

Our ref: 1.9.6

Committee Secretary,  
Standing Committee on Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local  
Government,  
PO Box 6021,  
House of Representatives,  
Parliament House,  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

25 June 2008

**Re: Inquiry into the proposed new Regional Development Australia Funding Program.**

It is the opinion of the Upper Lachlan Shire Council that the Capital Region Area Consultative Committee has been extremely effective in assisting both Council and the various local groups to establish whether their potential project matched the criteria for Regional Partnership Program funding.

The provision of support and assistance by the Capital Region Area Consultative Committee in the preparation of valid and credible applications has been a major advantage both to Council and to the local community groups that have sought assistance under the Regional Partnerships Program.

Upper Lachlan Shire Council was successful with two projects under the Regional Partnerships Program in 2006 and 2008, namely the:

1. Taralga Community Service Centre - this project principally involved the purchase of the former Taralga Post Office and renovations of the building to provide a Taralga Community Service Centre with access to Post Office, Medicare Office, Tourist Information Centre, all Council Services, Bureau of Meteorology and office facilities. The Taralga Community Centre has been a highly successful project in promoting Upper Lachlan Shire Council to the Taralga community and allowed postal services to remain in the town of Taralga.
2. Crookwell Integrated Medical Centre - this project primarily involved the purchase and fit-out of the former Banfield House Aged Care Hostel at Crookwell, with the aim of establishing a one-stop, walk-in/walk-out fully Integrated Medical Centre. The initiative has helped to empower an isolated and disadvantaged community and provide improved access to, and provision of, medical and allied health services underpinning better health and wellbeing.

These two projects have invested only minimal funding in Taralga (\$181,144) and Crookwell (\$400,000.00) to achieve indisputable regional economic development and the establishment of community infrastructure which has enhanced the sustainability and liveability in both these localities. These two towns have previously been in serious decline due to the ongoing drought and continuing rural decline.

There is no question that local rural communities absolutely require Federal Government funding assistance due to the fact that many items of infrastructure such as community and civic centres, aged care facilities, health clinics and sport and recreation facilities are either not in existence or were constructed many decades ago and have not been refurbished and upgraded because of a lack of funds.

As a direct result of the Regional Partnerships Program, the Upper Lachlan Shire Council, Yass Valley Council, Boorowa Council and Cootamundra Shire Council entered into an agreement to jointly fund a Grants Officer to assist the Council's in submitting projects worthy of consideration and further to assist the various community groups to formulate valid applications for their community projects. The general community struggles to understand the grants process and has great difficulty in articulating their project. The shared Grants Officer has been able to offer invaluable assistance to the local community groups in the formulation of their numerous grant applications.

To avoid a situation wherein the better prepared grant applications are successful in attracting grants, whilst a decidedly more worthy application is rejected because of inadequate details on the applications it is recommended that each of the newly formed Regional Development Australia Committees have a designated Grants Officer employed as part of the Committee to minimize any such anomalies. The question needs to be asked "Does the Federal Government want quality applications or not?"

In summary, Upper Lachlan Shire Council is very strongly of the opinion that substantial enhancements to any future Regional Development Australia funding arrangement for rural and regional communities would occur if the program incorporated closer liaison with the particular local government authority. It is the various local government authorities that are petitioned every year as part of the annual Management Plan process to assist with funding for numerous community infrastructure projects. Closer liaison between the Regional Development Australia Committee and the local Council would result in the securing of funding for projects that have the highest priority in the particular local government area.

Checks and balances applicable to local government include, but are not limited to, local, state and national press and media accountable to local ratepayers and residents, reviews by the ICAC and the Ombudsman, Department of Local Government reviews, Department of Planning reviews and other State government departmental reviews. Local Government is subject to more checks and balances than both the State and Federal Governments.

As an example, the new Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program should encompass such major infrastructure projects as the building of community and civic centres for rural Councils that have been disadvantaged due to the rural decline.

In the middle of a ten year drought, Council's ratepayers cannot be expected to fund projects such as a new community and civic centre but unfortunately the "Catch 22" is that Council staff and volunteers cannot be expected to work under conditions that prevailed in the 1930's and do not meet any current OH&S standards and would not be tolerated in any urban centre.

Upper Lachlan Shire Council would be extremely disappointed to see any decrease or cuts to what has been a most beneficial program for rural areas, not just in our own region, but across Australia.

Yours faithfully,

**JK Bell**  
**General Manager**  
**Upper Lachlan Shire Council**

