



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

Dear Sir / Madam

RE: Inquiry into new Regional Development Funding Program

We were stunned to hear that the Commonwealth had abandoned the extremely successful, results driven Regional Partnership Program. This program and it's predecessor the Sustainable Regions program stood out amid the myriad of bureaucratic, funding programs who's point seems to be creative and exclusive application processes with little or no outcomes for the general community.

We were one of the 8 successful commercial grant recipients misled for 6 months by Mr Gray and Albanesse then denied any but the most dismissive advice that they had no intention of honoring the approval as part of the current budget.

We are pleased to advise that prior to the approval there was no sign of any political interference in our application and quite the opposite we pestered and harassed the then Federal Government to obtain a decision on an application that took us some \$200,000 research to put together over the prior 2 years. If approvals were for hire then someone forgot to tell us there were easier ways to buy an approval than complying with the stated program guidelines.

So we write with much trepidation that our opinions are disregarded as commercial and hence valueless, regional and hence irrelevant but as a very positive organisation, we live in hope that our elected representatives will be forced to at least listen to if not consider the view of an organisation with much success in the areas where this program hopes to succeed. Regional people and infrastructure.

DTR Holdings Pty Ltd trading as Austchilli therefore respond to the request for submissions on the new program to replace Regional Partnerships as on the following page:



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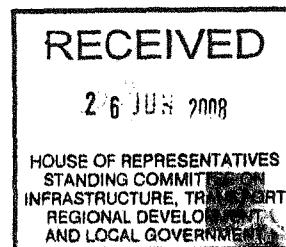
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- Specific discretionary funding must be retained to Regional Communities as they are currently struggling to maintain often ancient infrastructure and facilities let alone upgrade these to a level available in the capital cities and their surrounds. Their problem as recognized by the prior programs is Sustainability and access to funding more easily available to their city based cousins, hence the need for funding aimed particularly at this sustainability aspect of the communities.
- Commercial projects must again form an important part of the program as unlike, not for profit or council applications these provide not only usually a very short period to produce 100% ROI for the Commonwealth but if correctly assessed ensure sustainability of the local workforce and community funding base.
- The existing application criteria with the very successful goals and aims of the previous program should be retained with attention given to administration of the application, approval and acquittal processes which exclude great projects due to a lack of Grant application expertise rather than viability.
- The discretionary nature of the process was a huge asset in not restricting successful applicants to those proficient in application writing regardless of "common sense value" of the project. This must be retained to give the rest of us some chance of funding supported by the ACC structure to assist in primary assessment and application preparation. The system of allowing the department to assess the eligibility of the project but then having an elected minister grant the approval was such a profound improvement it should not be lost simply because of disagreement over these final decisions. Enhance the process don't destroy it.
- The ACC's must be retained as the most valuable tool in successful regional funding allowing organisations not normally able to formally develop and assess their own projects viability to access these funds. The process itself has been a valuable tool for many organisations that the previous program assessors never even saw. However the ACC helped them develop their projects through that process alone.
- We suggest that the role of the ACC be expanded to included the disbursement and reporting process to avoid the frustrations we had in our earlier application of having one officer in Canberra require a style of reporting then a subsequent Brisbane based replacement demand we rework our previous 3 milestone reports and the final report to finalise the process. This inconsistency would we feel, be avoided with ACC management at this stage.
- Above all don't lose this exceptionally successful program in achieving sustainable regional outcomes at least in our regions experience.

Thank You

Ian Gaffel
General Manager
Austchilli Pty Ltd



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