

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Additional Estimates February 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Question: REGS 01

Division/Agency: Regional Services

Topic: Regional Partnerships - Blackall Old People's Home

Hansard Pages: 63, 65, 74 (19/02/08)

Senator Boswell asked:

Senator BOSWELL—I have a couple of people who are getting very concerned. Blackall old people's home, what is happening with that one? It was approved, it was passed and it has been held up.

Ms McNally—Senator, the Government is currently considering its administrative arrangements for the regional programs in light of the ANAO audit report.

.....

Senator BOSWELL—Are you aware of the Blackall old people's home?

Ms McNally—Not directly, no.

Senator BOSWELL—Is anyone here?

Ms McNally—I would have to take that on notice.

.....

Senator BOSWELL—I know that you have read the reports. I know that you think that some of these are bi-partisan. I want to tell you this: there are many out there, and I have mentioned one, the Blackall old people's home. People in Blackall went around and took the hat around and developed this wonderful old people's home and they needed topping up. I think from memory it was \$300,000. These are tremendous projects that have been informed that they are going to get the money and they have taken the necessary provisions to order tradesmen or get tradesmen in. You have everything on hold. You have a lot of old people waiting for homes or for beds or units. It is an amount of about \$300,000. I think \$2 million or \$3 million was collected by the community and this whole project is being held up. I would like to put that on the record, because there is an assumption in the Government that these are very bi-partisan. Some may fall in that category, but I am telling you this: there are many out there that are actually great projects and being held up now. You are not affecting us; by not developing a decision, a lot of people are suffering.

Senator Conroy—Senator Boswell, I appreciate the point you are making. I think it is a very valid point. The individual matter you have raised we are happy to take on notice and get back to you with the information as to what status that individual project has within those gradations we were talking about. I think you have made a very good point and we are happy to take that on notice and get back to you.

Answer:

The Barcoo Living – Extension to McLean Place project is located in Blackall. The ongoing future of the *Regional Partnerships* program will be considered in conjunction with a number of Government priorities.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Additional Estimates February 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Question: REGS 02

Division/Agency: Regional Services

Topic: ANAO Audit Report – Administrative Arrangements

Hansard Page: 65 (19/02/08)

Senator Boswell asked:

Senator BOSWELL—What exactly are the administrative arrangements? Could you just enlighten us on what ‘reviewing the administrative arrangements’ means?

Senator Conroy—We are happy to take that on notice and get back to you.

Answer:

The Hon Anthony Albanese MP, the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, and the Hon Gary Gray, MP Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Development and Northern Australia have been considering how they wish to proceed on a broad range of issues related to the decision-making and the administration of the *Regional Partnerships* program.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Additional Estimates February 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Question: REGS 03

Division/Agency: Regional Services

Topic: Regional Partnerships – Uncontracted Projects

Hansard Page: 69 (19/02/08)

Senator Macdonald asked:

Senator IAN MACDONALD—So how many of the 116 have not even been sent a draft contract?

Ms McNally—I would have to take that on notice, Senator.

Answer:

Since receiving the three volume Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) report into the *Regional Partnerships* program which highlighted serious issues relating to the transparency of decision-making and the administration of the program, the Government is undertaking a detailed analysis of the report. The ongoing future of the *Regional Partnerships* program will be considered in conjunction with a number of Government priorities.

None of the 116 projects noted have executed funding agreements (contracts) in place.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Additional Estimates February 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Question: REGS 04

Division/Agency: Regional Services
Topic: Regional Partnerships – Uncontracted Projects
Hansard Page: 73 (19/02/08)

Senator Boswell asked:

Senator BOSWELL—There are 116 approved projects without a contract. When do they get the contract?

Ms McNally—Some of them will have received a contract and some will not. It depends on the process of the negotiation and how far through that negotiation they are.

Senator BOSWELL—How many have actually got the contract? Out of that 116, how many have been completed?

Senator Conroy—We said that we will get back to you. We will take that on notice and get you that information.

Senator BOSWELL—The question I have is how many have been approved but not paid; you are getting back to us on that?

Ms McNally—Yes, Senator.

Senator BOSWELL—My question is: how many have been approved but are being reviewed?

Ms McNally—Yes, Senator.

Senator Conroy—We are taking each of these on notice, yes.

Senator BOSWELL—My other question is: how many are awaiting approval?

