



## **Surf Life Saving Australia**

### **Submission to**

### **House of Representatives Standing Committee on Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government**

### **Inquiry into a new regional development funding program**

**Submission Prepared by**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brett Williamson".

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**Surf Life Saving Australia**  
**Submission to House of Representatives Standing Committee on**  
**Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government**  
**Inquiry into a new regional development funding program**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Surf Life Saving Australia appreciates the opportunity to provide information to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government inquiry into a new regional development funding program.

This submission addresses the first two of the terms of reference of the inquiry, namely;

1. *provide advice on future funding or regional programs in order to invest in genuine and accountable community infrastructure projects*
2. *Examine ways to minimize administrative costs and duplication for taxpayers;*

This submission gives particular regard to regional development program funding for community safety infrastructure.

Surf Life Saving Australia (SLSA) presents the following recommendations for the Committee's consideration:

1. Regional Development Funding Programs should be continued, in particular for community safety, health and wellbeing related projects.
2. Governments with coastal jurisdictions should support coastal infrastructure that addresses public safety in areas where public access to beaches is provided, readily available or encouraged, in particular where the projects are proven appropriate through structured risk management practices and procedures.
3. Regional Development Funding Programs should be flexible to include a range of infrastructure needs such as that required by surf lifesaving facilities.
4. SLSA be supported by a Regional Development Funding Program to enable a review of its lifesaving infrastructure across Australia.
5. Regional Development Funding Programs should have priority given to those groups where the greatest need is clearly demonstrated or identified.
6. Regional Development Funding Programs should have well developed administrative procedures that are clear, concise and which requests information relevant to the application; giving particular regard to the local community capacities and capabilities.
7. Regional Development Funding Programs should be flexible and support innovation or variation from the norm such that coastal infrastructure meets the changing social and environmental needs of the community; such as changing surf club infrastructure siting or footprint.

8. Regional Development Funding Programs should permit the inclusion of the risk assessments as an integral component of coastal infrastructure refurbishment and renewal projects.
9. Regional Development Funding Programs should support infrastructure that addresses emerging community safety needs and opportunities; such as the emergency service capabilities of the surf lifesaving organisations.
10. The Regional Development Funding Program should be available for environmentally positive infrastructure projects such as those currently being showcased by a number of surf lifesaving clubs across Australia and fostered by SLSA, the benefits of which will be shared with other community organisations, in particular those who are situated in the coastal zone.
11. Funding programs for infrastructure that provides access to those parts of the coast, in particular the beach that present a high risk, as determined by a risk assessment, should not be encouraged.
12. Funding programs for infrastructure that provides access to parts of the coast that present a low risk, as determined by a risk assessment, should be supported.
13. Regional Development Funding Programs should have clearly identified the partners, the leadership and streamlined administration procedures.
14. The new Regional Development Funding Program should have enhanced administration procedures that address the difficulties incurred by communities applying for previous funding, and which foster improved communication with those groups wishing to apply, in the process of applying, who have formally applied and those with applications formally approved.
15. The Regional Development Funding Program should consider supporting a single contact within a parent body where multiple applications are received from affiliated groups/clubs, and where administration efficiencies are clearly identified.
16. The Regional Development Funding Program should consider using parent bodies to prioritise funding applications where multiple applications are received from affiliated groups/ clubs.

A Regional Development Funding Program will permit development of infrastructure which would otherwise be overlooked or not implemented as a result of insufficient local resources. The program will also assist regional communities fund priority community infrastructure projects that they themselves have identified.

Many regions across Australia, in particular those along the coastline and outside metropolitan areas, are facing social, economic and environmental change; for example new communities, some being rejuvenated, changing population demographics and economic impacts from influences such as climate change, inflation and petroleum price escalation.

An ongoing regional development funding program is vital for the sustainability of this vital community safety infrastructure.

## INTRODUCTION

Surf Life Saving Australia appreciates the opportunity to provide information to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government inquiry into a new regional development funding program.

This submission addresses the first two of the terms of reference of the inquiry, namely;

1. *provide advice on future funding or regional programs in order to invest in genuine and accountable community infrastructure projects*
2. *Examine ways to minimize administrative costs and duplication for taxpayers;*

This submission gives particular regard to community safety infrastructure that will enhance the sustainability and liveability of Australia's coastal regions.

This submission presents the SLSA view, position and issues relating to a regional development funding program necessary to address current and future coastal public safety.

## BACKGROUND

Over 85%<sup>i</sup> of Australians live near the coast, and our tourist beaches alone receive an estimated 55 million visitations every year. The vast coastline of Australia covers more than 35,877kms and when including all islands this increases to 59,736kms<sup>ii</sup>. The coastal beaches while a magnet for living and visiting also have inherent and largely unpredictable risk.

