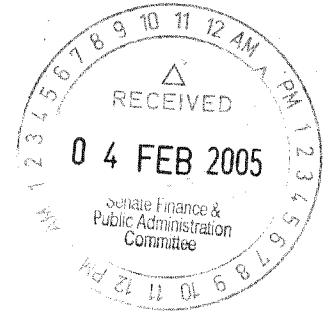




Department of Local Government and Regional Development
Government of Western Australia

Our Ref: 691-02 M0500151



Mr Alistair Sands
Committee Secretary
Senate Finance and Public Administration Committee
Department of the Senate
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr Sands

INQUIRY INTO THE REGIONAL PARTNERSHIPS PROGRAM

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback from the Department of Local Government and Regional Development (DLGRD) on the administration of the Regional Partnerships and Sustainable Regions programs.

The DLGRD has had the opportunity to work with various funding programs administered by the Department of Transport and Regional Services over the past few years, including the Regional Solutions Program, Dairy RAP, Rural Transactions Centre Program and, more recently, the Regional Partnerships and Sustainable Regions Programs. These programs have successfully combined with a number of State Government regional funding programs, administered by DLGRD, to support a variety of projects that are making significant differences to the lives of people living in regional Western Australia.

The continued focus of the Regional Partnerships and Sustainable Regions Programs on working in partnership with communities, government and the private sector to foster the development of self-reliant communities and regions is fully supported.

The use of the Area Consultative Committees (ACCs) in each region as the primary point of promotion, assistance and key provider of independent advice to DOTARS and the Minister is acknowledged. However, it is also noted that the activities of ACCs in some regions are not well known to communities outside of the main regional centres in which they are based. To this degree, Western Australia has continually lobbied for greater use of the Regional Development Commission structure in this State. The Commissions are Statutory Authorities with boards made up of local residents and local government representatives to reflect the wishes and aspirations of the communities which they serve.

Having said this, under the current arrangements, the DLGRD, along with the State's nine Regional Development Commissions and regional local governments, are keen to strengthen the relationship with each regional ACC in the future with a view to improved consultation, planning and identification of joint priorities and funding partnership opportunities in the State. Already a number of the State's Regional Development Commissions share membership with their region's ACC. However, the implementation of more formal mechanisms such as regular joint meetings, workshops and the development of a consultation process mechanism would help strengthen the potential for meaningful project partnerships, as well as strengthening the decision making of all programs and agencies involved.

Obviously, decisions to fund or not fund particular projects require that projects and funding applications be developed to the point that they can be considered in the first place. A concern with the Australian Government's funding programs is the extent to which the administration of the programs acts as a barrier to 'communities of need', such as remote Indigenous communities. These communities often have project ideas but lack the resources or expertise to develop project applications and identify and liaise with multiple funding partners. It is noted that while ACCs can give advice to communities, direct project development assistance of the kind required by these communities is not in their charter. Nor do ACCs seem resourced for this kind of community development work, which is integral to these communities obtaining access to grant programs, such as Regional Partnerships. This is another area in which State and the Australian Government's resources could be coordinated to identify ways of jointly resolving barriers to grant programs by such communities.

Generally, the Regional Partnerships Program is considered to be a flexible funding program that has the potential to provide real assistance to many communities in WA. DLGRD looks forward to further cooperative ventures with this program in the future.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide comment to the Inquiry.

Yours sincerely _____



Cheryl Gwilliam
DIRECTOR GENERAL

31 January 2005