006 | Given guidance by the GROW ACC to focus the application on accessibility and economic development as priorities. |
| 17 March 2006 31 March 2006 | Two papers submitted highlighting the accessibility benefits and the economic development benefits of the Civic Place Project. |
| 10 April 2006 | submitted 1 st DRAFT application |

| | |
|------------------|--|
| 26 April 2006 | Process of garnering letters of support from partner organisations. More advice received to focus on the accessibility features to a greater degree and reduce the emphasis on economic development features. Then submitted 1 st NEW VERSION application. |
| 19 May 2006 | <p>Feedback from DOTARS. Some of the comments received included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “If the Council have the capacity to expend \$136M on a project, then it could be perceived that they have the capacity to fund all aspects of the project (this includes the \$1.990m [originally] requested from Regional partnerships).” ▪ “Being a Sydney metropolitan suburb, close to the CBD the region has access to a number of facilities for arts and culture.” ▪ “Willoughby Council appears at the bottom end (10th from the bottom) of the SEIFA index of disadvantage, this indicates that the Council and the community is more affluent than 34 other LGA’s in the Greater Sydney Region.” ▪ “The application states that one in five residents have a disability, but of those how many require the state of the art facilities to access the Centre. Wouldn’t many of these people still be able to access the centre with the standard facilities provided for people with disabilities.” ▪ “The other outcomes support economic development with creation of jobs and increased viability of business with an annual turn over from the site of \$65M. This also suggests that the Council benefit from rents etc to cover the cost of the building.” |
| 23 May 2006 | Received above comments on the 1 st application. |
| October 2006 | 2 nd application – priorities of funding changed after announcement of new Minister for Regional Development |
| March 2007 | Critique of funding application. |
| 21 November 2007 | Revised application including reduced grant amount and resubmitted (after 4 or 5 revisions), many iterations and edits at GROW’s instructions. |
| | Project Managers within GROW changed. |
| May 2008 | Regional Partnership Program ceased – advised Civic Place Project application would not be considered for funding. |

Comparison showing Council's experience and understanding of the Regional Partnerships Program with the Federal Government's Water Smart Program



5. Cost to Applicant

Investment by the applicant organisation

Much time, energy and resources are invested in the preparation of funding applications. The selection criteria and underlying policies should be clearly stated and not changed during any one funding period.

Staff time

This included the time of the General Manager, the Civic Place Project Director, the Manager Special Projects, and the Manager Financial Services, with input from other professional Council staff over two years.

Resources

This included travelling time to attend meetings, workshops and business functions; presentations at GROW Board Meetings; and requesting support from partner organisations.

Consultants' time and fees

For example, the preparation of briefs for economic development and accessibility. Several measures as outlined below would see administrative costs reduced for both the applicant and the funder.

6. Conclusion and observations

Willoughby City Council's knowledge of and experience with the Regional Partnership Program has not been a positive one overall. This is due to the overly bureaucratic processes that it had to endure along the way and not because the Civic Place project was not funded.

Many of the recommendations made by the ANAO are fully endorsed by Willoughby City Council. Some of Council's recommendations are in line with the recommendations of the ANAO and some are what it considered was learnt from the funding experience during a two year and eight month process.

7. Unauthorised use of Civic Place images in Federal Government Advertising

Although the Civic Place Project funding application was not assessed during the current funding round, the Federal Government elected to use the Civic Place image to promote the program and the inquiry to the public, without any

authorisation, attribution or context, through the June 2008 *Local Government Focus* magazine, (Volume 24, Number 6, National Supplement by the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government Page 1 *Call for comments on Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program*.) The one third of a page colour image of Civic Place clearly inferred that the project was one of the successful grant applications.

In addition, in the same advertisement, and again without any authority, the Willoughby City Council's 'Kids Cottage Childcare Centre' image was used alongside the headline *2008-09 Financial Assistance Grants up by 4.5 per cent*, implying that those grants had included the funding of the building pictured. This is not the case.

