



GREATER GREEN TRIANGLE ACC INC

SUBMISSION 204

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

Dear Mr Crawford

Inquiry into a new regional development funding program

The Greater Green Triangle ACC (GGTACC) is pleased to provide a response to your request on our views on the issues raised in the terms of reference to this inquiry.

The GGTACC has played a critical role in facilitating Australian Government funding in regional economic development and community infrastructure over the past 14 years. The GGTACC provides an independent locally based regional capability that is unique within its region. The GGTACC works in partnership with all levels of government, business and the community, and is best placed to act as the conduit to advise government on enhancing the livability of regions.

The GGTACC can seamlessly transition to Regional Development Australia (RDA). ACC's membership comes from all levels of government, business and the community, with committees being united by their knowledge and commitment to their local communities and region and evidenced by their voluntary contributions.

The ACC Network through its autonomy provides an apolitical approach to transparent governance - assuring engagement of all of the community.

The Government has advised the community that it needs a national long term vision. The ACC/RDA Network can provide a conduit, to inform government on regional issues and opportunities and to act as a united voice for Regional Australia on sustainable economic and social prosperity.

It is the firm view of the GGTACC that a unique regional development funding program provides opportunity for all the community.

The ACC Network demonstrated significant capacity to not only draw out projects, but facilitate discussions that lead to the development of new project concepts in

their region. During the active life of the Regional Partnerships program the GGTACC drew out 250 substantial enquiries, of which 68 progressed to a formal Expression of Interest, 39 to a formal application, and 32 were successful in being offered a funding agreement. A further 11 projects were under assessment at the time the program ceased.

The GGTACC, and soon to be RDA, is capable of, and has the current capacity to assist in the delivery of a new regional development funding program, as is evidenced through its assistance to enquirers and applicants to the Regional Partnerships program since 2003, and historically over the past 10 years in facilitating other Australian Government programmes.

The RDA Network at a local level can:

- help applicants to decide whether their proposal is suitable for funding
- help applicants develop their project
- help and advise applicants on how to obtain broad community support for their project
- help identify possible project and funding partners to finalise the project
- explain and help with the application and submission process.
- provide advice and comments to the Australian Government on each project from a local and regional perspective.

Projects that did not fit within the guidelines' programme objectives were in most cases able to be redirected to more suitable funding programmes to seek support.

Programme Priority areas such as youth or specific disadvantage were of additional assistance in guiding the programme. The most valuable tool in guiding the GGTACC and enquirers was the GGTACC Strategic Regional Plan. All tiers of government, business and community have annually played a role in formulating the GGTACC's Strategic Regional Plan.

Future activities by RDA must again be underpinned by a broad based regional plan to guide these activities. RDAs Strategic Regional Plan must be recognised by all parties as the agreed direction for the region and guide future planning. It can also assist government in forming a strategic vision for the nation and assist their regions understand that vision.

Value for money was a significant additional achievement of the ACCs involvement in project development and securing funding partnerships. It achieved a funding ratio of \$1 of Regional Partnerships to \$3 of other money being secured to fund its projects.

Regional Australia's economic and social prosperity can continue to benefit from closer involvement by local governments in determining federal government spending through RDA. RDA is capable of ensuring closer ties with local government, as has been evidenced through the ACC Network's strong and long standing relationship with local government.

It is the GGTACCs view that a new regional development funding program would be more effective if the application process be changed from the continuous basis of the Regional Partnerships program to a rounds process - say 3 application rounds per year, with assessments to occur within 2 months of each round's

closing date. Projects which cannot be contracted within this period could be provided a 2 month extension to make preparations to finalise arrangements if necessary. Projects that were rejected due to a lack of preparation could be resubmitted in the next round, providing 3 opportunities to make application within a 12 month period.

It is the view of the GGTACC that having the Minister as the final decision maker is the best approach. The formation of the Committee of Ministers to make decisions during the later period of the Regional Partnerships program had a negative affect, causing further delays in the decision making process.

The GGTACC utilised the requested ACC comments to demonstrate to applicants and stakeholders that the GGTACC had an independent part in the decision making process. This process gave the GGTACC Committee an opportunity to have direct dialogue with the Minister, which was seen as vital by the Committee Members.

The GGTACC believes that a further approach that may minimize administration costs would be to provide the Department with the authority to approve grants under a certain threshold, possibly \$50,000.

There was evidence of duplication of activities between the GGTACC and DOTARS Regional Office in monitoring Contracted Projects, through both parties attending site visits, which may have only required the attendance of one party in consultation. The GGTACC provided assistance to contracted Regional Partnerships project recipients to keep their projects on track.

A coordinated approach to contracted Project Management with the Department in the future could also minimize administrative costs to the Department. Part of this approach would be keeping RDA informed of the progress of contracted projects in a formal rather than ad hoc approach, as was the experience under the Regional Partnerships program.

Assistance to applicants by GGTACC Project Officers with online applications increased with the launch of the eGrants system, primarily due to the difficulty of making application in rural areas without high capacity internet access.

In closing, the Greater Green Triangle ACC wishes to reaffirm its capacity and capability in both a strategic and project role. It can continue to be flexible, to refine and renew its delivery based on new priorities and opportunities as we transition to Regional Development Australia.

The GGTACC contact person for the purpose of this inquiry is Mr David Francis, Executive Officer, Greater Green Triangle ACC Inc., PO Box 610, Ararat, 3377.

Yours sincerely



Mrs Helen Morrison
Chair
Greater Green Triangle ACC Inc