

**Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee**  
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE  
Additional Budget Estimates February 2010  
**Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government**

**Question No.:** LGRD 01

**Division/Agency:** Local Government & Regional Development

**Topic:** Better Regions Program – Completed Projects

**Hansard Page:** 80

**Senator Nash asked:**

**Senator NASH**—Rather than trawling through them now could you provide the committee with a list of completed projects with their location and details?

**Mr Wood**-Certainly

**Answer:**

The completed projects are listed on the Department's website.

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**Question No.:** LGRD 02

**Division/Agency:** Local Government & Regional Development

**Topic:** Better Regions Program – Variations to Projects

**Hansard Page/s:** 80 (09/02/10)

**Senator Nash asked:**

**Senator NASH**—I understand the vagaries of weather and that sometimes it gets in the middle of these things. Could you provide the committee with a list of those projects that have had a variation as a result of not hitting a milestone thus far?

**Mr Wood**—Yes, Senator.

**Answer:**

Information on projects, which have had funding agreements executed, is on the Department's website.

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**Question No.:** LGRD 03

**Division/Agency:** Local Government & Regional Development

**Topic:** Funding Allocations to Regional Development Australia Committees

**Hansard Page/s:** 81 (09/02/10)

**Senator Nash asked:**

**Senator NASH**—We were just discussing Regional Development Australia offices, and how funding is divvied up and where that funding goes.

**Ms Foster**—In the budget \$14.7 million was allocated but an additional amount of almost \$300,000 was rolled over to make the total for this year just over \$15 million across the committees. We do not have with us the details of the allocation by committee, but Mr James can take you through the process that we used to arrive at those allocations.

**Senator NASH**—Could you also take my question on notice and provide us with the allocations for each committee?

**Ms Foster**—Certainly.

**Answer:**

The allocations for each committee are listed on the Department's website as funding contracts are executed.

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**Question No.:** LGRD 04

**Division/Agency:** Local Government & Regional Development

**Topic:** Regional Development Australia

**Hansard Page/s:** 84-85 (09/02/10)

**Senator Nash asked:**

**Senator NASH**—Are the proposals that are being drawn up always in concert with local government?

**Mr James**—Only local governments are eligible to apply as the formal applicant to the Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program, or RLCIP.

**Senator NASH**—Fantastic; that was the missing link. You are saying that local government authorities will be able to assist.

**Ms Foster**—That gives an RDA the capacity to focus more strategically on trying to bring together various elements of the community and to work with them on the priorities for that community, for example, by developing a business plan in consultation with the community.

**Senator NASH**—How do you measure this? Of all the ideas or proposals that have been brought to you or to the state government, how many are up and running?

**Mr James**—We would have to take that question on notice and provide you with the detail. Ms Foster mentioned a number of examples of things that are already up and running or that are underway. We do not have that information at our fingertips.

**Senator NASH**—Could you take that question on notice?

**Answer:**

RDA committees are independent bodies and are not required to submit ideas or proposals to the Department. RDA committees work within a national governance and reporting framework. Each committee has been asked to develop a strategic plan for the future of their region. These plans are to be submitted to the Department. Committees are required to report at the end of each financial year on achievements over the year, including reporting against their Key Performance Indicator targets.

Committees so far have advised of the following activities to December 2009:

- RDA Northern Rivers is holding 70 Innovative Development of Excellent Aged Services (IDEAS) workshops to up-skill the workforce.
- RDA Hunter is assisting with the Aboriginal Employment Opportunities Program to offer training and employment to 180 long-term unemployed and low skilled Aboriginal people in the region (with Federal and NSW Government funding).
- RDA Wheatbelt is delivering a New Youth Attainment and Transitions Program - Youth Connections contract for DEEWR.
- RDA Orana is undertaking a Small Community Retirement Design Project which is designing community owned and affordable retirement options for its aging population.