Ms McNally—Yes.

Senator Conroy—Yes, we will take that on notice.

Answer:

Since receiving the three volume Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) report into the *Regional Partnerships* program which highlighted serious issues relating to the transparency of decision-making and the administration of the program, the Government is undertaking a detailed analysis of the report. The ongoing future of the *Regional Partnerships* program will be considered in conjunction with a number of Government priorities.

None of the 116 projects noted have executed funding agreements (contracts) in place.

None of these 116 projects have received a payment.

As at 7 April 2008, there are 474 *Regional Partnerships* applications under assessment.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Additional Estimates February 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Question: REGS 05

Division/Agency: Regional Services

Topic: Regional Partnerships – Uncontracted Projects

Hansard Page: 75 (19/02/08)

Senator Boswell asked:

Senator BOSWELL—How many projects which have been signed off by the Government have had to be abandoned because the projects are time critical and they have yet to have contracts signed? There will be some of those now.

Senator CONROY—That is a very specific question. I am not sure if Ms McNally has that sort of detailed information to hand. I would not have imagined so, in all fairness. Again, we are happy to take that on notice and come back to you, but that is a very detailed question, Senator Boswell.

Answer:

The Department does not have information on whether any projects approved by the previous Government and for which no funding agreement (contract) has been agreed and executed, have been abandoned.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Additional Estimates February 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Question: REGS 06

Division/Agency: Regional Services
Topic: Approved Projects Pre-Election 2007
Hansard Page: 75 (19/02/08)

Senator Milne asked:

Senator MILNE—Thank you. Next to that, does it tell us what the departmental advice was in relation to all of those projects?

Ms McNally—No, Senator.

Senator MILNE—Can I have that, as well? Can I have it also broken down by State? And also, which of those projects were applications by for profit companies?

Ms Page—I will take that on notice, Senator.

Answer:

Under conventions accepted by successive Governments, Departments are not required to disclose the nature of advice to Ministers.

Projects approved for funding under the *Regional Partnerships* program are listed on the Department's website at:

http://dynamic.dotars.gov.au/regional/approved_grants/grants_regpart.cfm.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Additional Estimates February 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Question: REGS 07

Division/Agency: Regional Services

Topic: Regional Partnerships – Uncontracted Projects

Hansard Page: 76 (19/02/08)

Senator Nash asked:

Senator NASH—In the discussions that ensued earlier, I am not sure whether this question was asked and taken on notice. If it was not, can I ask for a list of the 116 projects that fall under that ‘approved, not contracted’ section. Thank you. Since the inception of the program—and again, I appreciate you will probably have to take this on notice—how many projects have not gone ahead due to the fact that agreement on a funding contract could not be reached? Have there ever been any instances where a project has fallen over because there could not be agreement around the funding contract?

Ms McNally—I will take that on notice.

Answer:

The Department does not have information on whether any projects approved by the previous government and for which no funding agreement (contract) has been agreed and executed have not gone ahead.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Additional Estimates February 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Question: REGS 08

Division/Agency: Regional Services
Topic: Approved Projects Pre-Election 2007
Hansard Pages: 76-77 (19/02/08)

Senator Nash asked:

Senator NASH—This question is probably for the Minister. This is in relation to the Prime Minister talking around the whole issue of procedure and process for potential *Regional Partnerships* program grants which deliver enormously, as the Department has said in its Annual Report, in terms of the economy and economic development for regional communities. In a doorstep interview on 16 November, the now Prime Minister was asked about the process of things. The journalist asked, ‘[So Ministers would not be able to overturn the recommendations of the Department. Is that what you were saying?](#)’ The Prime Minister replied, ‘[According to the three-stage procedure I have outlined, absolutely.](#)’ Minister, that would then suggest that under a program if a Department made a recommendation to a Minister of a positive nature the Minister would not be able to overturn it and decline to approve the project. Is that correct?

Senator Conroy—I do not have the entire transcript available.

Senator NASH—I am happy to table it.

Senator Conroy—I am happy to have it tabled. I am not suggesting that you are misreading it, but I am not aware of the context of that conversation. I am happy to seek the Minister’s comments on that and take it on notice and get back to you.

