

BY EMAIL
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Dear Michelle

Probity Sign Off - Caring for our Country Open Grants Scheme

Blake Dawson was appointed to act as Probity Advisers to the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (**Department**) in the assessment and of applications for grants under the Caring for our Country Open Grants Scheme.

Background

Grants under the Caring for our Country Open Grants Scheme were advertised on 21 June 2008 and applications closed on 1 August 2008. An Application Assessment Plan was developed for evaluating the applications. The Plan was developed to ensure that the assessment process was handled with impartiality, fairness, consistency, transparency, accountability, confidentiality and security, and that conflicts of interest were dealt with appropriately.

Key components of the assessment process included:

- The evaluation of each application by 2 *Internal Departmental Assessors*, and the development of a list of recommended, reserve, not recommended and ineligible applications;
- Arbitration of those applications where assessments differed by 30 marks or more and one score exceeded 210/300;
- Rankings based on scores being provided to an *Senior Executive Evaluation Panel* (SES Panel);
- Evaluation and adjustment of rankings by the SES Panel;
- The provision of comments by an *Independent Advisory Panel*;
- Consultation of experts and policy and program areas for advice in relation to experimental design, duplication of projects;
- Additional arbitration of the 25 highest ranked projects on the not recommended list;
- Final SES adjustment of rankings, taking into account the *Independent Advisory Panel* comments and additional arbitration.

Our reference
06-1436-2922

Partner
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Our role

Our role was to oversee the assessment process to ensure that there was integrity in the assessment and recommendation processes, to independently monitor processes to ensure compliance with the published documentation and to advise the Department in relation to process matters.

In particular, in independently monitoring the process, our role was primarily to be satisfied that:

- the recommendations and conclusions contained in the documents at each stage of the process were justified, clear and certain;
- relevant considerations were taken into account; and
- there was no evidence of bias or lack of good faith.

What we did

- We provided probity sign-off in relation to the Application Assessment Plan for the Caring for our Country Open Grants Scheme.
- We reviewed approximately 75 evaluations of applications by 42 different *Internal Departmental Assessors*;
- We reviewed approximately 36 determinations in relation to ineligible programs, and provided feedback to the Department in relation to consistency;
- We attended progress meetings and provided feedback and advice as required;
- We agreed that the arbitration process outlined in the Application Assessment Plan could be modified so that arbitration was limited to competitive applications; and
- We reviewed the documents provided to us by you, including Assessment Report 1, Assessment Report 2, SES Meeting Minutes and the final list of recommended applicants.

We did not review all assessments or attend the SES Panel or the *Independent Advisory Panel* meetings.

Sign-off

On the basis of materials made available to us, our observations and inquiries, and subject to the matters raised above, we are satisfied that each stage of the process was undertaken in accordance with the published documentation and the Application Assessment Plan. We have not identified any evidence of systematic bias or lack of objectivity which advantaged or disadvantaged any particular applicant.

Yours faithfully



John Clark

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