### SURF LIFE SAVING AUSTRALIA (SLSA)

In the past 100 years SLSA has saved over 530,000 lives at Australia's beaches and continues to rescue more than 11,000 people every year<sup>iii</sup>. Tragically, each year more than 80<sup>iv</sup> lives are lost and many hundreds of people suffer injuries – from minor incidents to serious trauma in accidents relating to our coast.

Of the 11,748 beaches now identified by the Australian Beach Safety and Management Program (ABSAMP), only approximately 3% (350) have a lifesaving service provided by the lifesaving clubs affiliated with SLSA and patrolled by lifeguard services provided by SLSA and local governments across Australia.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, SLSA realised that it needed to do more to protect human life along Australia's coastline. In the years since a range of lifesaving support services such as rescue helicopters, jet rescue boats, off-shore rescue boats, rescue water craft (PWCs) and more recently the Australian Lifeguard Service have been introduced to complement the extensive beach based volunteer lifesaving service. As at 30 June 2007, SLSA has 305 volunteer surf lifesaving clubs across 17 branches in 6 States and the Northern Territory with 50 support operations and 66 operations in the Australian Lifeguard Service providing a comprehensive lifesaving service along many thousands of kilometres of Australia's vast coastline.

There are numerous ways this extensive lifesaving network is engaged in coastal communities including coastal zone management and monitoring, emergency preparedness, response and care.

However, despite these lifesaving and support services, people continue to drown along Australia's coastline. SLSA aims to continue its 101 year tradition of "saving lives in the water" and preserving "the life of the beach".

## COASTAL POPULATION

According to the National Seachange Taskforce, 'almost six million people live in Australian coastal areas outside Australia's capital cities. The rate of growth in these areas is more than 60% higher than the national average and is gathering momentum. Apart from population growth, many coastal communities face the added impact of a dramatic increase in the level of tourism. While tourism injects revenue into the local commercial economy and helps to generate employment opportunities it does not contribute to the cost of public infrastructure needed to meet the needs of visitors<sup>iv</sup>.

Coastal population growth, shifts and trends are providing challenges for coastal zone management authorities on a number of fronts including infrastructure and basic services.

Many regional communities and their local government authorities have reduced abilities to fund vital infrastructure due to the limited residential and business populations from which to derive essential funding and in-kind support.

## CHALLENGES

This growth is providing challenges to coastal safety organisations including Surf Life Saving Australia (SLSA). These challenges include:

- Maintaining ageing lifesaving service infrastructure, in particular lifesaving buildings
- Sourcing funding for infrastructure maintenance, refurbishment, expansion and replacement
- Sourcing initial and ongoing funding for purchase, maintenance and replacement of lifesaving equipment, craft and vehicles
- Dealing with more people on the coast who lack knowledge and understanding of coastal water conditions such as rip currents
- Creation of new lifesaving services along the traditional volunteer lines
- Finding active volunteers amongst a number of the ageing coastal communities
- Keeping up with the pace of change in community expectations on volunteer management and administration including occupational health and safety
- The ability to be more mobile and responsive to cover areas that traditional "surf patrols" do not cover at times that would be considered outside normal operations
- Emergency preparedness initiatives such as Tsunami response activities or assistance provided statutory authorities in times of nature disaster such as floods

SLSA has already diversified its operations in an attempt to address some of these challenges, however the costs of infrastructure maintenance, refurbishment, expansion and replacement is becoming most difficult for many of the volunteer surf lifesaving clubs.

Many of the surf lifesaving clubs have been built by the local communities over the years, with many now on crown leases or permissive occupancy arrangements.

As a consequence, an ongoing regional development funding program is vital for the sustainability of this vital community safety infrastructure.

## TERMS OF REFERENCE

### 1. Provide advice on future funding or regional programs in order to invest in genuine and accountable community infrastructure projects

#### 1.1 Overview of lifesaving infrastructure

Community infrastructure projects that improve the health well-being and safety of community residents and visitors should be paramount in any regional development funding program.

The service provided to communities through the volunteer lifesaving and associated support services, while primarily for safety, contributes to the health and social wellbeing of the local communities in which they are located.

