Regional Development Australia – Far South Coast Inc. (RDA FSC) Submission to the Senate Inquiry into the extent of contracts offered, and the associated conditions, to successful applicants Terms of Reference

The impact on service quality, efficiency and sustainability of recent Commonwealth community service tendering processes by the Department of Social Services, with particular regard to:

a. the extent of consultation with service providers concerning the size, scope and nature of services tendered, determination of outcomes and other elements of service and contract design;

b. the effect of the tendering timeframe and lack of notice on service collaboration, consortia and the opportunity for innovative service design and delivery;

c. the evidence base and analysis underlying program design;

d. the clarity of information provided to prospective tenderers concerning service scope and outcomes;

e. the opportunities created for innovative service design and delivery, including greater service integration or improved service wrap-around, and the extent to which this was reflected in the outcomes of the tender process;

f. the extent to which tenders were restricted to not-for-profit services, the clarity of these terms, and whether they changed during the notification and tender process;

g. analysis of the types, size and structures of organisations which were successful and unsuccessful under this process;

h. the implementation and extent of compliance with Commonwealth Grant Guidelines;

i. the potential and likely impacts on service users concerning service delivery, continuity, quality and reliability;

j. the framework and measures in place (if any) to assess the impacts of these reforms on service user outcomes and service sustainability and effectiveness;

k. the information provided to tenderers about how decisions are made, feedback mechanisms for unsuccessful tender applicants, and the participation of independent experts in tender review processes to ensure fairness and transparency;

l. the impact on advocacy services across the sector;

m. factors relating to the efficient and effective collection and sharing of data on outcomes within and across program streams to allow actuarial analysis of program, cohort and population outcomes to be measured and evaluated;

n. the extent of contracts offered, and the associated conditions, to successful applicants; and

o. any other related matters.

To whom it may concern,

With regard to the Senate Inquiry into the impact on service quality, efficiency and sustainability of recent Commonwealth community service tendering processes by the Department of Social Services, we provide the following submission with particular regard to Terms of Reference points (i); (k) and (n):

The following comments are made in relation to all DSS funded projects however we consider that we have particular insight into these matters from our experience with both the Shoalhaven Youth Volunteering Initiative (SYVI) and the South Coast Youth Volunteering Initiative (SCYVI) projects.

Major concerns:

(i) The potential and likely impacts on service users concerning service delivery, continuity, quality and reliability;

The current funding model fails to take into account the need for service agencies and other funded bodies to plan ahead and budget. The tenuous nature of the funding and the lack of timely communication regarding funding continuation can alienate stakeholders and inhibit successful project delivery.

There needs to be far more notice given as to whether a project is to continue or be cancelled. We suggest that existing projects or programmes have a greater lead-in time frame with regard to continuation, or otherwise, of funding. This would allow greater clarity and transparency with communication to employees and stakeholders and would certainly assist in project delivery and result in more positive recognition for the Government. Having people left in the dark until the last minute merely antagonises the electorate.

(k) The information provided to tenderers about how decisions are made, feedback mechanisms for unsuccessful tender applicants, and the participation of independent experts in tender review processes to ensure fairness and transparency;

Lack of consultation with local members and/or RDAs regarding the funding of new or existing programmes results in a lack of understanding by the government of the day on which programmes most benefit the region and deliver the greatest return on investment for the government. The failure to utilise such significant 'on-the-ground' knowledge is a waste of a valuable resource and shows a complete disdain for the regions by the decision maker when making funding decisions. The perception of the electorate is that a 'faceless bureaucrat in Canberra' removed from day-to-day, regional, working-class reality, sits in an ivory tower making decisions for a region he/she doesn't know and doesn't make the effort to investigate. A simple telephone call to the local member or RDA would do much to alleviate this impression and would genuinely assist the government to utilise funding in a more efficient and beneficial manner.

(n) The extent of contracts offered, and the associated conditions, to successful applicants;

Ad hoc funding streams do not provide the security and ability to plan ahead or fit in with the requirements of those for whom the funding is intended – inflexible delivery periods – funding not

structured or flexible to fit the local variety of needs or delivery periods. E.g. Schools whose calendar and curriculum runs by the chronological year as opposed to the financial year.

Contract negotiations for potential on-going funding are left to the very last minute which can result in loss of programme staff; inability of the intended recipient to re-engage as insufficient notice is given; a lack of faith in truly beneficial programmes and the government's inability to recognise such valuable programmes.

Other comments:

- Lack of consultation in the region has a negative impact on the Governments image
- Funding considered by the local community to be misdirected gives a negative effect on the local member and by extension the Federal government
- Lack of local consultation smacks of patriarchy
- With such large amounts of funding provided it is inconceivable that no consultation takes place between the decision makers and the local member and/or the peak regional development body (RDA) prior to any decision making processes

In closing, Regional Development Australia - Far South Coast Inc. respectfully requests the **Senate Inquiry into the extent of contracts offered, and the associated conditions, to successful applicants** to seriously consider the above submission.

Yours sincerely,

Rob Pollock OAM

Chair

RDA FSC Inc.