

ROYAL SOCIETY FOR THE BLIND OF SA INC
RESPONSE TO THE RECENT DSS TENDERING PROCESS
Prepared by Andrew Daly, Executive Director
13th March 2015

We refer to the recent release of the Senate Inquiry into the “Impact on service quality, efficiency and sustainability of the recent Commonwealth community service tendering processes by the Department of Social Services” (DSS). The RSB welcomes the opportunity to respond to the enquiry given that it believes the process was ineffective, breached Commonwealth government procurement guidelines, lacked transparency and as a result cost the RSB significant time, resources and frustration over the seven months it took from beginning to end.

The RSB was founded in 1884 and assists over 12,000 people who are blind or vision impaired to achieve their optimal quality of life and live independently, through access to the full range of specialist rehabilitation and training services, including:

- Specialist Assessment and Counselling,
- Independent Living,
- Mobility, Guide and Assistance Dog Services,
- Adaptive Equipment Assessment and Training,
- Early Intervention Services for both Children and Adults,
- Recreation and Leisure Programs,
- Low Vision Services, and
- Employment and Systemic Advocacy.

In the current ever changing environment which includes the introduction of the age discriminatory National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and the plethora of Aged Care Reforms focussed on frail ageing, the RSB believes people who are blind or vision impaired will struggle to receive access to specialist funded disability services and assistive equipment. Further the significant shortfall in these systems has been identified and acknowledged by senior Commonwealth officers.

As such the RSB invested a significant amount of resources into the DSS tendering process (approximately 1,800 hours of staff time) to ensure we lodged our applications within the extremely tight timeframe of just over four weeks. This included engaging with stakeholders and suppliers to obtain letters of support from organisations in SA, WA, NSW, TAS & ACT, who similar to the RSB believed this was an opportunity to make a real difference to the lives of people who are blind or vision impaired.

The RSB after much frustration was eventually able to lodge 85 applications for funding across a range of DSS program/activity areas as outlined in Attachment A.

This farce commenced with a briefing that was at best embarrassing to DSS officers who had hired venues, and read verbatim from an overhead presentation and was unable to even answer a basic question due to “probity”. This made the DSS look extremely foolish and wasted the time of a very large number of people, clearly it would have been more productive to email the presentation.

The information sought from the RSB by the DSS and on which was the only basis a decision as to the successful tenderer was made was generic and lacked specific criteria against which an objective decision would not be possible.

The actual process of applying for the DSS Grants was fraught with problems including:

- The inadequate timeframes to scope the tenders and then create meaningful submissions including the creation of partnerships and stakeholder engagement;
- Electronic templates provided by DSS not being user friendly and having a number of bugs that continually caused the templates to crash;
- Lodgement of the applications due to the size of each file caused significant problems in uploading completed submissions to DSS this was eventually required to be undertaken in the early hours of the morning to ensure successful submissions;
- The lack of adequate receipting for each submission with some submissions not receiving electronic receipts thereby the RSB not being confident that the submissions were lodged successfully;
- The inadequate size of the DSS support team assisting with the tender process resulting in difficulty in contacting the support team or them being unable to assist or provide meaningful assistance due to what was described as probity/procurement issues.

Once the tenders were lodged the RSB waited a significant period of time for any response to our applications despite a commitment from DSS to notify tenderers in October 2014 regarding the outcomes. This initial timeframe came and went without any notification as to what was happening despite the 1st January 2015 start date rapidly looming.

During this period it was clear through calls to DSS (DSS made no contact with RSB) that a number of applications had been lost as part of the inadequate electronic lodgement process. Whilst the DSS Support team contacted the RSB a month after the applications closed (a month before successful tenderers were to be notified) to confirm that all RSB applications had been received. Given as noted below with what subsequently occurred regarding the fifteen applications for which the RSB was required to continually contact the DSS throughout January, in our view it is very likely that these applications were lost.

The RSB spent an inordinate amount of time planning for the announcement of the tender outcomes including continuing to maintain stakeholder and partnership engagement which became difficult as the decision regarding the tender outcomes was postponed until December 2014.

The announcement regarding the unsuccessful applications commenced by email on the 22nd December 2014, with as noted above, fifteen of the RSB's applications not being notified until January. This was despite numerous requests between November and December to the DSS Provider Portal as to the outcomes of the tender process to which no response was given by DSS staff.

In preparation for the announcement and the ever shrinking timeframe for implementation, the RSB postponed leave for staff impacting on staff morale and services.

The RSB was unsuccessful for all of its 85 applications which was a devastating result considering the time expended on preparing these and given that the information sought could not possibly lead to an objective decision being made.

A number of the applications lodged were also in the category of funding that was subsequently cut with no reason, consultation or discussion by DSS. This in itself represented a significant waste of time and investment for the RSB and demonstrated that the whole DSS tendering process was not planned effectively and clearly reflects badly on the ability of DSS to manage tendering processes in the future.

