



ACCs

The Australian Government's
Regional Development Network

SUNRAYSIA AREA CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE Inc.

Finance and Public Administration
References Committee
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Email: fpa.sen@aph.gov.au



Inquiry into the Regional Partnerships Program and Sustainable Regions Program Submission

As Chair of the Sunraysia Area Consultative Committee (SACC), I would like to thank the Committee for this opportunity to make comment on the Inquiry into the Regional Partnerships Program and Sustainable Regions Program. Before doing so I would like to make comment on the Regional Partnership Program's effect on the region.

We believe Regional Partnerships is a new and innovative grants program that enables communities to access funding for projects that will impact on the economic and social wellbeing of the region. The support of the Federal Government in providing matching funds to projects can have a significant impact on the viability of new and emerging industries in conjunction with the provision of much needed community facilities.

The close working relationship between DOTARS and ACC's has given the Government the ability to tap into the micro-economic components of the region and thus the ability to provide funding into crucial areas of development. This relationship is pivotal in the future of economic prosperity of regional areas.

We applaud the Government for this initiative and its response to addressing regional needs.

In regards to the questions outlined in the Inquiries Terms of Reference, I would like to make the following points.

(a) decisions to fund or not to fund particular projects;

It was a clear direction by all ACC Chair's at the last Chairs Conference that all projects should be judged on their merits and not based on notational allocations of funding for each region. This ensures regions that are proactive in regional development are not restricted in access to Federal Government funding.

As with all other grant systems in all levels of Government, projects that meet the guidelines established under the Regional Partnership Handbook are funded at the discretion of the Minister or in this case the Parliamentary Secretary. This is a practice that is universal with all grant systems.

(b) the recommendations of area consultative committees;

The recommendations from area consultative committees should hold the most weight in the decision by the Parliamentary Secretary to fund projects. Area Consultative Committees have local knowledge, regional experience and the ability to understand project concepts that will encourage regional development. Departmental representatives need to understand this concept and be willing to work constructively with ACC's to ensure administrative red tape does not impeded a good project.



An Australian Government Initiative

Address: 257 Eleventh St Mildura
Postal: PO Box 1679 Mildura Vic 3500
Tel: (03) 5023 8656
Fax: (03) 5023 8659
Email: eo@sunraysiaacc.com.au
Website: www.sunraysiaacc.com.au

(c) the recommendations of departmental officers and recommendations from any other sources including from other agencies or other levels of government;

Recommendations from departmental officers should not hold as much weight in the decision to approve projects. Continually applications are being delayed from reaching the Ministers office by DOTARS Regional Office staff members that are continually questioning the proponent. This frustrates many project proponents as this process in some cases can delay projects substantially impacting on their effectiveness. Departmental staff should be instructed to assess applications thoroughly, furnishing proponents with a complete and comprehensive list of issues to be addressed. Once these issues are addressed by the proponent, the final submission should be dispatched to the Parliamentary Secretary for consideration.

(d) the nature and extent of the respective roles of the administering department, minister and parliamentary secretary, other ministers and parliamentary secretaries, other senators or members and their advisers and staff in the process of selection of successful applications;

The final decision for the selection of successful projects should be at the sole discretion of the Parliamentary Secretary based on the recommendation of the ACC.

(e) the criteria used to take the decision to fund projects

The criteria used to fund projects is clear, transparent and provides a clear direction to proponents and ACC's about the important factors that need to be considered when a project is assessed under Regional Partnerships.

(f) the transparency and accountability of the process and outcomes;

All projects are assessed against outcomes to the community. The Department provides a contract to the proponent that clearly sets out the accountability process and milestones against outcomes. Proponents are continually in contact with the ACC during the contract period to update the Board on the status of the project.

(g) the mechanism for authorising the funding of projects;

It is our understanding that the Parliamentary Secretary, is provided with a package from the department which includes the original submission with recommendations from both the ACC and the DOTARS Regional Office. This mechanism in our view is completely transparent and provides clear advice to the Parliamentary Secretary for making decisions on funding RP Projects.

(h) the constitutionality, legality and propriety of any practices whereby any members of either House of Parliament are excluded from committees, boards or other bodies involved in the consideration of proposed projects, or coerced or threatened in an effort to prevent them from freely communicating with their constituents; and

(i) whether the operation of the program is consistent with the Auditor-General's 'Better Practice Guide for the Administration of Grants', and is subject to sufficient independent audit.

The ACC is not involved in the administration of the grants system other than to provide advice to proponents in the creation of a submission. Contracts for approved projects are between the Government and the proponent.





ACCs

The Australian Government's
Regional Development Network

SUNRAYSIA AREA CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE Inc.

With respect to the future administration of similar programs, any safeguards or guidelines which might be put in place to ensure proper accountability for the expenditure of public money, particularly the appropriate arrangements for independent audit of the funding of projects.

We feel that the program has the appropriate arrangements in place.

(3) Any related matters.

Concern has been raised in regards to the timeframes that currently exist between the lodgement of the applications by the proponent and the final decision for approval.

The Department has advised ACC's that projects would be processed within a 12 week period from the date of lodgement. These timeframes are currently not being met by the Department which undermines the advice given to the proponents. ACC's are also currently not informed by the Department about the current status of a project in the system.

We would like the Government to review the departmental processes that are in place to establish the reasons for delays in project assessment and to implement a communication process to advise ACC's on the status of projects.

Don Carrazza
Chair
Sunraysia ACC Inc.



An Australian Government Initiative

Address: 257 Eleventh St Mildura
Postal: PO Box 1679 Mildura Vic 3500
Tel: (03) 5023 8656
Fax: (03) 5023 8659
Email: eo@sunraysiaacc.com.au
Website: www.sunraysiaacc.com.au