Senator NASH—That would be good. I guess my question very simply is: is it appropriate for a Department to give advice to a Minister of a positive nature—that is, is it possible for a Department to give advice to a Minister saying, ‘Yes, I recommend you approve this project’—and then the Minister not be able to overturn that in a negative way and say, ‘No, I don’t think that is a worthy project. I think the Department actually has it wrong here. They shouldn’t have recommended that, so I’m not going to tick off on it’? Doesn’t what the Prime Minister has said preclude the Minister from being able to make a judgement?

Senator Conroy—There could be circumstances arise where, say, five projects are all approved by a Department but there are only three spots—three pieces of funding. So, by definition, two projects that were approved would not receive funding, so it is entirely possible that a departmental recommendation saying ‘approve this’ may not actually receive funding.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Bad try.

Senator McGAURAN—Why did the Department not prioritise so that it does not have to make any decision?

Senator Conroy—But on the broader point that you are making, I think it is a very important question and I am happy to seek the views of the Minister on it and take it on notice and get back to you.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Additional Estimates February 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Senator NASH—If you could and come back to the Committee, that would be great, because I think this is a very important point. The Prime Minister has said that Ministers would not be able to overturn recommendations. Departments are not perfect. They do a very good job in most instances, but they are not perfect and they may well recommend something that a Minister thinks is not worthy. And, according to the Prime Minister, that Minister will not have the ability to overturn that decision. So, if you could come back to me with that, that would be great.

Answer:

In making the decisions whether to fund proposals, Ministers are required to be satisfied that they meet the requirements of the *Financial Management and Accountability Act 1997* Regulation 9.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Additional Estimates February 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Question: REGS 09

Division/Agency: Regional Services
Topic: Approved Projects Pre-Election 2007
Hansard Page: 80 (19/02/08)

Senator Milne asked:

Senator MILNE—Thank you for that. Earlier, I asked you to take on notice the list of projects that have been approved and the departmental recommendations. Where projects have been approved contrary to the Department's recommendation can I also see the reasons that the previous Ministers have given for approving those projects?

Ms Page—We will take that on notice.

Answer:

Projects approved for funding under the *Regional Partnerships* program are listed on the Department's website at:

http://dynamic.dotars.gov.au/regional/approved_grants/grants_regpart.cfm.

Under conventions accepted by successive Governments, Departments are not required to disclose the nature of advice to Ministers.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Additional Estimates February 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Question: REGS 10

Division/Agency: Regional Services

Topic: Dysart Sports Complex

Hansard Page: 80 (19/02/08)

Senator Nash asked:

Senator NASH—Just one last question for the Minister because I am completely at a loss here. The Minister has been talking all day about accountability and process. Given that the Minister has been talking about the proper process—that it was supposed to come, in his view, to Ministers under the Regional Partnerships program in the previous government—can the minister answer: why would the then Opposition, the now Labor Government, commit \$1½ million for the Dysart Sports Complex which, as my colleague here has said, the Minister has said is committed funding when that particular project had previously not been approved by this Department?

Senator Conroy—I need to take you up on one point in your introduction to the question where you talk about the Minister talking about all these issues. Let us be clear: you may be in denial about the ANAO report but it is the ANAO report that has been identified—

Senator NASH—How many projects did the ANAO—

CHAIR—Senator Nash, the Minister is trying to answer your question.

Senator Conroy—My second point is that you may be in denial but I am simply quoting from the ANAO's report on the specific item you have raised. It is a very specific question, as I am sure you understand. I am happy to take that on notice and get a specific response on that matter from the Minister. As I am sure you will understand, the Department has not had a chance to assess these projects and look at these projects for implementation. It is only the Minister who can give you that answer.

Answer:

The Government has committed to funding the Dysart Sports Complex project under the *Better Regions Program*.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Additional Estimates February 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Question: REGS 11

Division/Agency: Regional Services

Topic: WA Great Southern ACC

Hansard Page: Written Question

Senator Adams asked:

I would like to know whether or not the Area Consultative Committees will continue.

Answer:

On 20 March 2008, the Hon Anthony Albanese MP, Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government made a Ministerial statement to the House of Representatives announcing that the Area Consultative Committee (ACC) network would transition to become local Regional Development Australia (RDA) committees.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Additional Estimates February 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Question: REGS 12

Division/Agency: Regional Services

Topic: Barcaldine Tree of Knowledge Project

Hansard Page: 81 (19/02/08)

Senator Boswell asked:

Senator BOSWELL—I have a couple of questions. Was the \$2.6 million *Barcaldine Tree of Knowledge* project rejected by the Department under the former Government?

