



June 24, 2008

The Committee Secretary
 Standing Committee on Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development & Local Government
 House of Representatives
 PO Box 6021
 Parliament House
 CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Committee Secretary

Re: Central Qld Area Consultative Committee Inquiry Response – New Regional Development Funding Program.

I refer to the invitation by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government to participate in providing advice by way of a written submission on a future Regional Funding Program.

The Central Qld Area Consultative Committee (CQACC) totally agrees with the Federal Government's view that funding devoted to economic development and community infrastructure plays a key role in enhancing the sustainability and liveability of Australia's regions and refers to the enormous contribution regional funding programs such as Regional Assistance Program (RAP), Dairy RAP, Regional Solutions, Sustainable Regions and most recently Regional Partnerships Program (RPP) have provided regional Australia.

The CQACC also refers to the Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) Report on the RPP which quite legitimately revealed processing deficits which clearly were as a direct result of years of regional program evolution. The CQACC by no means offers such a statement as an excuse for what could very well be described as administrative shortfalls/deficiencies however when such an evolutionary process occurs at the rate it has, without rigorous monitoring and relevant adjustment mechanisms, a stunted level of Best Practice evolved. The CQACC also believes that the ANAO is a specialist in its particular field however in the case of grant funds the ANAO Report fails to consider that, in the scheme of things, not all grant applications will be successful. The ACC Network commenced operation in the mid-nineties with as noted previously, the regional funding program known as RAP. Over the next 10-12 years the capacity and scale of delivery in terms of regional funding (with the inclusion of the so-named programs) grew significantly along with the intended delivery outputs. Overall tax-payers money invested as an input contributed to the sustainability and liveability of many needy regional communities. The CQACC regards the ANAO Report as an opportunity to highlight the input/output deliverables of the RPP thereby gaining the appropriate attention of the department and subsequent level of administrative funding and support required to operate at an International recognised level of Best Practice.



In an effort to contribute to the call for submissions on a future regional funding program the CQACC will thereby briefly address the criteria nominated.

1. Invest in genuine and accountable community infrastructure projects. The CQACC supports the view that communities are as unique as the individuals that make them up, therefore when we speak of genuine and accountable community infrastructure projects the intended regional program criteria should take into account that a 'one-size-fits-all' does not necessarily consider the uniqueness of the regional landscape. MACRO social and political factors apply with the legitimacy of projects being endorsed by local Members of Parliament via a rigorous, transparent and equitable process. The legitimacy of projects therefore should be vividly apparent via this transparent application process and not the decision of an out-of-touch departmental assessment panel in Canberra. The application process should be rigorous enough to build the confidence of the Minister to commit in principal with 'Subject To and Conditional Upon' conditions administered in the risk mitigation/due diligence process managed by the department responsible for the regional funding program.
2. Examine ways to minimise administrative costs and duplication for tax-payers. The CQACC in the first instance refers to the above (Item 1) where lengthy cost imposing delays in administration and contract management are passed directly across to the Proponent. Previously associated administrative costs in the sometimes lengthy application development were absorbed by the duplication of the department and the ACC Network whereas in the suggested methodology the costs associated in the application development process are absorbed by the Proponent and not the tax-payer. Assessment and contract management resources are only engaged once contractual conditions are developed and comply accordingly. The suggested methodology also addresses the outlandish processing timeframes of the past. Timeframes in this regard will be determined by the action or inaction of the Proponent. Amalgamation rationalisation methodologies adopted by the Qld Government in 2008 should be investigated in boundary re-alignment of the current Network.
3. The former Government's practices and grants as outlined in the ANAO Report. As stated previously, the CQACC welcomed the ANAO Report as it provided an assessment instrument that made clear and decisive adjustment recommendations. The previous Government's intention in supporting a regional grants program (RPP) should be commended however with the evolution of the program from RAP status to RPP and the subsequent increase in tax-payer investment so too should there have been an evolutionary process toward the notable growth in delivery mechanisms. The level of increased deliverables in the regional grants program status adjustment were clearly visible and should have stimulated relevant governance adjustments managed through the departmental contract process with the ACC network.
4. Former Government's practices and grants after the audit period 2003-2006. The CQACC view the post ANAO period as a knee-jerk reaction in attempting to remedy the dishevelled administrative deficits identified. Band-aid solutions to obvious elements of the inadequate practice of the former Government which clearly were responsible for that which is recognised as the ANAO recommendations. The CQACC congratulate the current Government in the prescribed action/directive from the Parliamentary Secretary of the department whereby taking into consideration the views of a diverse range of regional community stakeholders in developing a future regional grants funding program.



The CQACC believes that by providing the Standing Committee with the following 'Region at a Glance' will assist in legitimising that which is contained within the responses nominated.

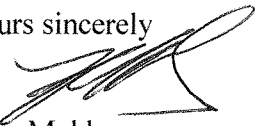
The Central Qld region has an estimated population of 220,000 people with an extended geographical area of approximately 470,000 square kilometres (1/3 of the State of Queensland). Local government statistics indicate that some 71 percent of the region's population is based in coastal areas, 20 percent in the highlands and the remaining 9 percent in the Central Western part of the region. Industries and opportunities could be grouped to include mining, light to medium industry, light metals, cattle, agriculture, fishing and tourism.

Central Qld is a cocktail mix of many factors both positive and negative which range from an unprecedented explosion of the resource sector to an unstable and compromised agriculture, fishing and now tourism sectors. The disparities relevant to that of distinguishable opportunities and threats of the urban coastal fringes and highlands compared to that of the Central West are quite significant and highlight the uniqueness of individual regional communities. In this case such reference refers to the legitimacy of community infrastructure project proposals and who more qualified to ratify such legitimacy as that of the elected local Members of Parliament who work tirelessly in understanding the diverse range of needs of constituents and their communities. When combined with a rigorous transparent application process via the proposed Regional Development Australia Committee structure such practices would be deemed output focused and value for money to the Australian tax-payer.

The CQACC is set to commence its regional community engagement strategy aimed at providing advice to the Australian Government on the role of RDA Committees and how they will interact (Charter) with initiatives aimed at enhancing the sustainability and liveability of Australian regions.

The CQACC looks forward to the consolidation report of the House of Representative Standing Committee in this regard and is happy to cooperate further should the need occur.

Yours sincerely



Kym Mobbs
Chairman CQACC

