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Secretary
House Standing Committee on Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Committee Members

INQUIRY IN TO A NEW REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUNDING PROGRAM

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input to the review on behalf of Australia's peak professional association for parks and leisure professionals. Parks and Leisure Australia (PLA) represents a wide range of people whose task is to facilitate the many leisure opportunities made available to the Australian people. Many of those opportunities are offered at community level and are centred on community infrastructure e.g. sports field, a vital element of any community. Membership ranges across staff and management of parks, gardens, sport, aquatic, rehabilitation, aged hostels and recreation centres, at local and state government levels, students from tertiary institutions, academics, private consultants, private operators of facilities and many more. The membership comprises people from all states of Australia and overseas and as you can see from the above sectors, this organisation and its members have a significant impact on the lifestyles of people in all parts of Australia and overseas.

It is important to note that up to 80% of Parks and Leisure Australia's (PLA) members are employed by local government and, in most cases, would have had some exposure to the recent Regional Partnerships Funding Program.

Before outlining the key issues, observations and recommendations for the proposed new funding program, it is my pleasure to extend an invitation to you all to attend an important forum, being held as part of PLA's 10th National Conference (9 – 12 November 2008) at the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre, on community infrastructure and "a way forward". The forum is to take place on Monday, 10 November 2008 between 12.45 and 4.15pm. I would hope that some of the committee members could attend this "invite only" event to hear first hand from key people representing all levels of government and the private sector talk about relevant issues relating to community infrastructure and what is required (including funding) to ensure a sustainable solution for the future, ultimately resulting in improved lifestyles of the Australian people. Please contact Garry Henshall (Chief Executive Officer) on (03) 5444 1763 or garry@parks-leisure.com.au to secure a place at this event.

Please note the following key issues, observations and recommendations:

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- PLA will not comment on the previous funding program (Regional Partnerships) as it wishes to comment on future funding arrangements and will outline a number of key principles it would like to see incorporated in to the proposed new funding program.
- PLA has previously supported two submissions re: community infrastructure to the Government and Opposition (prior to the last federal election), they being: -
 - "A Place to Play - Proposal for a Sustainable National Community Sport Infrastructure" (submitted by a consortium of major national sporting organisations) which asked for an allocation of one billion dollars over a four year period; and
 - The Australian Local Government Association's proposed "Local Community Infrastructure Renewals Fund" which asked for the same funding arrangements as the above proposal.
- It should be noted that there is currently no Australia wide database of community infrastructure for sport and recreation.
 - Various local governments (LG - and to a limited degree state governments) have extensive databases and/or GIS systems that catalogue their infrastructure.
 - Some of those local governments have advanced asset management programs with some life cycle costing parameters in place.
 - Many local governments do not have either of the above systems in place (particularly those in rural areas).
 - It will remain a difficult task to determine projects of priority need until the above systems are developed and standardized in a local and regional planning sense.
 - With regard to sport and recreation, it is imperative that regional recreation plans (involving groupings of LGs that look at participation needs and infrastructure provision) are developed on a long term basis and captured in a statewide context to allow for priorities to be determined at various levels i.e. minor through to major projects (such plans will also create opportunities for resource sharing and cost reductions across councils and thus promote more sustainable management of community infrastructure)
 - There is a need to ensure that the recreation planning process is consistent across Australia to allow for the determination of priorities and comparisons where required.
- The various funding systems (from all levels of government) that have been or are still in place to support the development of (and in some cases retrofitting) infrastructure, have experienced mixed fortunes when it comes to cooperative funding arrangements/agreements i.e. there is a marked need for improved collaboration of funding programs to achieve more effective and multiple outcomes.
 - There is a need to ensure that the processes required to secure funding for projects that have met the necessary planning requirements (and are identified through a recreation planning process) are streamlined to ensure minimal delays in bringing the development to fruition. A notional commitment early in the process will allow the organisation to more readily secure funding from other sources.
- There is a need for communities and LGs to determine (through appropriate planning processes that consider current and future requirements) which of their facilities are surplus to need i.e. there is a need for rationalisation and/or modification of existing infrastructure (promoting a sporting hub philosophy where clubs / groups share overlapping facilities such as club rooms, toilets, etc).
 - The expectations of people within our communities need to be brought in to line with the realistic options available to us all.
 - If there is a demonstrated need and the resources are available (based on a life cycle costing approach), the communities should be supported by all levels of government and, where appropriate, the private sector.
 - There needs to be a strong correlation between the participation plans of all sports (from national / state/ regional /local level) and their infrastructure needs to address grass roots participation and support that is offered by LG (note the recent NSW Parliamentary findings regarding "no where to play").
- There is an emerging trend of an increase in public private partnerships (PPP) to provide necessary community infrastructure e.g. schools, recreation and aquatic facilities, etc, to significant population centres.
 - PPPs will become, in many cases, a necessary "way of life" given the ever increasing costs associated with the development of and maintenance of community infrastructure.