Senator Conroy—That would be advice to a former Government.

Senator BOSWELL—I am asking: was it rejected by the Department as a project?

Ms McNally—I will have to take that on notice.

Answer:

Under conventions accepted by successive Governments, Departments are not required to disclose the nature of advice to Ministers.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Additional Estimates February 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Question: REGS 13

Division/Agency: Regional Services
Topic: Labor Government's Election Commitments
Hansard Page: 81 (19/02/08)

Senator Boswell asked:

Senator BOSWELL—Mr Crean went out and promised \$109 million in a week. Are those commitments going to be honoured even if the Department rejects them?

Senator Conroy—These are election commitments and, as the Prime Minister has indicated, we will honour all of our election commitments.

Senator BOSWELL—The Prime Minister was asked a question by a journalist, 'Ministers would not be able to overturn the recommendations of the Department; is that what you are saying?' The Prime Minister said, 'According to the three procedures I have outlined the stages are renounced.' Can these projects be overturned if the Department rejects them?

Senator Conroy—As the Prime Minister has said, we will be keeping all of our election commitments. As to any further comment, I am happy to take that on notice and seek the views of the Minister.

Answer:

The Government has committed to funding a number of projects in regional Australia.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Additional Estimates February 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Question: REGS 14

Division/Agency: Regional Services

Topic: Election Commitments by Electorate

Hansard Page: 83 (19/02/08)

Senator McGauran asked:

Senator McGAURAN—Growing regions? I just wanted clarification on that. As Senator Nash has rightly requested, what programs have been committed to under *Better Regions*? Could you add to that list or requirement the electorates to which those commitments have been made during the election period?

Answer:

The arrangements for implementing election commitments are currently being finalised by the Government.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Additional Estimates February 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Question: REGS 15

Division/Agency: Regional Services

Topic: Barcaldine Tree of Knowledge Project

Hansard Page: 83 (19/02/08)

Senator McGauran asked:

Senator McGAURAN—Sorry, I have one more question. Senator Boswell raised the election commitment to the *Tree of Knowledge*. That is the famous Labor tree of knowledge, is it? The commitment is \$2.6 million, for heaven's sake. I do not know how you could spend \$2.6 million around that tree, but if that is the case can you outline to me how \$2.6 million is envisaged to be spent on a dying tree?

Senator Conroy—I think the tree has—

Senator BOSWELL—Expired.

Senator McGAURAN—Where has \$2.6 million—

Senator Conroy—It has certainly had some issues, but we will get back to you and take that on notice on the way we intend to spend that money.

Senator SCULLION—I think it is important, just to ensure that the Minister understands the full aspects of the fact, that it was an election commitment by the Government of \$2.6 million to protect the tree. It was also a fact that this project had already been rejected by the Department. I just wondered if you could provide the answers on notice.

Senator Conroy—Senator McGauran asked specifically how we were going to spend the \$2.6 million. So, that is the part I happily take on notice. It was an election commitment and we will keep our election commitments.

Senator McGAURAN—What had they planned to spend the \$2.6 million on initially?

Senator Conroy—That is a very specific question on a very specific project.

Senator McGAURAN—The first time around?

Senator Conroy—The Department would like to assist and the only way it can assist is by taking that on notice and getting the information for you.

Answer:

The Government committed funding to the *Tree of Knowledge* project which includes the establishment of a memorial at the site, the interpretation of the Australian *Tree of Knowledge* story within the Australian Workers Heritage Centre, and the creation of a theme pathway to enable visitors to walk to the memorial and to facilitate access to the museum and town.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Additional Estimates February 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Question: REGS 16

Division/Agency: Regional Services
Topic: Barcaldine Tree of Knowledge
Hansard Page: 84 (19/02/08)

Senator McGauran asked:

Senator McGAURAN—It just jumps out at you, \$2.6 million, as an absolute waste. Some frivolous Shadow Minister at the time has passed through there and thrown down the promise and kept moving. It is an indulgence in Labor history—self-satisfying history. Given that it has been rejected once, you must then know, Ms Page—

Senator Conroy—This is an election commitment.

Senator McGAURAN—why it was rejected. Can you inform the committee why it was initially rejected?