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- RDA Central West is supporting, through the Aboriginal Business Development Project, the development of existing Aboriginal businesses.
- RDA Pilbara is part of a consortium delivering a Communities for Children contract for FaHCSIA.
- RDA Southern Inland has received funding from the NSW Department of Industry and Investment to undertake the Screen South East project, which promotes the region as a filming destination for television and movies.
- RDA Tasmania, in conjunction with the Department of Premier and Cabinet, organised 10 grant writing workshops around the state with over 200 people attending.
- RDA Northern Rivers is delivering its Resource Efficiency Action Plan (Sustainability Advantage) to 10 businesses across the region, with financial savings already being realised.
- RDA Northern Rivers has organised Home Sustainability Assessor Training as part of the YGreen project.
- RDA Central Coast is researching tourism in India and China to determine how international travellers select their travel location and assess capital city versus regional visitation decisions.
- RDA Riverina is undertaking an Agri-Tourism Feasibility Study to develop agri-tourism in the Riverina Highlands based on the timber industry.
- RDA Central Coast is organising an 'Agribusiness Today' Forum (in July or August 2010), with Charles Sturt University and the Asian Agribusiness Research Centre, providing an export forum and information to exporters on beef, lamb and cereal crops.

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**Question No.:** LGRD 05

**Division/Agency:** Local Government & Regional Development

**Topic:** Regional Development Australia

**Hansard Page/s:** 86 (09/02/10)

**Senator Back asked:**

**Senator BACK**—I am quoting from ABC News of 17 December 2009, which states:

The Labor Party has named its candidate for the Western Australian seat of Forrest in the next federal election. Margaret River small business owner Jackie Jarvis was endorsed by the party's state executive on Monday. I think that was about 12 December or 13 December—about the same day. I note that the conflict of interest clause states:

... the RDA must remain politically neutral at all times and must be especially vigilant when elections are called.

Would the department consider that to be possibly a conflict of interest, or could it be seen as a conflict of interest, Minister?

**Senator Conroy**—Let me be clear about this. The Nationals leader in Western Australia and the state minister ticked off the RDA WA appointments. It was ticked off by the Western Australian Nationals leader and state minister. I am happy to take the rest of your question on notice to see whether there is anything further we would like to add.

**Answer:**

The provisions of the Operational Funding Contract to be signed by the Australian Government and individual RDA committees require that committees establish internal procedures to assess and address actual and perceived conflicts of interest.

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**Question No.:** LGRD 06

**Division/Agency:** Local Government & Regional Development

**Topic:** Regional Development Australia

**Hansard Page/s:** 86-87 (09/02/10)

**Senator Back asked:**

**Senator BACK**—I am not so much interested in what the state minister thought of the whole process.

**Senator Conroy**—We know what you think of the Western Australian Nationals, but you are a coalition partner, so try to keep your differences—

**Senator BACK**—I have no view at all. I refer again to the conflicts policy, which states: Conflicts carry a significant risk to the standing and reputation of the organisation—and, no doubt, in the eyes of the wider community. It continues: No decisions we take are worth exposing RDA south-west to any accusation that members may be acting in self-interest, either pecuniary or otherwise. With this in mind it is better to err on the side of caution. Armed with that knowledge, what action should be taken to satisfy the clause in the conflict policy relating to politics?

**Senator Conroy**—As I said, we will take on notice the issues that you have raised. If there is anything further that we would like to add we will get back to you, Senator Back. You have raised an issue and we are happy to seek some advice and to give you an answer.

**Answer:**

Refer to LGRD 05.

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**Question No.:** LGRD 07

**Division/Agency:** Local Government & Regional Development

**Topic:** Regional Development Australia

**Hansard Page/s:** 87 (09/02/10)

**Senator Back asked:**

**Senator BACK**—I would be delighted if you would. Will the department also take on notice another question? I am now reading in the same policy the personal information:

Individuals declare their interests in the nomination form. Where circumstances change members should inform the administration officer so that information on the register can be amended.

Would you take on notice whether or not the information officer was so advised? I notice that it refers also to ongoing conflicts:

The Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government— which is this department— should be advised of ongoing conflicts.

Would you take on notice whether or not the department has been advised. I also ask you to take on notice the next reference, which is:

Where an ongoing conflict exists it may be necessary for the member concerned to resign.

**Senator Conroy**—To add some further information, I mentioned earlier a gentleman called Steve Perryman.

**Senator BACK**—Is he also part of the process in Western Australia, Minister?

**Senator Conroy**—No, he is a South Australian, I think from Mount Gambier. When he was appointed he was already the candidate for the Liberals in the South Australian state election.

**Senator BACK**—And?

**Senator Conroy**—I think he is a member. I am just making the point, as I wanted to ensure that—

**Senator IAN MACDONALD**—There is a slight difference, though.

**Senator Conroy**—Yes and no. I am happy to take the question on notice and to seek some further information. I wanted to ensure that Senator Back knew all the facts.

