

Chapter 2

The ACCs and SRACs

2.1 The Government Senators fully support the regional funding model adopted by RPP and SRP, particularly the integral role served by local bodies in ensuring successful outcomes for their regions. ACCs and SRACs provide extensive support and assistance to proponents when developing applications and are an invaluable source of local knowledge for the department and the minister. The tireless work of the committed and motivated members of ACCs and SRACs, most of whom are volunteers, ensures that these regional programs deliver genuine, effective outcomes to the grass roots of local communities. We wish to strongly congratulate the ACCs and SRACs for their ongoing efforts in delivering excellent projects to their communities through RPP and SRP.

2.2 The valuable work of the ACCs and SRACs needs encouragement and support. Instead, this inquiry has placed a significant resource burden on ACCs and SRACs, not in order to objectively and systematically assess administrative processes but to fuel pre-determined partisan objectives. The Government Senators wish to acknowledge and thank all the ACCs and SRACs who contributed to the inquiry and responded to the Committee's onerous requests for information. In doing so, these bodies showed their processes and operations to be open, transparent and accountable.

2.3 The Government Senators appreciate the time and effort that was required for the ACCs and SRACs to respond to the Committee's request. We also understand that many of the conversations ACC and SRAC members have with proponents are held in-confidence and divulging these has serious privacy implications. The deliberations of ACCs and SRACs regarding projects are held in-private. The Government Senators appreciate the serious concerns some ACCs and SRACs had about making these deliberations public. ACCs and SRACs work hard to establish and maintain the confidence of their communities and the Committee's intention to make public their deliberations could impact on their relationships with particular proponents and their communities in general.

Area Consultative Committees

2.4 As discussed in the majority report, the governance arrangements for ACCs are rigorous. The rules and guidelines set out in the ACCs' Handbook and Operational Funding Contact ensure that their operations are above board and accountable. In addition, these bodies are incorporated under relevant state and territory legislation and therefore must adhere to all relevant reporting requirements.

2.5 The Government Senators welcome the majority report's acknowledgment that effective ACCs are integral to delivering successful outcomes through RPP. We support the majority report's observation that ACCs need to be adequately resourced to operate effectively in their region. In particular, Government Senators note that

recent increases in petrol prices have created an unexpected increase in the operating costs of ACCs, particularly those covering large geographic areas in remote regions. For example, the Committee took evidence from the chairman and executive officer of the Pilbara ACC, which covers one-sixth of Australia's continental landmass.¹ The Government Senators recommend that ACCs' operating budgets should be adjusted to cater for this unexpected cost increase.

2.6 The Government Senators also support the majority Committee's call for a three year funding cycle for ACCs. We consider that annual funding does not give ACCs the capacity to plan and operate as strategically in their region as a longer-term funding cycle would afford. We therefore recommend that rolling three year budgets be introduced in place of the current annual operational funding contract.

2.7 Government Senators consider that the role and operations of the ACCs can be further strengthened and expanded in two areas not addressed in the recommendations of the majority report: ACC media and marketing and ACC involvement in grant announcements.

2.8 Currently, ACCs' media relations activities are curtailed by restrictions set out in their funding agreement with DOTARS.² ACCs are required to have every media statement cleared by DOTARS, which can cause unworkable delays. Government Senators recommend that the ACCs, as bodies with an important independent role in RPP, be given more freedom in relation to their media activities.

2.9 Throughout the inquiry Committee members had the opportunity to see the high quality marketing material produced by ACCs. Government Senators are concerned at the resource demand placed on ACCs to produce this material. To reduce duplication of cost and effort, Government Senators recommend that template marketing material be developed for only minor adjustment by individual ACCs.

2.10 The Government Senators consider that the valuable contribution of the ACCs to RPP can be further maximised by involving ACCs in funding announcements. ACCs work hard to bring forward meritorious projects for funding under the RPP program. ACCs have a strong relationship with their community, with the proponents they support and with the projects they help to fund. It is logical for these bodies, that work closely with proponents often over an extended period of time, to be involved in funding announcements. With their knowledge of local projects and the circumstances in their local communities, ACCs are well placed to assist in organising appropriate grant announcements. Accordingly, the Government Senators recommend that ACCs be advised of grant approvals in advance, and that they be encouraged to assist with arranging grant announcements and any follow up matters relevant to their local projects.

1 Mr Cameron Simpkins, Executive Officer, Pilbara ACC, *Committee Hansard*, 14 July 2005, p. 97.

2 DOTARS, *Submission 14*, Attachment G, ACC Operational Funding Contract, p. 21.

Sustainable Regions Advisory Committees

2.11 The Sustainable Regions Program provides an innovative locational approach to regional development. As DOTARS described in a submission to the inquiry:

[The SRP] assists these regions to plan for their future, build capacity for strategic and informed decision making at the regional level and contributes to the implementation of significant projects that can make a difference to economic opportunity and quality of life.³

2.12 The Sustainable Regions Advisory Committees have an integral role in ensuring that the local priorities of each region are addressed by the program. As DOTARS explained to the Committee:

Strategic regional priorities for projects to be supported are determined locally, with communities taking the lead in their own development. Guidance is provided by a locally-based advisory committee comprising business, government and community representatives, who are committed to making a difference in their region.⁴

2.13 SRP projects must meet the region's strategic priorities as well as the program criteria, ensuring that the projects delivered by SRP meet the real needs of regional communities. SRAC's work hard to deliver these outcomes, not only by helping to identify and articulate regional priorities, but in bringing forward and assessing applications and providing funding recommendations and advice to the Minister.

2.14 Government Senators support the observations in the majority report regarding the strengths of the Cradle Coast SRAC, its operations and the benefits it has delivered to the Cradle Coast region. We add that these outcomes are in no small measure a result of the dedication of the members of the Cradle Coast Authority and commend Mr Roger Jaensch, Executive Chairman of the Authority and Chairman of the SRAC, for his excellent service in delivering results for the region.

3 DOTARS, *Submission 14*, p. 4.

4 DOTARS, *Submission 14*, p. 5.