- Over many years, organisations have tended to develop their own stand-alone facilities e.g. hockey club. This trend has started to change over the last 10 – 20 years with a government policy “push” to develop multipurpose/use facilities (sporting hubs), whereby organisations are able to share infrastructure and/or collocate in order to make more efficient and effective use of their resources (our members are working on innovative solutions in this regard all over Australia that could be used as best practice models).
 - This trend must continue and in fact be encouraged as much as possible on the basis of “like” activities being able to occur on the one “footprint”.
- There is a continuing need to ensure that sport, recreation and leisure related infrastructure is made available and made affordable to the Australian population to ensure we continue to combat major illnesses plaguing this country e.g. obesity, diabetes, heart disease, etc and the tension between the participation plans of various peak sporting and leisure organisations and the infrastructure they expect to use at a local level needs to be resolved.
- The level of true asset management planning and life cycle cost analysis is low throughout Australia and needs to be rectified to ensure more appropriate and sustainable outcomes for the future.
 - There are very few (if any) infrastructure funding programs that provide allocations for maintenance or upgrading to meet changing building standards and community expectations. It is important that the new funding program considers this element for strategically placed facilities of regional significance.
- Climate change has had and will continue to have a significant impact on both the lives of the Australian people and the associated infrastructure they use for sport, recreation and leisure purposes.
 - The impact of reduced rainfall and water restrictions has seen the degradation of many sports playing fields, affecting participation levels and in many cases reductions in playing seasons.
 - Like many parts of Australia, Sydney has, for the past few seasons, had to restrict the number of young people participating in sport due to a lack of infrastructure i.e. playing fields. To deny young people the chance to be physically active is a tragedy and one that can only lead to increased future problems with chronic diseases.
 - It should also be noted that this issue has been exacerbated by the number of schools (public and private) that have not allowed community access to their facilities and in some cases the sale of schools and the resultant loss of open space and sporting facilities adding further pressure on existing infrastructure.
 - This is a significant issue in regional areas where sporting clubs make up the social fabric of these towns and the impacts on sporting usage through run down infrastructure and water restrictions is resulting in the breakdown of societal structures and populations are lost to other towns and social connections and support is eroded. PLA has been seeking federal funding support for a program that waterproofs these towns and their sport and leisure facilities through sewerage recycling programs as part of the package of sustainable infrastructure in these regional areas.
 - PLA’s Western Australian Regional Council was instrumental in developing (in partnership with the Department of Sport and Recreation WA) a “Climate Change Adaptation Framework” designed for LG and sport and recreation organisations, providing them with a guide to plan more effectively for the changes associated with climate change.
 - PLA’s other regional councils (located throughout Australia) have all had involvement in reviewing the impact of issues like water shortages, its affect on participation and modifications required to counteract this significant issue.
 - The modifications required will need the ongoing financial support of all tiers of government to ensure we allow the Australian people to remain physically active by providing them with outlets that support and indeed enhance their quality of life.
 - There is an increased tendency to play and/or recreate indoors and/or at night to avoid the sun.
 - This trend has created pressure on organisations to provide more appropriate infrastructure to cater for the demand e.g. indoor aquatic centres, lights to sports fields, etc.
 - There has been an increase in demand to replace natural turf with synthetic turf options for sporting activities e.g. lawn bowls.