**Answer:**

Refer to LGRD 05.



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**Question No.:** LGRD 08

**Division/Agency:** Local Government & Regional Development  
**Topic:** State Contributions to Regional Development Australia  
**Hansard Page/s:** 88 (09/02/10)

**Senator Macdonald asked:**

**Senator IAN MACDONALD**—Thanks, Minister. That was not what I asked, but thanks for the gratuitous comment. I am interested in what the states are contributing. Are they contributing about the same amount as the federal government?

**Ms Foster**—Senator, I think it varies from state to state. We can take that question on notice.

**Answer:**

The following states are providing funding or in-kind support to RDA committees in their jurisdictions:

The NSW Government has budgeted for an amount of \$2.1 million for administrative assistance payments to RDA committees in 2009–10 in that jurisdiction. These committees are also able to apply for funding for projects on a case by case basis.

The Victorian Government is providing an in-kind contribution including administrative support and other resources from Regional Development Victoria for RDA committees in that jurisdiction.

The Queensland Government is providing in-kind support including office space and resources for RDA committees in that jurisdiction.

The SA Government is providing funding to RDA committees in that jurisdiction. The SA Government is however not prepared to release the amount being provided. Local governments in SA are also providing funding – however the level of their funding is still to be finalised.

The ACT Government is providing funding of \$150,000 on an annual basis to RDA ACT.

The Tasmanian Government is providing in-kind support including providing accommodation at their offices in Hobart.

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**Question No.:** LGRD 09

**Division/Agency:** Local Government & Regional Development

**Topic:** Regional Development Australia Guidelines

**Hansard Page/s:** 89 (09/02/10)

**Senator Macdonald asked:**

**Senator IAN MACDONALD**—Could you perhaps help me and other parliamentarians by referring me to the item in the partnership agreement that indicates that they are able to meet with parliamentarians, state or federal.

**Mr James**—We could take on notice the guidelines and provide them.

**Answer:**

The guidelines on RDA Committees – Working with Members of Parliament are below.



**REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AUSTRALIA -  
WORKING WITH MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT**

September 2009

Regional Development Australia is a partnership between the Australian, state, territory and local governments to develop and strengthen the regional communities of Australia. RDA committees will be strong advocates for their region and drivers of change, and will have a pivotal role in ensuring the long-term sustainability of Australia's regions. RDA committees will work with all sectors of the community to develop and strengthen the regions, including women, young people, Indigenous Australians and people from a variety of cultures.

A key focus of Regional Development Australia will be on the economic, social and environmental issues affecting communities. Regional Development Australia will be an important contributor to and driver of:

- regional business growth plans and strategies, which will help support economic development, the creation of new jobs, skills development and business investment;

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- environmental solutions, which will support ongoing sustainability and the management climate change (including the impact of drought, flood or bushfires); and
- social inclusion strategies, which will bring together and support all members of the community.

**Communicating with Federal Members of Parliament and Senators**

RDA committee Chairs, Deputy Chairs, members and employees should seek to work cooperatively with local Members of the Federal Parliament (Members of the House of Representatives and Senators). RDA will be an effective conduit between governments and regional communities, and will provide advice to governments about the strengths and weaknesses of regional Australia.

**Attendance at Meetings**

The RDA Chair should invite local MPs or Senators to attend an RDA meeting each year. Local MPs and Senators will, however, only have observer status when attending the RDA meeting. In some cases, RDA committee business may need to be considered privately and, in such cases, the Chair should request any observers or guests to absent themselves from the meeting.

MPs and Senators do not have an active role in the decision making processes of the Committee and must not attempt to influence proceedings. MPs and Senators should not seek to give, and nor should RDA committees take, direction on matters relating to the committee's work.

RDA Chairs should note that conflict of Interest procedures for MPs and Senators are to be observed. MPs and Senators are required to declare any personal or professional conflict with any item on the agenda. In cases where a conflict is identified, the MP or Senator will not receive papers or background information on that item nor participate in the discussion on that item.

**Advice on Outcomes of Consultations**

It would be reasonable for the RDA Chair to meet annually with its local MP or Senator to update them on the Committee's work. This meeting could also provide an opportunity for the Committee to present a copy of its Regional Plan, Annual Report or other public document. Advice and information provided to MPs and Senators should be in writing.