

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

Dear Sir/Madam

Inquiry into a New Regional Development Funding Program

The South West Development Commission welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the development of future regional development funding programs conducted by the Commonwealth Government.

The Commission has over the years worked closely with the South West Area Consultative Committee (SWACC) and has supported applications for worthwhile regional projects, many of which have been funded through a mix of funding sources and have been extremely successful.

Two aspects of the previous funding program that the Commission would like to see perpetuated relate to accessibility and local support.

Accessibility

Applications to Regional Partnerships could be made at any time. The process was open. It could therefore be used to complement other grant schemes that operated within fixed timeframes. This aspect of the process is fully supported.

Local Support

SWACC offered excellent support and assistance for organisations contemplating applications to Regional Partnerships. This enabled doubtful applications to be identified early in the process. These applications were then either re-worked (to be competitive) or discounted if the proposal lacked substance.

Having a local capability of this nature (SWACC) enables the Commonwealth Government to keep abreast of local issues and funding requirements. Two-way benefits accrue: SWACC is able to advise and guide local groups through the application and local groups are able to bring local issues to SWACC's notice.



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It is suggested that this two-way communication process should be preserved in the new system to enhance engagement between the Commonwealth Government and regional communities.

Several other aspects however require improvement if new funding programs are to provide maximum benefits to regional areas.

Quicker Outcome

A much quicker turnaround on decisions is required after the application leaves the regional ACC. A lengthy decision-making process has an adverse impact on the whole funding cocktail of a project; often one grant is used as leverage against another grant. A delay also adversely affects the project due to cost escalations. The original grant may not be adequate if there is a six or eight month wait for the decision. A timely decision, while local enthusiasm is still high, certainly leads to more successful project outcomes.

Recognition of Local Input

It is suggested that more attention needs to be paid to the recommendations of local ACC boards. Once the local board endorsed and referred the application to Canberra there appeared to be little recognition of the board's endorsement. The board's recommendations appeared to carry little weight and there was an inordinately long time waiting for a decision.

Application Form – Criteria and Complexity

Regional Partnerships had a strong focus on employment outcomes. The Commission fully supports the need for employment outcomes; however, believes that applications in which social and environmental benefits may outweigh the economic benefits, should be able to compete under balanced triple bottom line criteria. Please refocus on triple bottom line criteria.

Also, the application form in the past has been quite complicated and has deterred some applicants. Please simplify the application form wherever possible.

The Commission looks forward to continuing its partnership with the Commonwealth Government in developing and funding valuable projects for the South West Region.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide input to this Inquiry.

Yours faithfully



DON PUNCH
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

8 July 2008