Ms Page—I am assuming it was rejected, as you say. I do not have a detailed knowledge of all the projects under the *Regional Partnerships* program.

Senator Conroy—We will have to take that on notice and come back to you.

Answer:

The *Regional Partnerships* Ministerial Committee did not make a funding decision on the *Tree of Knowledge* Tourism Master Plan Implementation Project – Phase 1 – Memorial project prior to the former Government entering the caretaker period on 17 October 2007.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Additional Estimates February 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Question: REGS 17

Division/Agency: Regional Services

Topic: Sustainable Regions Audit

Hansard Page: Written Question

Senator Sterle asked:

Is the Sustainable Regions program being audited?

Answer:

The Sustainable Regions program has been included in the Australian National Audit Office 2008/09 audit program for the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Additional Estimates February 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Question: REGS 18

Division/Agency: Regional Services

Topic: Sustainable Regions Audit

Hansard Page: Written Question

Senator Sterle asked:

When will it be audited?

Answer:

The *Sustainable Regions* program will be audited as part of the Australian National Audit Office 2008/09 audit program.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Additional Estimates February 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Question: REGS 19

Division/Agency: Regional Services

Topic: Sustainable Regions Audit

Hansard Page: Written Question

Senator Sterle asked:

Can you guarantee the Committee that this process will be transparent?

Answer:

The conduct of the proposed audit is a matter for the Australian National Audit Office.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Additional Estimates February 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Question: REGS 20 and REGS 23

Division/Agency: Regional Services

Topic: **Regional Partnerships Program**

Hansard Page: Written Question

Senator Sterle asked:

REGS 20

How do you design funding programs to reflect best practice and if you are designing them like this now why weren't they done like that in the first place?

REGS 23

Looking back to 2004/2005 what initiatives would have improved the transparency of the *Regional Partnerships* program?

Answer:

The Department's response to the matters raised by the Australian National Audit Office performance audit of the *Regional Partnerships* program is set out at pages 629 to 631 of the report which was tabled on 15 November 2007.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Additional Estimates February 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Question: REGS 21

Division/Agency: Regional Services
Topic: Labor Government's Election Commitment
Hansard Page: Written Question

Senator Sterle asked:

How are ACCs structured? How transparent are they?

Answer:

The ACC network comprised 54 individual committees that were established to provide a link between the Australian Government and rural, regional and metropolitan Australia.

ACC committees had a Chair and Deputy Chair who were appointed by the Portfolio Minister. The Government announced on 20 March 2008 the establishment of Regional Development Australia (RDA) to be based on the ACC network and that the CRG would form an interim RDA board. They will review the structure and functions of RDA.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Additional Estimates February 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Question: REGS 22

Division/Agency: Regional Services
Topic: **Regional Partnerships Program**
Hansard Page: Written Question

Senator Sterle asked:

How did you implement competitive neutrality? Local ads, local hearings in communities?

Answer:

The previous Government approved the following process for assessing the competitive advantage status of applications submitted under the *Regional Partnerships* program:

The assessment is based on:

- information provided in the application form and any support documents;
- comments provided by the relevant Area Consultative Committee;
- advice from the relevant departmental regional office;
- researching telephone directories;
- internet scans for information about the project or industry;
- information search from industry organisations or other Government Departments; and
- reviewing reports of the external Financial Viability Assessments undertaken on behalf of the Department.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Additional Estimates February 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Question: REGS 24

Division/Agency: Regional Services

Topic: **Regional Partnerships Program**

Hansard Page: Written Question

Senator Sterle asked:

Did you ever have the impression that the “*Regional Partnerships*” program was the ‘*property*’ of a political party, namely the Liberal and National Party?

Answer:

This is not a matter upon which it is appropriate for the Department to respond.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Additional Estimates February 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Question: REGS 25

Division/Agency: Regional Services

Topic: **Regional Partnerships Program**

Hansard Page: Written Question

Senator Sterle asked:

Did the Party Secretariat of the Liberal or National Party ever approach the Minister's office about funding proposals?

Answer:

That question should be referred to the former Minister for Transport and Regional Services.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Additional Estimates February 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Question: REGS 26

Division/Agency: Regional Services
Topic: **Regional Partnerships Program**
Hansard Page: Written Question

Senator Sterle asked:

Did the Minister ever approve funding to an organisation of which an ACC member was a direct beneficiary? How can you be sure of this, given their track record?

