

# Shoalhaven Area Consultative Committee Inc

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SUBMISSION 76

ACCs

The Australian Government's  
Regional Development Network

P.O. Box 1227 Nowra 2541

**Telephone:** (02) 4422 9011

**Facsimile:** (02) 4422 5080

**Email:** admin@sacc.com.au

**Website:** sacc.com.au

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The Secretary  
Standing Committee on Infrastructure, Transport,  
Regional Development and Local Government  
House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

## **Re: Inquiry into a New Regional Development Funding Program**

The Shoalhaven Area Consultative Committee (SACC) (Regional Development Australia) welcomes the opportunity to make a brief submission to the above Inquiry, and by so doing, to provide advice on future funding of regional programs following the Australian National Audit Office's Performance report of the Regional Partnerships Program (RPP).

### **The Shoalhaven ACC**

The SACC was formed in 1995 and the basics of that initial membership are still in place today. The current Chairman, Brian Hanley, was the initial Chairman appointed under the Keating Labor Government, and the Committee is comprised of representatives from Jervis Bay Territory, the education sector, defence, local government, the community, the Indigenous community, tourism and hospitality, local business and industry. The Committee also has ex-officio members from local, state and federal government agencies.

The Committee's geographical responsibility is for the Local Government Area of Shoalhaven and the Jervis Bay Territory with a population of 95,000. This region is characterised by high unemployment (8.3% March Quarter; Small Area Labor Market. Aust 4.2%. NSW 4.6%) and considerable dependence on Social Security. This is confirmed by the region's low SEIFA rating of 951.44 from the 2001 Census. However the region has a growing population, diverse industry sectors and excellent educational facilities. It is located close to Sydney and Canberra and has beautiful beaches and national parks.

During the period of the RPP, funding of \$6.3 million was approved for 32 projects which had a total project value of \$36.82 million (Exclusive of GST). Funding for individual projects



An Australian Government Initiative

ranged from \$6,050 to \$3 million, and the projects were located across the region. Most of these projects had both social and economic outcomes, and the main economic outcome was the identified number of sustainable jobs created by the projects.

The SACC maintains a strong working relationship with the Department's regional office in Wollongong in regards to potential and current projects under RPP. This commenced with receiving their comments on a brief project overview of potential projects and was maintained throughout the process of application development, assessment, submission, contracting and launch.

The SACC members and staff have strong relationships with all major economic and community stakeholder groups and the three levels of government through membership and attending meetings and forums. These stakeholder groups include the NSW Department of State and Regional Development, Ausindustry, Shoalhaven Industry Development and Employment Committee, Illawarra Regional Development Board, the Southern Councils Group, the South East Australia Transport Strategy, Shoalhaven Student Support and the Student Workplace Learning Program.

#### **The SACC Assessment Process**

From an initial contact, SACC staff would meet with potential applicants to discuss their project. At this meeting the applicant and project would be vetted and often redirected to a more appropriate funding program or agency and other levels of government.

Approximately 75% of all funding enquiries were advised at this stage not to proceed with applications under RPP. We believe this process minimized administrative costs particularly for the Department.

Throughout the development of the application, we always worked hand in hand with both the applicant and the Department, and this working relationship was maintained through to project submission.

An important element in our Committee's assessment of RPP applications was the face-to-face meeting and presentation by proponents to our members and Departmental staff. This afforded a great opportunity for both the proponent and our members to adequately assess all elements of the project and report to Government as they were requested to do.

From this process our assessment comments were developed and logged onto the system.

All 32 projects which were approved for funding under the RPP in our region followed this assessment process.

**Benefit to Community and Recommendations**

From our experience with previous regional development programmes we recommend that the Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Fund be:

- An ongoing funding program with simple objectives, guidelines, application form and contracting on a competitive grants basis
- Timely approval process accepting of Ministerial Accountability
- Take advantage of local knowledge to assist in the assessment process

We trust the above information will assist with development of future funding of the Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program, and we would happy to clarify any of the above if requested to do so.

Yours faithfully,

  
BRIAN HANLEY  
Chair