Further to this no access to feedback has been provided to understand the rationale for the decisions made. This is despite a number of formal requests to the DSS seeking this feedback. Whilst there has been generic feedback in the form of FAQ's posted on the DSS website that noted some general reasons why organisations were unsuccessful there has been no opportunity for direct feedback, resulting in the RSB being unable to improve future applications to be successful in the future.

The RSB has been unable to ascertain whether this tendering process needed to be conducted in accordance with for instance the Public Governance Performance and Accountability Act or the Commonwealth Government Procurement (CPP) programs, clearly as noted above, if there was a requirement, then the DSS tendering process has failed.

The CPP were created to ensure that the Commonwealth receive:

- Value for money;
- Encouraging completion ;
- Efficient, Effective, Economical and Ethical procurement, and
- Accountability and transparency in the process.

This is further supported by for instance the Australian National Audit Office's "Fairness and Transparency in purchasing decisions".

The tender process in which the RSB participated failed to meet the above standards and in summary:

- Was ineffectively planned;
- Lacked clarity and transparency;
- Breached Commonwealth procurement and other guidelines;
- Cost the RSB significant time and resources in planning, collating and submitting tenders and waiting for decisions to be made;
- Was compromised by poor communication;
- Significantly impacted on future stakeholder engagement with key partners; and
- It is doubtful that it is able to demonstrate value for money.

The RSB believes that this senate inquiry needs to review the decisions made as a result of the recent tender process to ensure that the decisions made reflect the requirements of the CPP, unsuccessful tenderers are able to receive individual feedback on their submissions and that the time frames for preparation, review and commencement of services are realistic.

In the future there is a need to ensure that this situation does not reoccur and the DSS are made as accountable as other Government bodies in meeting CPP and other standards for procurement. We believe that it is vital that confidence in Government procurement is restored.

If you require any further information or clarity on the matters raised above please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

ANDREW DALY
Executive Director

ATTACHMENT A

TENDER CATEGORY	TENDER NAME	STATE/REGION	FUNDS APPLIED FOR
Community Development & Participation	Independence & Integration	SA	\$250,000
Community Development & Participation	Independence & Integration	WA	\$250,000
Community Development & Participation	Independence & Integration	ACT	\$250,000
Community Development & Participation	Independence & Integration	TAS	\$250,000
Community Development & Participation	Independence & Integration	SYDNEY	\$250,000
Community Development & Participation	Independence & Integration	HUNTER	\$250,000
Community Development & Participation	Independence & Integration	GOSFORD	\$250,000
Community Development & Participation	Health & Wellness	SA	\$250,000
Community Development & Participation	Health & Wellness	WA	\$250,000
Community Development & Participation	Health & Wellness	ACT	\$250,000
Community Development & Participation	Health & Wellness	TAS	\$250,000
Community Development & Participation	Health & Wellness	SYDNEY	\$250,000
Community Development & Participation	Health & Wellness	HUNTER	\$250,000

Community Development & Participation	Health & Wellness	GOSFORD	\$250,000
Community Development & Participation	ATC	SA	\$250,000
Community Development & Participation	ATC	WA	\$250,000
Community Development & Participation	ATC	ACT	\$250,000
Community Development & Participation	ATC	TAS	\$250,000
Community Development & Participation	ATC	SYDNEY	\$250,000
Community Development & Participation	ATC	HUNTER	\$250,000
Community Development & Participation	ATC	GOSFORD	\$250,000
Community Development & Participation	TECH FEST	WA	\$250,000
Community Development & Participation	TECH FEST	ACT	\$250,000
Community Development & Participation	TECH FEST	TAS	\$250,000
Community Development & Participation	TECH FEST	SYDNEY	\$250,000
Community Development & Participation	TECH FEST	HUNTER	\$250,000
Community Development & Participation	TECH FEST	GOSFORD	\$250,000
Community Development & Participation	SUBSIDY SCHEME	SA	\$250,000
Community Development & Participation	SUBSIDY SCHEME	WA	\$250,000
Community Development & Participation	SUBSIDY SCHEME	ACT	\$250,000