Answer:

Area Consultative Committee (ACC) Chairs, Deputy Chairs and Committee Members are volunteers drawn from the community, local business and local government. It is likely that on a number of occasions that they will be involved in organisations that are applying for funding under *Regional Partnerships*. The *Regional Partnerships* guidelines do not prevent organisations, including individual ACC members, from applying for funding under the program. However, ACC Operational Funding Contracts and the ACC Handbook require ACCs to have internal procedures in place for dealing with conflicts of interest and for it to be a standing item on all formal ACC committees and sub-committees. The ACC is required to advise the Department when a conflict of interest occurs.

Since receiving the three volume Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) report into the *Regional Partnerships* program which highlighted serious issues relating to the transparency of decision-making and the administration of the program, the Government is undertaking a detailed analysis of the report. The ongoing future of the *Regional Partnerships* program will be considered in conjunction with a number of Government priorities.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Additional Estimates February 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Question: REGS 27

Division/Agency: Regional Services

Topic: **Regional Partnerships Program**

Hansard Page: Written Question

Senator Sterle asked:

Did you ever receive direction from Ministers to expedite funding applications or to approve them out of process?

Answer:

The Australian National Audit Office audit of the *Regional Partnerships* program, tabled in November 2007, sets out instances where the Department was directed to expedite funding applications.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Additional Estimates February 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Question: REGS 28

Division/Agency: Regional Services

Topic: **Regional Partnerships Program**

Hansard Page: Written Question

Senator Sterle asked:

Do you have any concerns about other programs?

Answer:

All programs administered by the Department are the subject of regular review and continuous improvement.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Additional Estimates February 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Question: REGS 29

Division/Agency: Regional Services

Topic: **Regional Partnerships Program**

Hansard Page: Written Question

Senator Sterle asked:

Are you aware of any correlation between Liberal Party donors and recipients of *Regional Partnerships*? How can you be sure?

Answer:

No.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Additional Estimates February 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Question: REGS 30

Division/Agency: Regional Services

Topic: Regional Partnerships Program

Hansard Page: Written Question

Senator Sterle asked:

How were Ministers able to intervene and approve applications?

- a. How were Ministers able to approve applications before their applications had been submitted?
- b. There are supposedly 7 steps for consideration. How was this process corrupted?
- c. Why did we not learn of this maladministration until after the event?

Answer:

Regional Partnerships is a discretionary grants program where Ministers have responsibility for making decisions whether to approve funding of projects.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Additional Estimates February 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Question: REGS 31, REGS 35, REGS 36

Division/Agency: Regional Services

Topic: Rural Medical Infrastructure Fund

Hansard Page: Written Question

Senator Sterle asked:

REGS 31

How much funding was underspent in this program?

- a. In how many years did underspending occur?
- b. Given the dire need for health service provision in regional communities how could the program have underspent its allocation of funding?

REGS 35

In regional communities, where there is an urgent need for health services, how could there be funding left over?

REGS 36

Why have there been low numbers for applications for RMIF?

Answer:

The Rural Medical Infrastructure Fund (RMIF) had an annual budget of \$5 million over three years from 2005-06 to 2007-08. As at January 2008, 27 projects with a value of \$5.2 million have been approved for funding and contracted.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Additional Estimates February 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Question: REGS 32

Division/Agency: Regional Services

Topic: Rural Medical Infrastructure Fund

Hansard Page: Written Question

Senator Sterle asked:

What proportions of programs were for Indigenous communities?

Answer:

There have been 27 Rural Medical Infrastructure Fund (RMIF) projects approved and contracted with a total value of \$5.3 million. Of these, 18 projects with a total value of \$3.3 million are located in areas with Indigenous populations over 4 per cent.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Additional Estimates February 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Question: REGS 33

Division/Agency: Regional Services

Topic: Rural Medical Infrastructure Fund

Hansard Page: Written Question

Senator Sterle asked:

Did you ever feel pressured by the former Government or former Ministers to favour Coalition seats?

Answer:

The Department assesses Rural Medical Infrastructure Fund (RMIF) applications in accordance with the *Regional Partnerships* guidelines. The electorate in which the project is located does not play a part in the assessment of the project.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Additional Estimates February 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Question: REGS 34

Division/Agency: Regional Services

Topic: Rural Medical Infrastructure Fund

Hansard Page: Written Question

Senator Sterle asked:

In hindsight, would you have done anything differently?

