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By email
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House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Infrastructure, Regional Development and Local
Government
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

INQUIRY INTO A NEW REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUNDING PROGRAM

The Shire of Nannup has been affected by the recent funding review of the former Regional Partnerships program therefore has first hand experience on how important this avenue of funding is for regional communities.

The Shire of Nannup is very small and cannot rely on locally generated funds to create economic and social development opportunities. A range of Federal, State and other funding programs (such as LotteryWest) has been successfully used over a number of years.

In the period 2003 to 2007, 21 Regional Partnerships Programme (RPP) Grants were approved in the Warren Blackwood area which this Shire is a part of. This area is covered by the Western Australian South West Area Consultative Committee (SWACC). The 21 grants within the Warren Blackwood area had total project costs of \$9,759,932 of which \$2,769,134 (28.4%) was from RPP. The RPP has played a major role in economic and social development in this area and this shire supports a similar or equivalent programme to assist continued local development.

Unlike many funding programs, the RPP did not have "rounds of funding", and applications could be made at any time. This allowed RPP to be used when needed in collaboration with other funding programs which did have fixed funding rounds. This flexibility was an important benefit of RPP, which would have been more difficult to access, and use, if it had been limited to funding rounds which may not have concurred with other programmes. Hence any new Regional Development Funding Program should retain this flexibility.

The RPP had little prescription in the range of activity which it could support which had both strategic and operational benefits. Strategically the flexibility in which RPP grants could be used encouraged vision and boldness in applications, increasing the likelihood that projects would be truly individual and of high impact. Operationally the flexibility allowed for simpler "packaging" of a number of funding sources since the RPP element could be applied to activities for which other funds could not be used. We believe that, without this flexibility some ground breaking projects, which are already demonstrating their ability to have significant benefits on their communities, would not have gone ahead. It is acknowledged that such a flexible program can be more difficult to administer, and that this may result in a more complex and costly approval process. Nevertheless Council submits that the replacement program should retain significant flexibilities on the use of funds.

For Commonwealth programs it is recommended that application processing be carried out regionally in order that applicants and local communities are aware that decisions on 'their' projects are significantly influenced by people with accurate and detailed knowledge of the particular circumstances of their communities.

It is important that the Local Regional Development Australia Boards which begin operation on 1st January 2009 have the necessary standing and resources to undertake these functions. A number of successful applicants for RPP in this region have stressed the effectiveness by which the staff of the former South West WA Area Consultative Committee assisted them through the process of refining their initial proposals and preparing applications.

Council submits that a Federally funded Regional Development program is essential for the continued growth and development of Regional Australia and urges such a program to be implemented as soon as practical.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require any further information.

Yours faithfully

SHANE COLLIE
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER


