

House of Representatives Inquiry Submission SUBMISSION 72

Wheatbelt Region

Closing Date for Submission - Monday 14th July 2008

Please complete as many pages as required

Name: Brian Childs
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Organisation (if applicable): Framework Lifestyle Planning Pty Ltd
Region: Wheatbelt Region
Signature:
1. Please provide your thoughts on future funding of regional programs in order to invest in genuine and accountable community infrastructure projects.
<p>I approach this issue from a small business development background and therefore tend to reference the investment of funds in community infrastructure projects in terms of building local business capacity. It is my view that funding should be aimed at investments in community projects that foster and support the local business community. The local business community employ locals, pay taxes and consume locally produced goods and services. Future funding of regional programs should be based upon:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resourcing of agencies and processes that foster local idea generation within the community; • Resourcing of processes that not only consult with the community, but develop community engagement with the whole process of idea generation, community development and local needs analysis; • Encouragement of local community drivers of the application to Government for resources to facilitate accountable community infrastructure projects; • Development of intermediate agencies that can guide and support the local community in the processes of ideas formation, exploration, selection, planning, resourcing, implantation and management. <p>The above are somewhat 'motherhood' statements in that most will agree with them but specifically what do we do next?</p> <p>Answer: Most communities (and I refer to the business community here) are so busy dealing with issues of survival and day-to-day management of the next crisis, that the individuals concerned do not have the time or skills to engage in developing and articulating the case to government on investment in community infrastructure projects. Most communities need competent local community development agencies with suitably skilled professional staff who can apply the necessary discipline and processes of community development and foster the local community through the above steps to identify and develop suitable community projects.</p> <p>The short answer to this issue is for government to fund suitably qualified local community development agencies and agents to engage the community development process on behalf of the Government.</p>
2. How should the Federal Government design regional programs in a way to minimise administrative costs and duplication for taxpayers.
<p>Drawing upon my fourth bullet point in the previous answer 'development of the intermediate agencies that can guide and support the local community in the processes of ideas formation' it is through suitably qualified local community development agencies (and their staff) that the needs analysis, project development, implementation and management can be fostered. By structuring these agencies with the charter to assess and represent local needs and then to oversee their implantation, administrative costs can be managed and (provided an agreed geographic area of responsibility is defined) duplication will be avoided.</p>

Forward Submission to –

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Email: itrdlg.reps@aph.gov.au

Post: Committee Secretary; Standing Committee on Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government; PO Box 6021; House of Representatives; Parliament House; CANBERRA ACT 2600

(Note- In order to facilitate electronic publishing of submissions, the Committee would prefer posted submissions to be sent on disk or CD-ROM in Microsoft Word® or Portable Document Format (PDF).

3. Examine the former government's practices and grants outlined in the Australian National Audit Office report on Regional Partnerships http://www.anao.gov.au/director/publications/auditreports/2007-2008.cfm?item_id=40BC1C6C1560A6E8AAA43AAB96708E61 with the aim of providing advice on future funding of regional programs.

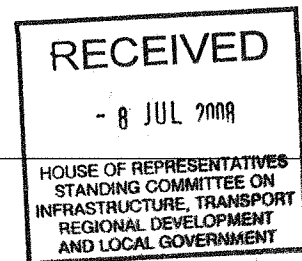
A direct quotation from the Australian National Audit Office report within the Overall Audi Conclusions is **"the concern that decisions on projects were open to the interpretation that they had been made for political reasons and not on the merits of the project was the primary reason for the then Minister for Transport and Regional Services establishing a Ministerial Committee in November 2005 to take decisions on applications, replacing decisions by individual Ministers"** has been addressed in the report. However, this does give weight to the prospective notion of devolving decision making on grants to locally based community focused organisations. Please give consideration to notionally allocating funding for project up to a pre set maximum (say \$5,000) to local community based agencies to undertake grant decision making (within agreed guidelines) without Ministerial intervention. This will make the process more efficient, save time and foster local decision making. Another quotation **"Perceptions that funding decisions were not merit-based arise in such circumstances. These perceptions are elevated in circumstances where the basis for Ministerial decisions is not recorded"** are further grounds for concern about unnecessary ministerial intervention and the politicisation of grants decisions aimed at community development. The distribution of funding with weighting toward electorates held by Coalition parties again causes concern and further justifies the exploration and development of strategies aimed at devolving decision to recognised locally based groups. Continuing with the theme of undue ministerial influence is the issue of reduced timeframes imposed upon the department for due diligence in the period leading up to the election. These issues and the politicisation of the departments due diligence and attempts at ensuring equity mean that an alternative to the ministers absolute control must be developed.

I respectfully suggest that ONLY community based rural agencies can meaningfully assess and determine what is best for the local community and a significant part of the decision making should be devolved to them. The balance of the decision making process should be handled by the appropriate government department should oversee the process and ensure compliance with guidelines.

4. Examine the former government's practices and grants in the Regional Partnerships Program after the audit period of 2003-2006 with the aim of providing advice on future funding of regional programs.

I have answered this point in part in my previous answer. It is my view that 80% of the decision making should be taken at local level by professional guidance of local communities. The guidance may come from locally based community development agencies such as the ACC network across Australia. This approach will de politicise the process, provide empowerment and equity to local communities and if there are difficulties those difficulties will be resolved at local level.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer my views.



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