Answer:

The Department administered Rural Medical Infrastructure Fund in accordance with the guidelines approved by the previous Government.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Additional Estimates February 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Question: REGS 37

Division/Agency: Regional Services

Topic: Rural Medical Infrastructure Fund

Hansard Page: Written Question

Senator Sterle asked:

Were non-Coalition MP's informed of the program?

Answer:

The Rural Medical Infrastructure Fund (RMIF) was announced in the lead up to the 2004 Federal Election.

Information on the RMIF is provided to the public on the Department's website as well as promoted in the Australian Government's Regional Information Directory and the Government's GrantsLINK website.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
 Additional Estimates February 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Question: REGS 38

Division/Agency: Regional Services
Topic: Rural Medical Infrastructure Fund
Hansard Page: Written Question

Senator Sterle asked:

Did any safe Coalition seats receive disproportionate funding compared to other seats?

Answer:

Of the 34 Rural Medical Infrastructure Fund (RMIF) projects which have been approved, the following table indicates the number of projects by electorate (excluding electorates with no projects).

Electorate (2004 Distribution)	RMIF Projects Approved	Total Value
Ballarat, Victoria	1	\$400,000
Barker, South Australia	1	\$400,000
Blair, Queensland	1	\$165,000
Capricornia, Queensland	1	\$250,000
Corangamite, Victoria	1	\$200,000
Eden-Monaro, New South Wales	1	\$33,000
Farrer, New South Wales	1	\$69,300
Gippsland, Victoria	1	\$175,350
Grey, South Australia	1	\$400,000
Groom, Queensland	1	\$400,000
Gwydir, New South Wales	3	\$295,162
Hume, New South Wales	1	\$400,000
Indi, Victoria	2	\$733,645
Kalgoorlie, Western Australia	1	\$20,623
Lingiari, Northern Territory	1	\$175,663
Lyons, Tasmania	1	\$400,000
Maranoa, Queensland	2	\$725,720
Murray, Victoria	1	\$304,740
O'Connor, Western Australia	6	\$1,036,163
Parkes, New South Wales	2	\$282,335
Pearce, Western Australia	1	\$30,508
Riverina, New South Wales	3	\$664,000

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
 Additional Estimates February 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Question: REGS 39

Division/Agency: Regional Services
Topic: Rural Medical Infrastructure Fund
Hansard Page: Written Question

Senator Sterle asked:

How many RMIF applications from Coalition held seats were received and/or approved in September 2007 prior to the election in 2007?

Answer:

There were two Rural Medical Infrastructure Fund (RMIF) applications received by the Department in September 2007:

Project	Date Received	Electorate (2004 Distribution)
RP03744 – Kingston Medical Centre	4 September 2007	Barker, South Australia
RP03509 – Cobram Community Health Centre	11 September 2007	Murray, Victoria

The previous Government approved a total of seven RMIF applications approved for funding in September 2007 for the following electorates:

Project	Date Approved	Electorate (2004 Distribution)
RP03428 – Ballan District Health Care Redevelopment	13 September 2007	Ballarat, Victoria
RP03513 – Ruchworth & District Community Medical Centre	17 September 2007	Murray, Victoria
RP03634 – The Rock Medical Centre	17 September 2007	Riverina, New South Wales
RP03666 – Morawa Medical Centre	17 September 2007	O'Connor, Western Australia
RP03579 – Leonora Medical Equipment	17 September 2007	Kalgoorlie, Western Australia
RP03684 – Expansion of Leichardt Medical Centre	19 September 2007	Capricornia, Queensland
RP03476 – Violet Town GP Medical Facility	26 September 2007	Indi, Victoria

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Additional Estimates February 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Question: REGS 40

Division/Agency: Regional Services

Topic: Rural Medical Infrastructure Fund

Hansard Page: Written Question

Senator Sterle asked:

How many Coalition RMIF applications were refused in 2007/2008?