The infrastructure that supports the lifesavers is often broad and not solely confined to the “clubhouse”. Typical lifesaving infrastructure includes:

- Building (clubhouse) which includes storage for rescue equipment, first aid room, training and meeting rooms and a range of other facilities depending on location and local needs
- Both land and water based access for pedestrians, rescue vehicles and craft
- Raised facilities to aid surveillance such as an observation tower; this may be collocated with or separate to the main building
- Radio communication equipment and antennae
- Essential services such as power, gas, fresh water, grey water, sewage, and telephone.
- More recent infrastructure includes alternate power generation such as wind and solar power, recycling grey water, collection of rain water

Lifesaving infrastructure changes and enhancements will need to:

- keep pace with population growth, trends and shifts;
- be cognisant of the changing impacts of climate change;
- remain consistent with community expectations, and
- provide ready access to beaches for lifesaving equipment such as Inflatable Rescue Boats (IRBs), Rescue Water Craft and Beach Rescue Vehicles (e.g. All Terrain Vehicles – ATV)
- Increasing use of technological infrastructure such as camera towers, communication centres etc

Surf Life Saving Australia as it enters its second century of operation has identified a need to undertake a comprehensive review of its lifesaving infrastructure across Australia. This first phase review will not be a detailed analysis or an infrastructure audit. The review will be based on information provided by the clubs, by state lifesaving operations, by local and state government and other authorities such as the ABS, and through interviews with stakeholders.

The intention is to rate the quality of physical lifesaving infrastructure generally, in particular to assess whether infrastructure is fit for its current and anticipated purpose. The ratings will be based on the condition of the assets, vulnerability to extreme weather events and impacts of climate change, asset management and economic, environmental and social sustainability.

Based on the ratings, a priority list will be developed to enable a more thorough infrastructure audit to be completed over a three year period. The outcomes of the audits could be linked to priority Regional Development Funding programs

The review will provide an up-to-date status of the infrastructure and also the assets and capabilities of Surf Life Saving across Australia.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

It is therefore the position of Surf Life Saving Australia (SLSA) that:

1. Regional Development Funding Programs should be continued, in particular for community safety, health and wellbeing related projects
2. Governments with coastal jurisdictions should support coastal infrastructure that addresses public safety in areas where public access to beaches is provided, readily available or encouraged, in particular where the projects are proven appropriate through structured risk management practices and procedures.
3. Regional Development Funding Programs should be flexible to include a range of infrastructure needs such as that required by surf lifesaving facilities.
4. SLSA be supported by a Regional Development Funding Program to enable a review of its lifesaving infrastructure across Australia.

### 1.2 Source of infrastructure funding

Volunteer surf lifesaving club committees attempt to secure infrastructure funding from many sources including governments (local, State and Federal), club fundraising activities, philanthropic foundations and donations. There are many club committees across Australia without regular revenue streams that rely on the grants and funds established by governments to assist refurbish or renew infrastructure.

Government funding programs are often periodic and while open to all clubs and groups as outlined in the relevant program documentation, there are often obstacles for clubs in preparing submissions including:

- Awareness of the applications for funding
- Available resources to collect relevant information for a submission
- Appropriately skilled persons to prepare and submit an application
- Ability to meet deadlines, which are often short to fit government budgetary timing

Often the most needy clubs are left to wait for the next round, nervous on whether government fiscal pressures will result in them missing out; again.

Community fundraising activities rely on certainty of purpose for a campaign to be focused and with greater chance of success. There have been community groups who have had a clearly defined project on which to focus their fundraising efforts, yet uncertainty in partnership funding such as that likely to be available from government funding programs, can impact whether or not a valuable community project gets off the ground. Similarly, business needs funding certainty to underpin their business decisions.

Clear, concise and timely procedures that are regularly communicated will go a long way towards achieving successful regional development outcomes.

## RECOMMENDATION

It is therefore the position of Surf Life Saving Australia (SLSA) that:

5. Regional Development Funding Programs should have priority given to those groups where the greatest need is clearly demonstrated or identified.
6. Regional Development Funding Programs should have well developed administrative procedures that are clear, concise and which requests information relevant to the application; giving particular regard to the local community capacities and capabilities.

### 1.3 Climate change, sea level rise and natural disaster events

The impacts of climate change such as extreme weather events and sea level rise will progressively impact the coast and beaches with changing risks and conditions affecting surf club infrastructure such as buildings, access paths and ramps.

Often the greatest impacts on surf club infrastructure is from natural disaster events such as storms and associated inundation from flooding from coastal rains, storm surges and in some cases the combined affects. For example in June 2007, a storm event impacted the coastline in Eastern Victoria such that part of the Seaspray Surf Life Saving Club infrastructure was damaged as depicted in Figure 1 below.



Fig 1. Seaspray Surf Life Saving Club, Victoria: Gippsland Storm, June 2007 (courtesy Life Saving Victoria)

The location of some infrastructure may be vulnerable to such events and may need to be re-engineered or relocated. Surf clubs that may currently have clear and uninterrupted vision of the beach may need to be relocated inland from the beach with additional and less substantial infrastructure such as a lifeguard tower provided adjacent the beach for clear and uninterrupted surveillance.

For example, the Salt Surf Life Saving Club in the Tweed Shire in northern New South Wales is located some 150m inland from the beach necessitating a semi-portable lifeguard tower on the foreshore adjacent to and with very good visibility of the beach.

Figure 2 below depicts the lifeguard tower on the foreshore at the Salt development.





Fig 2. Lifeguard tower – Salt Resort, NSW (photo by N Farmer)

Periodic inspections may need to be carried out by appropriate engineers to monitor the ongoing stability of the land on which the surf clubs have been built to ensure safety of the lifesavers, and also visitors, coastal users and emergency services workers who may be called upon to respond to emergencies.

Governments and coastal management agencies in association with coastal based operations such as Surf Life Saving will need to implement coastal monitoring, preparedness and responsive programs to ensure communities are adaptable and able to make plans in advance of change, and to respond rapidly to coastal changes resulting from extreme weather events and the like.

Importantly, the coastal community safety organisations such as surf lifesaving clubs and their parent organisations (i.e. SLSA) provide an emerging opportunity for greater involvement in emergency preparedness, response and recovery through the significant infrastructure and assets readily available.

Consideration will need to be given by coastal planners and managers for expansion of special lifesaving and support services such as lifesaving command and communication centres, helicopter search and rescue, special water craft launch and/or mooring facilities and the like. This may include special permits for crown land use.

As a consequence Regional Development Funding Programs should also consider the use of the infrastructure beyond what has been the tradition or the norm.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

It is therefore the position of Surf Life Saving Australia (SLSA) that:

7. Regional Development Funding Programs should be flexible and support innovation or variation from the norm such that coastal infrastructure meets the changing social and environmental needs of the community; such as changing surf club infrastructure siting or footprint.
8. Regional Development Funding Programs should permit the inclusion of the risk assessments as an integral component of coastal infrastructure refurbishment and renewal projects.

9. Regional Development Funding Programs should support infrastructure that addresses emerging community safety needs and opportunities; such as the emergency service capabilities of the surf lifesaving organisations.

#### 1.4 Environmentally positive infrastructure

The forecast impacts of climate change and subsequent rise of sea levels potentially leaves surf lifesaving clubs and service infrastructure vulnerable. As a proactive measure, SLSA has developed EcoSurf; a program for surf lifesavers to work together, with its partners and with local communities to make a positive environmental impact on Australia's coastline.

EcoSurf infrastructure programs are currently being driven at a "grass roots" level through a number of surf lifesaving club best practice initiatives including;

- Solar and/or wind generators
- Water collection and recycling
- Solar water heating
- Waste management

SLSA, with the support of all levels of government, industry and through localised corporate support will expand local initiatives nationally.

An ongoing Regional Development Funding Program will enable the introduction of environmentally positive infrastructure that can be shared by local community groups. This will assist reduce the coastal footprint,

#### RECOMMENDATION

It is therefore the position of Surf Life Saving Australia (SLSA) that:

10. The Regional Development Funding Program should be available for environmentally positive infrastructure projects such as those currently being showcased by a number of surf lifesaving clubs across Australia and fostered by SLSA, the benefits of which will be shared with other community organisations, in particular those who are situated in the coastal zone.

#### 1.5 Access to the coast

There is a clear relationship between access to the coast, its beaches and human safety. Accessibility to the coast provides a broad range of recreational, health and social benefits. However if access is not planned and managed the result could be an unfortunate incident impacting on a person's health, or worse still, death.

Access to and use of beaches for recreation will be impacted by ongoing extreme weather events. Beach hazards will change and will pose a greater risk of injury unless monitored, mapped and communicated.

The infrastructure funding of a car park and access track without the required risk assessment of the area may constitute a greater risk to the community (through providing access to an unpatrolled and dangerous beach) than providing community benefit.

There may need to be more regular inspections of coastal beaches and paths to ensure hazards are identified and addressed to minimise risk of injury or death.

#### RECOMMENDATION

It is therefore the position of Surf Life Saving Australia (SLSA) that:

11. Funding programs for infrastructure that provides access to those parts of the coast that present a high risk, as determined by a risk assessment, should not be encouraged.
12. Funding programs for infrastructure that provides access to parts of the coast that present a low risk, as determined by a risk assessment, should be supported.

