

24 June 2008



Committee Secretary  
Standing Committee Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development  
and Local Government  
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Dear Sir/Madam

### INQUIRY INTO A NEW REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUNDING PROGRAM

This is a submission to the above inquiry.

The Swan Hill Rural City Council is a regionally based municipality, located along the Murray River in North West Victoria. Council is actively aware of the difficulties facing rural Australia, particularly those that are struggling under the adverse conditions caused by drought. We urge you in the strongest terms to consider the immediate re-introduction of a funding program for rural Australia to replace the Regional Partnership Program.

Council was extremely disappointed with the decision to withdraw Regional Partnership, particularly without replacing it with another funding program in a timely manner.

Regional Partnerships, or a similar program, is vital for the continued sustainability and liveability of Regional Australia. Regional Partnerships has funded, or was likely to fund important projects in our community. Particularly valuable have been projects that are funded by contributions from Local Government, State Government, and through Regional Partnerships, the Federal Government.

Examples of these projects are:-

- Robinvale Leisure Centre, Regional Partnerships, contributed \$450,000 to this \$2 million project. The remainder of the funding was made up of contributions from the State Government, Swan Hill Rural City Council and the community of Robinvale. This important project has provided much needed leisure and recreational opportunities for the community of Robinvale.
- Swan Hill Tourist Information Centre Fit Out. Regional Partnerships contributed \$45,000 to the fit out of the Tourist Information Centre. The centre has contributed strongly to tourism in the region, by encouraging travellers to stay longer in the region resulting in positive economic flow on effects.
- Lake Boga Foreshore Development. An application for \$310,000 was made under Regional Partnership Program to boost tourism to the region, with the development of facilities at Lake Boga located near Swan Hill.

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Regional Partnerships funding was to be part of a larger \$755,000 project with funding already secured from the State Government, Swan Hill Rural City Council and the Lake Boga Community.

It is critically important that Regional Partnerships or a successor is made available immediately, for projects similar to those listed above to be undertaken.

With the instigation of a replacement funding program, it is important to ensure that the application process is kept as straight forward and as easy to follow as possible. The Regional Partnership application process was bureaucratic, lengthy and onerous for community based organisations. A streamlined application process should be adopted that will satisfy accountability issues but be easy to follow and easy to complete. The use of a two staged application process involving an initial Expression of Intent followed by a full application is suggested.

A positive element of the former Regional Partnership was the support and advice provided by the regionally based Area Consultative Committee's. The retention of these committees is essential if a future funding program is to be introduced to provide that vital link between the community and Federal Government.

In conclusion, I would like to stress the absolute importance of the re-introduction of a Federal Government funding program as soon as possible to allow for the development of sustainable community infrastructure.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Dennis Hovenden', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Dennis Hovenden  
Chief Executive Officer