Answer:

There have been no Rural Medical Infrastructure Fund (RMIF) applications refused in 2007-08.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Additional Estimates February 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Question: REGS 41

Division/Agency: Regional Services

Topic: Funding Status of the Kiama Showground Pavilion Upgrade Project

Hansard Page: Written Question

Senator Payne asked:

- a) What is the status of the Dunn & Lewis Foundation *Kiama Showground Pavilion upgrade*?
- b) Was the project in receipt of a funding agreement?
- c) Is this project being reviewed under the Government's review of priorities and allocations of funding?
- d) When will the project proponent be advised of the result of the consideration?

Answer:

- a) The Kiama Showground Community Events and Exhibition Centre was approved for funding of \$1 million (GST-exclusive) on 27 June 2007.
- b) The Kiama Municipal Council does not have an executed Funding Agreement (contract) for this project.
- c) Yes.
- d) The Kiama Municipal Council will be informed after the Minister and Parliamentary Secretary have completed their analysis of the ANAO report, considered this in conjunction with Government priorities, and have come to a decision.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Additional Estimates February 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Question: REGS 42

Division/Agency: Regional Services

Topic: Funding Status of the Ulladulla Pistol Club Project

Hansard Page: Written Question

Senator Payne asked:

- a) What is the status of the Dunn & Lewis Foundation *Ulladulla Pistol Club project*?
- b) Was the project in receipt of a funding agreement?
- c) Is this project being reviewed under the Government's review of priorities and allocations of funding?
- d) When will the project proponent be advised of the result of the consideration?

Answer:

- a) The Ulladulla Complex Range Development was approved for funding of \$20,000 (GST-exclusive) on 18 September 2007.
- b) The Ulladulla Pistol Club Inc does not have an executed Funding Agreement (contract) for this project.
- c) Yes.
- d) The Ulladulla Pistol Club Inc will be informed after the Minister and Parliamentary Secretary have completed their analysis of the ANAO report, considered this in conjunction with Government priorities, and have come to a decision.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Additional Estimates February 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Question: REGS 43

Division/Agency: Regional Services

Topic: Batemans Bay Chamber of Commerce

Hansard Page: Written Question

Senator Payne asked:

- a) What is the status of the Government's commitment of \$100,000 to the Batemans Bay Chamber of Commerce?
- b) When it is expected that the Batemans Bay Chamber of Commerce will be in receipt of the committed funding?

Answer:

The arrangements for implementing election commitments are currently being finalised by the Government.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Additional Estimates February 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Question: REGS 44

Division/Agency: Local Government and Regional Development

Topic: Batemans Bay Rugby Club

Hansard Page: Written Question

Senator Payne asked:

- a) What is the status of the Government's commitment of \$10,000 to the Batemans Bay Rugby Club?
- b) When it is expected that the Batemans Bay Rugby Club will be in receipt of the committed funding?

Answer:

The arrangements for implementing election commitments are currently being finalised by the Government.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Additional Estimates February 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Question: REGS 45

Division/Agency: Regional Services

Topic: Eurobodalla Netball Association

Hansard Page: Written Question

Senator Payne asked:

- a) What is the status of the Government's commitment of \$8,000 to the Eurobodalla Netball Association?
- b) When it is expected that the Eurobodalla Netball Association will be in receipt of the committed funding?

Answer:

The arrangements for implementing election commitments are currently being finalised by the Government.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Additional Estimates February 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Questions: REGS 46, REGS 47, REGS 48

Division/Agency: Regional Services

Topic: Better Regions Projects

Hansard Page: Written Question

Senator Nash asked:

REGS 46

Could the Department provide a complete list of all the *Better Regions* projects, by name, location and description, promised by the ALP during the election campaign?

REGS 47

How many of those projects had already been submitted to the Department for consideration under the *Regional Partnerships* program?

REGS 48

How many of those projects had been recommended / not recommended to the previous Minister by the Department prior to caretaker mode?

Answer:

The Government has not finalised the allocation of election commitments to portfolios.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Additional Estimates February 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Question: REGS 49

Division/Agency: Regional Services

Topic: Regional Partnerships

Hansard Page: Written Question

Senator Boswell asked:

In relation to the *Regional Partnerships* will you the department please provide an itemised list including the name of the applicant, the project they have applied for and the amount they have applied for (reported separately) for the projects that have the following status (reported separately):

- a. projects that have been approved but not paid;
- b. have been approved but are being reviewed; and
- c. are awaiting approval.

Answer:

The Government is continuing to review the status of projects considered under the *Regional Partnerships* program.