- This trend requires further research to determine the best solution but nevertheless, both options require significant capital outlays, both up front and for ongoing maintenance and development.
- There is now greater recognition of the need to consider ESD principles in facility designs. Given the impact of climate change and its future challenges, it is imperative that ESD principles be factored in to all designs, including proposed retrofitting of infrastructure.
- New community infrastructure, where possible, must be culturally sensitive and environmentally sustainable and include as a minimum solar power and water recycling systems within their design.
- Research suggests that exposure to natural environments, parks and sport and recreational pursuits (using the relevant infrastructure, be they active or passive) have a significant positive affect on an individual's wellbeing. This said, any infrastructure investment program should also consider the complimentary infrastructure of parks and natural areas part of sporting and leisure infrastructure. Investments in these areas are critical with population growth and more compact and densely populated cities with limited access to facilities. Thus resulting in the added benefit of reducing various health issues (including mental health) in the community that in turn will realise savings in the area of health expenditure.

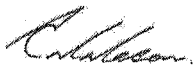
RECOMMENDATIONS:

- That the new funding program be titled "Community Infrastructure Australia".
 - That the fund be **allocated four billion dollars over a four year period** i.e. **\$1B per annum**, to support the development of community infrastructure e.g. aquatic centres, sports fields, child care facilities and associated open space infrastructure to integrate facilities into the surrounding communities (not just stand alone).
 - That funding of up to one third the total cost of the project be allocated from this fund on the basis that support (to be negotiated) is forthcoming from state and local governments and where appropriate, the private sector.
 - That the new fund is available to all communities throughout Australia i.e. metropolitan, rural, regional and remote.
 - That an advisory committee be created to focus on sport, recreation and leisure related projects.
 - The role of this group should be to assess the projects on the basis of state and regional planning processes (and associated priorities) and recommend projects for support to the Minister for Transport, Regional Development and Local Government.
 - This group should include representatives from national organisations (government and non-government) and should include as a minimum:
 - Parks and Leisure Australia (PLA)
 - Standing Committee on Recreation and Sport (SCORS)
 - Australian Local Government Association (ALGA)
 - Local Government Managers Australia (LGMA)
 - Department of Health and Ageing
 - Department of Transport, Regional Development and Local Government
 - Australian Sports Commission
 - Confederation of Australian Sport (CAS) or other suitable representative of sport at a national level
 - Regional Development Australia
 - That a portion (to be determined) of the funding program be allocated for maintenance of strategically located infrastructure of regional significance.
- That a facility audit (including identification, mapping to a central GIS system and condition audit) of community infrastructure throughout Australia be undertaken. This process will assist with strategic planning for LGs, peak sporting associations and industry bodies such as PLA.
- That regional recreation plans (with a long term outlook) be developed throughout Australia in order to identify priority projects.
 - That these plans be consistent in their format and process when identifying and establishing priorities.
- That all applications for funding highlight the inclusion of asset management, life cycle costing principles and integrated planning.

- That all major projects (\$500K+) demonstrate (for existing and/or proposed infrastructure) that sound asset management and life cycle cost principles and practices have been included in their submissions, thus impacting on the final design of the projects.
- That all applications for funding incorporate ESD principles in their designs on the basis of climate change adaptation.
 - That consideration and priority be given to projects that are adapting to the effects of climate change e.g. water re-use/recycling systems to reduce the use of potable water.
- That wherever possible, new infrastructure be collocated with existing infrastructure e.g. schools, medical centres, child care centres, etc, to ensure shared use of facilities, programs and services.
- That PPPs be considered for medium to major community infrastructure projects wherever possible to reduce the burden on the "public purse".

Please also see attached PLA's recently endorsed Strategic Framework for your reference.

Yours sincerely



STEVE MASON
NATIONAL PRESIDENT

15 October 2008