## **2. Examine ways to minimize administrative costs and duplication for taxpayers**

### **2.1 Responsibility and support**

Clearly, responsibility for leadership in regional development rests primarily with federal, state and local governments however in concert with local businesses and communities. While it is common to see all three levels of government engaged in regional development activities in any community, there are identifiable benefits in the synergies of well coordinated regional development programs.

A Regional Development Funding Program should have tri-partisan support across all levels of government to ensure any community infrastructure development under a Regional Development Funding Program includes the following attributes.

- has broad support at community and government levels;
- is designed, developed and commissioned with efficiency, quality, minimal disruption and environmental impact;
- is free from any government taxes such as land tax and stamp duty;
- has processes for development approval that are enhanced and streamlined through minimising bureaucracy without compromising safety or the quality of decision making, and
- compliance with regulations, standards and guidelines.

However, when considering a multilayered regional development and support program, there should not be multiple layers of administration. Ideally, one level of government should take the lead with other government support integrated into the program and administered by the lead agency. In this way, the community and/or organisation receiving the funding is able to acknowledge and promote the multilayered support for a project, but is not encumbered by multiple or complex administration systems.

#### RECOMMENDATION

It is therefore the position of Surf Life Saving Australia (SLSA) that:

13. Regional Development Funding Programs should have clearly identified the partners, the leadership and streamlined administration procedures.

## 2.2 Funding under the previous Regional Partnerships Programme

The level and number of applications from the volunteer surf lifesaving clubs for the previous government's Regional Partnerships Programme remains unclear as each club has applied directly. However an internet search for approved grants under the Regional Partnerships Programme has revealed there were six surf lifesaving groups from three States who received funding under the last program. The approved funding was for club redevelopments and extensions, a training centre and for a future leaders' development program.

However, in the past six months SLSA is aware of approximately three applications which remain under consideration as a result of an extension of time provided by the current Australian Government for those applications made under the prior programme. The media release dated 28 May 2008 from the Hon. Anthony Albanese MP, Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government refers.

Any uncertainty in programme approvals highlights how community groups eager to foster and support regional development programmes can on occasion be unfortunately caught in bureaucracy created by election caretaker periods and change in governments.

As a consequence there is an opportunity to introduce a new Regional Development Funding Program that has enhanced administrative procedures that take into consideration learnings arising from recent transition difficulties. These procedures could include enhanced reporting on milestone achievement, reporting of negotiations for other funding sources, project milestone approvals, and more frequent communication with applicants, in particular with those yet to be approved.

### RECOMMENDATION

It is therefore the position of Surf Life Saving Australia (SLSA) that:

14. The new Regional Development Funding Program should have enhanced administration procedures that address the difficulties incurred by communities applying for previous funding, and which foster improved communication with those groups wishing to apply, in the process of applying, who have formally applied and those with applications formally approved.

## 2.3 Project coordination

There appears to be an opportunity for community groups that are part of a larger organisation to have funding program applications coordinated through the parent organisation.

For example; a local communities wishing to seek funding for a surf lifesaving club development could be supported and/or prioritised by the peak organisation at State and National levels thereby ensuring:

- the applications are completed in accordance with the requirements;
- any gaps are addressed prior to submission;
- assistance is provided to the local club in completing the application or in sourcing relevant information;
- the application is submitted on time

This should minimise the administrative costs, in particular for Government departments responsible for managing the Regional Development Funding Programs as there will be one point of contact within each parent organisation.

There will of course be a need to provide funding for this coordination and a value judgement made by responsible Government departments.

As mentioned previously, the introduction of improved administration and communication procedures should go some way to minimising the level of enquiries and duplication of effort.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

It is therefore the position of Surf Life Saving Australia (SLSA) that:

15. The Regional Development Funding Program should consider supporting a single contact within a parent body where multiple applications are received from affiliated groups/clubs, and where administration efficiencies are clearly identified.
16. The Regional Development Funding Program should consider using parent bodies to prioritise funding applications where multiple applications are received from affiliated groups/ clubs.

## REFERENCES

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>i</sup> 1301.0 – Year Book Australia 2004, Australian Bureau of Statistics

<sup>ii</sup> Geoscience Australia at <http://www.ga.gov.au/education/facts/dimensions/coastlin.htm>

<sup>iii</sup> Surf Life Saving in Australia saving lives in the water for more than 100 years – A Service Profile, 2007, pp12

<sup>iv</sup> National Coastal Safety Report 2007, Surf Life Saving Australia

<sup>v</sup> National Seachange Taskforce at <http://www.seachangetaskforce.org.au/About.html>