The use of the image of 'Willoughby, NSW' on page 3 again suggests that Willoughby Local Government Authority has benefitted from funding. See attached page from the publication. From this it may again be inferred that the project was financially supported by the Regional Partnerships Program which is not the case. See Appendix A for all images used.

8. Recommendations

Recommendation 1 – Ensure a Local Government Stream for Funding

With limited access to rates and loan borrowings the provision of community infrastructure is difficult to achieve. Ensuring there is a **Local Government** stream for funding, via Regional Programs, is one of the crucial ways in which funding can be invested in genuine and accountable community infrastructure programs.

Recommendation 2 – Recognise the Complexity of Infrastructure Projects

In some cases the criteria used can be too stringent. For example, to make funding conditional on receipt of Development Consent, or on a contract not being let may be prohibitive for large scale projects. As with other funding models, milestone reporting requirements should be flexible to accommodate the reality of project delivery. Not placing a 250 word limit within the application form to describe parts of a large scale infrastructure program to would be beneficial.

Recommendation 3 – Simplify the Process

It is clear from Willoughby City Council's experience with the Civic Place Project application that the Regional Partnerships Program differs greatly from other Federal government departments. The Civic Place project has been successful in receiving both Federal and NSW State Government Funding over the last three years for water reuse initiatives. The funding models used by the relevant departments are simpler in both guidelines and assessment; with clear set criteria, specific funding rounds, date of notification, contract or deed signing and reporting. As shown on page 5 in the table of comparative processes, a 4 stage process with the successful \$1.8 million grant from the Federal Government's Water Smart Program clearly demonstrates a more efficient process as opposed to the Regional Partnership Program process of between 12-15 stages.

It was Willoughby City Council's experience with the GROW Regional Partnerships Program requiring too many processes and stages to be completed before submission. See Appendix B a copy of the *GROW Regional Partnerships Programme – CONCEPT KIT – July 2003*, which outlines the long process of an application.

Combined with an array of project officers/managers and staff turnover, the application was required to go through multiple hands, many times, following changes in priorities and policies. During the application period Ministers, the GROW Area Consultative Committee Members and staff, including the CEO also changed.

Recommendation 4 – Maintain Applicable Programs and Policies during the Funding Period

As outlined in the *ANAO's report on Regional Partnerships*, "... the frequency with which departures occurred from the provisions of the published Programme Guidelines ... for the assessment of applications ... the departmental assessments of applications against the published eligibility and assessment criteria were inconsistent and, in many cases, inadequate." It is Willoughby City Council's experience with the Civic Place Project funding application that this is demonstrably true.

Recommendation 5 – Clearly State Expected Processes and Timetable

The Regional Partnership Program would benefit from fewer bureaucratic approval processes, and with fewer parties undertaking revisions. Funding rounds with set closing dates rather than an open ended funding process would be preferable.

Recommendation 6 – Remove Area Consultative Committees (ACC)

The use of ACCs may lead to subjective assessment of draft applications and third party communications. The ACC provides another layer of input with few apparent benefits. The program should be either administered directly from Canberra by the Minister or devolved to the various regions. This would eliminate the overly bureaucratic process and streamline administration, thus reducing costs and duplication.

Recommendation 7 – Use Consistent Terminology and Plain English, not jargon

The terminology used by GROW and the Regional Partners Program is inconsistent with other government departments. For example, the use by GROW of the word **outputs** as opposed to other funding applications where the word **outcomes** is used. Inconsistent terminology can confuse applicants if no clear reason for the inconsistency is apparent.



Australian Government
Department of Infrastructure,
Transport, Regional Development
and Local Government

Local Government – A National Perspective

Local Government FOCUS
National Supplement
June 2008

2008–09 Financial Assistance Grants up by 4.5 per cent

The Federal Government will deliver nearly \$1.9 billion to Australia's Local Governments through financial assistance grants in 2008–09. This is an increase of nearly 4.5 per cent over 2007–08 and maintains the value of the grants.

