July 8, 2008

Submission to the Inquiry into a New Regional Development Program

Patricia Sundstrom

Referring to Items 1 and 4 in the terms of Reference

Introduction

I write as a volunteer member of a fundraising team, which is striving to bring an urgently needed community based project into being. With such effort still foremost in mind, I feel it is imperative that your Committee is firstly, made aware of the huge degree of upset and disappointment our group has recently undergone. The shock of being abruptly dealt out of well-deserved Government funding due to the unexpected close down of the Regional Partnerships Program [RP] is one thing. To also find, after reaching our own required partnership allocation, the application itself, apparently deemed illegitimate, then consigned to limbo with no alternative funding in sight. This is the absolute "pits" where this critically needed enterprise is concerned. [see attached]

Response To Terms of Reference

1. Although it has recently become evident that the now inoperative Regional Partnership Program [RP] was misused or manipulated politically in a few cases, the initial 'partnership philosophy' was very admirably conceived and deserves to be incorporated into the New Program.[NP]

There is also need to introduce a process of directing applications through a clearly designated **independent** assessment process. This would minimize the ministerial discretion factor and provide relief from political manipulation, hopefully ensuring genuine and accountable community infrastructure projects.

"The contribution of neighborhood groups to the well being of their community is undervalued and even stifled by governments obsessed with leading and controlling everything."
John MURPHY "The Corporate Citizen", Winter 2001.

4. **Major** overhauls of regional community programs every few years seem hardly rational. Particularly so, if longer term approaches in respect of the contribution of local groups to the well-being of their community is to be encouraged. Ongoing

Community aspirations should not be simply stifled just because a change of government takes place.

There is a crucial need to retain at the local level: -
[a] Access to people who know how to find partnerships and funding partners needed to assemble projects.

[b] Application writers, because many rural area residents do not have the proficiency to compete against city-based grant writers who are thoroughly skilled wordsmiths. Indeed, unless appropriate face to face assistance is included in the New Program, genuinely deserving projects, particularly in those smaller country communities will surely be lost.

[c] Neither is it any use trying to introduce so called centralisation efficiencies in order to reduce costing in respect of the New Program.
As far as Information Technology [IT] goes: - Have any Committee members ever-tried downloading information when line speed is19 Kbps or less?

[d] Nor would it be any use deciding we who live in the regions could have access through a distant call centre, when the very first question is, "Albany, is that north or south of Perth ? " [and that response came from a Perth based call centre.]

[e] Along with these suggestions, it appears in the light of the following quotation, that the role of public servants also needs to be questioned.-

" The mechanisms by which trust is developed and maintained have practical implications for how public servants representing government agencies should behave in partnerships with non government organisations. At a minimum, it would be important that they did not renege on undertakings made to providers, about things such as funding, process requirements, agreed purposes, or program continuation."
Department for Victorian Communities *Changing the way*
IPAA Victoria *Government Works Seminar*
5th October 2004 *Melbourne*

For example, in the period just prior to the RP close down, Great Southern Area Consultancy Committee [ACC] assured our project leader it was 'business as usual' as far as RP applications were concerned. This, plus the fact the website RP application form was still active, raises a serious quandary which certainly warrants Committee attention: -

- What were the senior public servants in the Department advising the Minister?

- Why too, did the closing down of the grant website on Budget night, result in all those RP applications, each submitted in good faith, get suddenly trashed?

It seems to be a gross breach of trust for the current Government to have disregarded over 490 applications submitted by dedicated and committed community members who played no part in any political manipulation.

In the matter of providing advice on future funding of regional programs, I respectfully urge your Committee to strongly insist that the Australian Government's decision-makers dutifully respect the outstanding value of rural and regional groups. And finally; that all those involved give scrupulous attention to fair and honourable practices.

Summary

In summary, it is imperative for regional and disadvantaged communities, that face-to-face contact be maintained in any New Program i.e. retain the ACC philosophy, contact and function.

An independent assessment panel is essential to minimise political manipulation and government control, and to deliver fair practice.

Future funding of any New Program must involve decision-makers who respect and value community groups in regional and rural Australia. This should mean that the breach of trust incurred on the scrapping of the RP would not be repeated.

Albany Lions Community Care Centre

Community Respite Project - Update 2008

Our Goal - To develop a respite facility. **Target $500,000.00**

Many of you may have received our brochure about our latest project to develop a community respite facility.
Over the last 9 months we have been raising funds both locally and through major funding bodies. Our aim is to raise $500,000.00 to enable us to build a purpose built facility at our current premises at 73 Hardie Road Albany.

Once completed this facility will support carers and those being cared for *in our community.*

Project funding to date

Albany Business Community	23,350.00
Albany Service Clubs	15,000.00
Lotterywest	180,000.00
Albany Lions Community Care Centre fundraising	29,000.00
Donations –	100,000.00
In kind donations – Business community	35,000.00
Total to date	382,350.00

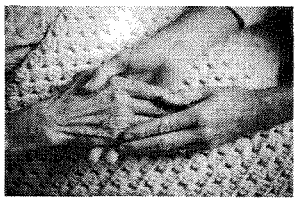
We are over half way there

Currently we are waiting on a final submission to further boost our funds to reach our target.
To ensure we have sufficient funds to complete the project we are appealing to the community of Albany to further support the project.

If you are interested in making a donation – monetary or inkind to assist with site works, building supplies, equipment or furnishings please contact the centre on 98418668 for further information

For those who have already donated or pledged support, thank you for supporting this project.

Albany Lions Community Care Centre Contact 98418668



Caring in our local community