

DISTRICT COUNCIL OF BARUNGA WEST

SUBMISSION TO THE

INQUIRY INTO A NEW REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUNDING PROGRAM

I wish to lodge on behalf of the Council our submission in respect of the Regional Development Programs that have been available from the previous Government, and the benefits that these programs have been for rural communities such as ours.

As a background, my Council is situated in South Australia, some 170 kilometres north west of Adelaide, and a total area of 158,000 hectares approximately. We have two major townships of Port Broughton and Bute with a number of other settlements. Our district has a population of 2,680. The Council has a rate revenue of \$2.2million, with a total revenue of \$3.4million. We have over 2,600 assessments with some 35% of these assessments being for non-resident owners (holiday home owners)

Our age profile is that we are an elderly community, with a mean average age of 47 at the 2006 Census (compared to the State average of 39).

Our major "industries" are farming (mixed), fishing, aged care and tourism.

As can be seen we are only a small Council, but we do have a proud record of having success at obtaining grants that have a positive result for our district. These grants are a mixture of funding available from the Australian and South Australian Governments. Of particular interest, is that since 2000, we have secured the following grants under the various Regional Funding programs:-

- \$125,000 for the establishment of the Port Broughton Rural Transaction Centre
- \$175,000 for the development of the Port Broughton Boat Ramp facility
- \$120,000 for the establishment of the Bute Rural Transaction Centre
- \$185,000 for the extension to the Port Broughton Community School Library

These funds have come at an opportune time for the Council and the community.

The Port Broughton Rural Transaction Centre was established following the closure of the only Bank (ANZ) in our community, and has allowed for the establishment of a Bank Agency, Centrelink Agency, Services SA Agency along with a range of other minor services. This has been a tremendous asset to our community, and enabled our older citizens to undertake a number of activities within the town.

The Port Broughton Boat Ramp was an extremely important project which assisted the various fishing groups (recreational, commercial and charter boats) and the aquaculture industry to prosper with suitable facilities. This was a massive project for Council and the funds from the Regional Program and several State Government funds enabled a first class facility (cost of \$1.7million) to be constructed. The benefits to the community have been immeasurable.

The Bute Rural Transaction Centre was established following the near closure of the Post Office at Bute. The Council established the Centre to include The Post Office, an ANZ Bank agency and Council operations to provide an essential service to this small community.

The Port Broughton Community School Library is another example of the three tiers of Government working together to provide a first class facility for a small community. The Library extensions will be officially opened on 1st July 2008, and have enabled an improved range of facilities to be available to the community and tourists. The total cost of this project (\$750,000 approximately), would have been beyond the capacity of our Council to fund.

Inquiry Terms of Reference.

1. Advice on future funding

It is imperative that any funding program does have a set of guidelines to ensure accountability, and to be available for genuine infrastructure that does have significant community benefits. The community benefits must be for communities of all sizes (e.g. Bute has a town population of 300 and a district population of 700, whilst Port Broughton has a town population of 1,000 and a district population of 1500).

These programs must not be aimed at larger regional center's only. The community benefits have to be measured against the size of the community, and the community's capacity to be able to fund the project, including the on-going maintenance. (The Library project detailed above is a very good example of this).

Small Councils and communities, such as ours, would struggle to provide essential services to our communities, if a funding program such as a Regional Funding Program was not available.

Funding should also be on projects that have been identified through long term plans, as being essential for that community. There should be some evidence that there has been some planning for a project (through for example Council's Strategic Management Plans or Business Plans), and that they are in line with the Strategic Plans or goals of the Australian and State Governments.

Again there has to be an allowance that some smaller communities may have difficulties lining up with specific goals of governments, and that there should be some flexibility in assessing these goals. However this would not apply to the accountability of the project.

2. Administrative costs and duplications.

In the past years the application process for the grants, have at times been complex, and difficult for Councils with limited resources. I have often made the comment "*have the people who designed the application process, ever applied for a grant, as they would have given up!*"

I feel that the administrative costs could be reduced by simplifying the process for applicants. The availability of Departmental staff to assist in understanding the process is essential. In years gone by, it was necessary to deal with staff in Canberra.

However for the last project (the Library), Departmental staff were available in Adelaide, and being able to access this staff for pre-application advice, advice for following the necessary steps through the application process, and then having somebody close while the grant was being

expended, was a terrific help, and by far the best process that I have been involved with, for all the grants listed above.

3. Former Government practices.

I am not in a position to offer many comments on this point.

However I would have one concern, in that when an application is finalized and forwarded to Canberra, through the State Office, there should be some process to enable the applicant to have an interview with the Assessment Panel. It is just too difficult to put into words the "emotion" that is being expressed in the application, and as such too difficult for the Assessment Panel to make a judgment from a written application. I have often been frustrated at feeling that the Assessment Panel does not understand the intent of the application, cannot feel the emotion of the application and the benefits to the community, as very often these people do not have a close affinity with rural Australia.

4. After the Audit Period.

I have no comment to make.

I appreciate the opportunity to make a submission on behalf of my Council.

As can be seen my Council has been a successful recipient of funding from Regional Development Funding for our community, and they have been very successful and well received by our community. The projects will be serving the community for many years to come. They would not have occurred if this funding had not been available to Council, and our communities would be suffering accordingly.

We understand that all Programs need to be reviewed at various times, but I would urge the Committee to ensure that a regional Development Funding Program is available to all rural Australia, as it certainly does assist in ensuring that rural Australians are able to improve their lifestyle, and to have facilities that enhance their quality of life.

These facilities assist in providing an important social fabric to our community that is sometimes hard to quantify in specific details. They are immeasurable.

I would be happy to provide any additional information to the Inquiry if required.

Nigel Hand
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District Council of Barunga West