This funding will provide much needed support to councils so they can provide their local communities with basic infrastructure and services

such as local roads, swimming pools and sporting fields, child care, aged care and community services and cleaning and garbage collection.

The Government is committed to strengthening local communities and working closely with Local Government. Local Governments will receive an additional \$307.5 million in 2008–09 through the Government's Roads to Recovery program

In addition to these grants South Australian councils will receive an extra \$14.2 million in 2008–09, in recognition that the local roads component of the financial assistance grants for South Australian councils is substantially less in proportion to the local road length and population of other jurisdictions.

The table below shows the Budget estimated Local Government financial assistance grant entitlement for each jurisdiction.

All of the grants are untied, meaning councils can spend them on the priorities determined by their local communities.



Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, Anthony Albanese.



Kids Cottage Childcare Centre.

Local Government Financial Assistance Grants 2008–09

| Jurisdiction | General Purpose \$ | Local Roads \$ | Total \$ | Increase from 2007–08 actual % |
|--------------|-----------------------|--------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------------|
| NSW | 421,396,084 | 165,815,999 | 587,212,083 | 4.10% |
| Vic | 319,099,284 | 117,826,833 | 436,926,117 | 4.47% |
| Qld | 256,821,796 | 107,081,982 | 363,903,778 | 4.92% |
| WA | 129,604,143 | 87,386,307 | 216,990,450 | 4.98% |
| SA | 96,872,144 | 31,408,914 | 128,281,058 | 4.09% |
| Tas | 30,172,641 | 30,286,542 | 60,459,183 | 4.13% |
| NT | 13,219,678 | 13,387,765 | 26,607,443 | 4.82% |
| ACT | 20,807,212 | 18,326,048 | 39,133,260 | 4.53% |
| Total | 1,287,992,982 | 571,520,390 | 1,859,513,372 | 4.47% |

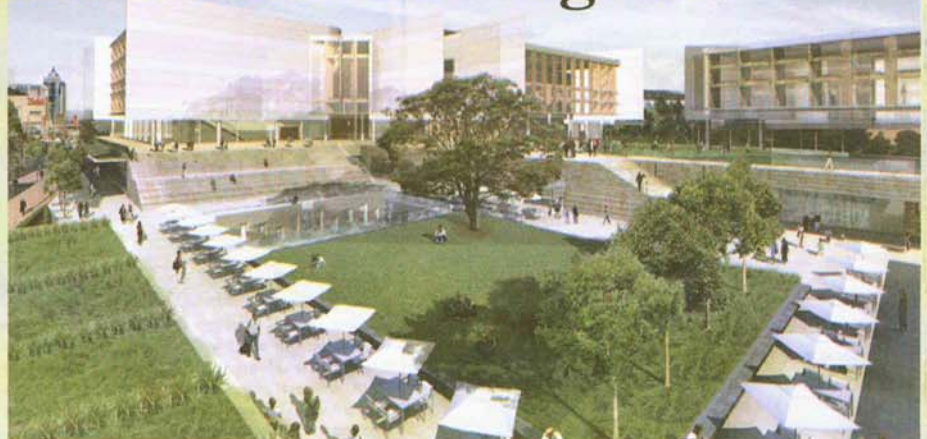
Call for comments on Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program

From next year's Budget, the Government will fund a Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program to strengthen local economies and improve the quality of life within local communities.

The Government understands local communities' need for a specific community infrastructure fund. That's why we will work closely with Local Governments and other regional organisations to improve and better coordinate regional infrastructure and services.

To make sure the program is developed properly and reflects the needs of communities, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government is conducting a public inquiry with consultations nationwide.

The Government encourages all Local Governments to make a submission to this Inquiry at www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/itrd/rlg/regionaldevelopment/index.htm



Local Government – A National Perspective

Major Cities Unit focuses on urban development

On 30 April 2008 the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, the Hon Anthony Albanese MP, announced that the Government would establish a Major Cities Unit within the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government to renew the Commonwealth's focus on the nation's cities and on urban development.



