

## House of Representatives Inquiry Submission Wheatbelt Region

**Closing Date for Submission - Monday 14<sup>th</sup> July 2008**

*Please complete as many pages as required*

Name: Sean Fletcher

Position Role (if applicable): Chief Executive Officer

Organisation (if applicable): Shire of Wyalkatchem

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.

The Wheatbelt Area Consultative Committee (WACC) has played a key role in assisting secure the funding for the Medical Centre under Regional Partnerships and the Regional Infrastructure Medical Fund and provided assistance regarding many other projects. It is also a stakeholder in the development of the Aviation College and has provided the author advice on other development initiatives.

The Australian Local Government's position is that any further investment in Regional Australia should be based on investing in or renewing declining community infrastructure for example swimming pools, playgrounds, ovals, libraries and so on. The Shire of Wyalkatchem supports this position.

This matter goes to the heart of sustainability for local governments and has been highlighted repeatedly in the Local Government Advisory Board's report, the SSS Report and also the recent report into Local Government on its capacity to raise revenue.

#### Author's Recommendation

That funding should be for both renewable and new infrastructure, with the main emphasis on renewable community infrastructure and specialist funding for health infrastructure. The way that the funding is provided should be similar to the way that Roads to Recovery funding is allocated.

2. How should the Federal Government design regional programs in a way to minimise administrative costs and duplication for taxpayers.

The simplest and most cost effective solution would be for the newly formed Regional Development Australia (RDA) to be a one stop shop for federal government funding programs including assistance with advice, completion of grant applications and roll out of any new developments.

The WACC has also been proactive with training programs, seminars, grant expos and workshops that underpin community development. These have been an invaluable tool in assisting both professionals and volunteers to up-skill and deliver capacity building outcomes.

Apart from this, the WACC has an extensive Youth Development Program that includes leadership development for young people. As a result, the youth in the Wheatbelt have received opportunities that their cousins do not receive in the metropolitan areas. For instance, Wyalkatchem's youth in recent times have done programs on the Leeuwin Sailing Ship, attended development programs at Gin-Gin and most recently a leadership camp in Dwellingup. It is important that such a role continues

#### Author's Recommendation

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That Regional Development Australia maintain similar status to that of the Area Consultative Committees with added service provision regarding access to other Federal Government funding programs.

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](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.

Funding for regional programs must continue. They must be delivered in a user friendly way that takes into account that people in today's world are time poor.

The Regional Partnerships application process was both difficult and complex. The scope of the application challenged even the most skilled and effective applicants. It also consumed large amounts of time as a result.

However, staff were extremely helpful both in the Regional Office (Perth) and also in the Wheatbelt Area Consultative Committee. Also, Regional Partnerships did not have funding rounds. Applications could be submitted any time which is important for those who are time poor.

#### Author's Recommendation

That any future funding programs continue without funding rounds. If there are funding rounds imposed, there must be an "out of season" mechanism in place so that applicants have the opportunity to put through projects that are of an urgent nature as well as those projects that have regional significance. The justification for regional significance projects is that it is not always easy to get the input from all the stakeholders when needed.

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.

The report on the Australian National Audit Office's Performance Audit of the Regional Partnerships Program identified that ministers and departmental staff had made decisions outside the guidelines and in contravention of the recommendations made by various ACCs. It would appear that such decisions occurred in marginal electorates. So, the rigour was lacking in the funding approval process. However, the majority of Area Consultative Committees and Departmental staff complied with the guidelines.

Perhaps the issue is more about dealing with individuals who breach the guidelines rather than dismantling a whole system that was working very well. It would appear that the Rudd Government's response to the report was to scrap the Regional Partnerships, Sustainable Regions and Better Regions programs and put an alternative program in their place that also dismantles the ACC process. In hand with this, the State Office of the Department of Infrastructure (formerly DOTARs) will be closed. This means local state based consultation and administration will cease and be relocated to Canberra.

There must be on ground support for regional communities, both rural and remote. This is the key if the Government is serious in turning from an economic rationalist model to a sustainability model regarding regional development. On ground support encourages creativity and innovation and the ability to respond to adverse situations. The subsequent provision of funding then ensures that regional local communities have access to some of the services and facilities that built up urban environments experience on a daily basis. It is only reasonable that community infrastructure is provided to ensure that the social well being of a community is maintained.

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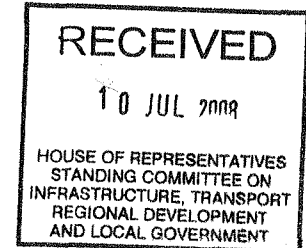
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Author's Recommendation

That RDA Groups are supported. It is imperative that these groups are used to provide local, on the ground support and act as receptors of feedback. The RDAs must have input into any funding application put forward because of the local knowledge their staff have.



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