Community Development & Participation	SUBSIDY SCHEME	TAS	\$250,000
Community Development & Participation	SUBSIDY SCHEME	SYDNEY	\$250,000
Community Development & Participation	SUBSIDY SCHEME	HUNTER	\$250,000
Community Development & Participation	SUBSIDY SCHEME	GOSFORD	\$250,000
Aged Care Service improvement & Health Ageing	Health & Wellness	SA	\$250,000
Aged Care Service improvement & Health Ageing	Health & Wellness	WA	\$250,000
Aged Care Service improvement & Health Ageing	Health & Wellness	ACT	\$250,000
Aged Care Service improvement & Health Ageing	Health & Wellness	TAS	\$250,000
Aged Care Service improvement & Health Ageing	Health & Wellness	NSW	\$750,000
Aged Care Service improvement & Health Ageing	FALLS PREVENTION	NATIONAL	\$1,177,267
Aged Care Service improvement & Health Ageing	MEHP - Support for People with Diverse Needs	SA	\$300,000
Aged Care Service improvement & Health Ageing	MEHP - Support for People with Diverse Needs	WA	\$300,000
Aged Care Service improvement & Health Ageing	MEHP - Support for People with Diverse Needs	ACT	\$300,000
Aged Care Service improvement & Health Ageing	MEHP - Support for People with Diverse Needs	TAS	\$300,000
Aged Care Service improvement & Health Ageing	MEHP - Support for People with Diverse Needs	NSW	\$600,000
Aged Care Service improvement & Health Ageing	MEHP - Activities to Promote Active & Healthy Ageing	SA	\$300,000
Aged Care Service improvement & Health Ageing	MEHP - Activities to Promote Active & Healthy Ageing	WA	\$300,000

Aged Care Service improvement & Health Ageing	MEHP - Activities to Promote Active & Healthy Ageing	ACT	\$300,000
Aged Care Service improvement & Health Ageing	MEHP - Activities to Promote Active & Healthy Ageing	TAS	\$300,000
Aged Care Service improvement & Health Ageing	MEHP - Activities to Promote Active & Healthy Ageing	NSW	\$600,000
Aged Care Service improvement & Health Ageing	MEHP - Activities to Build the Capacity of Aged Care Services to Deliver High Quality Care	SA	\$300,000
Aged Care Service improvement & Health Ageing	MEHP - Activities to Build the Capacity of Aged Care Services to Deliver High Quality Care	WA	\$300,000
Aged Care Service improvement & Health Ageing	MEHP - Activities to Build the Capacity of Aged Care Services to Deliver High Quality Care	ACT	\$300,000
Aged Care Service improvement & Health Ageing	MEHP - Activities to Build the Capacity of Aged Care Services to Deliver High Quality Care	TAS	\$300,000
Aged Care Service improvement & Health Ageing	MEHP - Activities to Build the Capacity of Aged Care Services to Deliver High Quality Care	NSW	\$600,000
Volunteer Management	Volunteer Services	SA	\$150,000
Volunteer Management	Volunteer Services	WA	\$150,000
Volunteer Management	Volunteer Services	ACT	\$150,000
Volunteer Management	Volunteer Services	TAS	\$150,000
Volunteer Management	Volunteer Services	NSW	\$150,000
Children & Parenting Support	Children & Parenting Support	SA	\$450,000
Children & Parenting Support	Children & Parenting Support	WA	\$450,000
Children & Parenting Support	Children & Parenting Support	ACT	\$450,000
Children & Parenting Support	Children & Parenting Support	TAS	\$450,000
Children & Parenting Support	Children & Parenting Support	NSW	\$675,000

Children & Parenting Support	Children & Parenting Support Autism Assistance Dog Service	SA	\$375,000
Children & Parenting Support	Children & Parenting Support Autism Assistance Dog Service	Tas	\$375,000
Children & Parenting Support	Children & Parenting Support Autism Assistance Dog Service	WA	\$375,000
Children & Parenting Support	Children & Parenting Support Autism Assistance Dog Service	ACT	\$375,000
Children & Parenting Support	Children & Parenting Support Autism Assistance Dog Service	NSW	\$375,000
Community Development & Participation	Guide Dog Service	NSW	\$250,000
Community Development & Participation	Guide Dog Service	SA	\$250,000
Community Development & Participation	Guide Dog Service	ACT	\$250,000
Community Development & Participation	Guide Dog Service	TAS	\$250,000
Community Development & Participation	Guide Dog Service	WA	\$250,000
Children & Parenting Support	Children & Parenting Support K94U2C camp	SA	\$25,000
Housing & Homelessness	Design Manual	National	\$200,000
Community Development & Participation	Systemic Advocacy	SA	\$300,000
Community Development & Participation	Systemic Advocacy	ACT	\$300,000
Community Development & Participation	Systemic Advocacy	NSW	\$300,000
Community Development & Participation	Systemic Advocacy	Tas	\$300,000
Community Development & Participation	Systemic Advocacy	WA	\$300,000
Aged Care Service improvement &	Activities to Promote Healthy Ageing -	NATIONAL	\$570,000

Health Ageing	Reading Made Easy (Navigators)		
Community Development & Participation	CALD Information Material	NATIONAL	\$290,000
Diversity and Social Cohesion	CALD Information Material Project	NATIONAL	\$290,000
TOTAL FUNDING APPLIED FOR			\$26,052,267
TOTAL APPLICATIONS APPLIED FOR			85