Perth, WA

Besides the eight capital cities, our major cities include major regional centres experiencing enormous growth, such as Geelong, the Gold Coast, Newcastle and Townsville.

Australia is one of the most urbanised countries in the world, with more than four out of five Australians living in urban communities.

Between 2001 and 2006 our capital cities contributed 78 per cent to the nation's economic growth.

The Major Cities Unit will concentrate on:

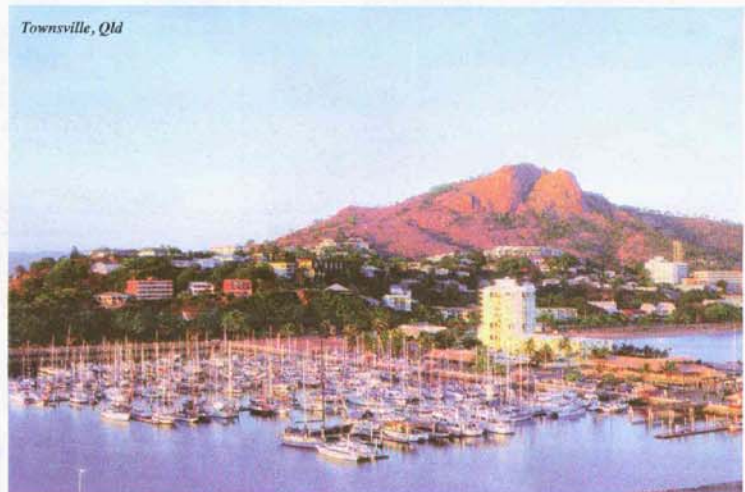
- ensuring a more integrated and coordinated approach to policy development and integration across the Australian Government in

relation to the economic, social, and environmental outcomes associated with major cities

- identifying opportunities where Australian Government leadership can make a difference to the prosperity of cities and the wellbeing of their residents.



Willoughby, NSW



Townsville, Qld

Building better regions

The Government is providing \$176 million over four years for a range of regional infrastructure election commitments which have been identified by local communities as priorities for their regions.

The Better Regions projects encourage economic and community development and invest in local infrastructure such as:

- the revitalisation of towns' main streets
- multi-purpose community and resource centres
- major sport and recreational venues
- community transport infrastructure.



Public amenities

Poor bladder and bowel control is a significant health condition that has physical, social and economic implications for women and men of all ages as well as children, carers, families and the community.

Therefore, the Australian Government, through the Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA) funds the National Continence Management Strategy to help improve community awareness of incontinence.

Activities supported include education and training for health professionals, awareness raising initiatives for the community, and projects designed to improve the evidence base for the treatment and management of bladder and bowel problems.

Incontinence still unfortunately remains a taboo subject, yet nearly four million Australians are affected to some degree by the condition. Access to appropriate public amenities can significantly assist affected people to participate more fully in their community.

Through the then Department of Transport and Regional Services' Awards for Local Government program in 2007, DoHA sponsored



for Public Amenities" category, which recognised excellence in innovation and design of public toilets. DoHA will again sponsor this category award in 2008 and looks forward to a similarly high standard of entries to those received last year.

An online map is also making life easier for those affected by poor bladder and bowel control. The National Public Toilet Map web site shows the location of more than 14,000 public toilet facilities across Australia. Location information, opening

change rooms, accessibility for people with disabilities and the details of other nearby toilets are provided.

The site can be accessed at www.toiletmap.gov.au

For more information on continence management, contact the National Continence Helpline on 1800 33 00 66.

The helpline is staffed by qualified continence nurse advisers who provide expert, confidential advice and information to health professionals and the

**Appendix B - GROW Regional Partnerships Programme
CONCEPT KIT
Outlining how the program works**

How GROW works with an Applicant to make a Project Idea become a Funded Project

