

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

11.8 The Committee recommends that the operation of the SONA guidelines cease.

Recommendation 2

11.18 The Committee recommends it be mandatory for all Regional Partnerships program applications to be developed in consultation with local Area Consultative Committees.

Recommendation 3

11.19 The Committee recommends that Area Consultative Committees must receive copies of relevant applications and be afforded an opportunity to consider and make recommendations not less than ten working days from receipt of the application.

Recommendation 4

11.21 The Committee recommends that the Department of Transport and Regional Services incorporates and outlines appropriate assessment procedures for multi-region funding applications into the published Regional Partnerships program guidelines.

Recommendation 5

11.22 The Committee recommends that multi-region funding applications be referred to all relevant Area Consultative Committees for review comments and recommendations.

Recommendation 6

11.27 The Committee recommends that a biannual statement be tabled in the Senate by the Minister representing the Minister for Transport and Regional Services, listing:

- the Regional Partnerships program grants approved in the preceding six month period;
- the Department of Transport and Regional Services' and Area Consultative Committee's recommendations; and
- where the funding decision is inconsistent with the departmental and/or Area Consultative Committee recommendation, a statement of the reasons for the decision.

Recommendation 7

11.31 The Committee recommends that the Government address inequities in the distribution of Regional Partnerships program funding consistent with the ANAO Better Practice Guide.

Recommendation 8

11.33 The Committee recommends that the exclusion of the Australian Capital Territory government from eligibility for Regional Partnerships program funding be rescinded.

Recommendation 9

11.37 The Committee recommends that the Government review resourcing of Area Consultative Committees, and training for committee members and employees, to ensure that they can adequately perform their role in relation to Regional Partnerships program.

Recommendation 10

11.38 The Committee recommends the introduction of three-year operational funding contracts for Area Consultative Committees.

Recommendation 11

11.41 The Committee recommends that the Government negotiates with each Area Consultative Committee in relation to key performance indicators, including job creation and partnership support, to ensure performance measures are regionally appropriate.

Recommendation 12

11.43 The Committee recommends that Area Consultative Committee recommendations be disclosed to funding applicants upon request.

Recommendation 13

11.45 The Committee recommends that the Government conduct a review of the role of Area Consultative Committees to ensure that their contribution to regional development is maximised.

Recommendation 14

11.47 The Committee recommends that the appointment process for Sustainable Regions Advisory Committee members, including selection criteria, be made public.

Recommendation 15

11.49 The Committee recommends that the Government adopts a skills-based approach in relation to the appointment of future Sustainable Regions Advisory Committees, including the two new bodies announced during the 2004 federal election campaign.

Recommendation 16

11.51 The Committee recommends that the Australian National Audit Office audit the administration of the Regional Partnerships and Sustainable Regions programs, with particular attention to the case studies highlighted in this report.

Recommendation 17

11.56 The Committee recommends that projects that cannot obtain or have not yet obtained relevant approvals or licences not be eligible for Regional Partnerships or Sustainable Regions funding.

Recommendation 18

11.60 The Committee recommends that competitive neutrality procedures be strengthened, including the introduction of a procedure for potential competitors to lodge objections.

Recommendation 19

11.62 The Committee recommends that due diligence processes be strengthened including a routine inquiry relating to legal action against applicants.

Recommendation 20

11.63 The Committee recommends that no program funding be approved for projects that do not meet Regional Partnerships and Sustainable Regions guidelines and fail other tests including proper due diligence.

Recommendation 21

11.67 The Committee recommends that it become formal policy that ministers and their staff are kept strictly at arm's length from decisions, including all relevant departmental advice, on applications from their own electorates. The portfolio minister and his or her staff should not be included in the circulation of departmental advice on applications for projects based in the minister's electorate.

Recommendation 22

11.68 The Committee recommends that Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries, and their staff, should be prohibited from intervening in the assessment of grants.

Recommendation 23

11.70 The Committee recommends that from the 1 July preceding a general election, the following procedures apply to grant approvals and announcements:

- when the Minister's decision to approve or not approve a grant is different to the recommendation of either the Area Consultative Committee or the Department, or the funding amount approved by the Minister is different to the amount recommended, then the grant approval decision be made in conjunction with the relevant Shadow Minister. The Committee further recommends that all grants approved in these circumstances be announced jointly by the Minister and the Shadow Minister.

Recommendation 24

11.73 The Committee recommends that the government develops and discloses procedures to govern the cessation or transition of the Regional Partnerships and Sustainable Regions programs.

Recommendation 25

11.76 The Committee recommends that the government reviews the efficacy of a grants-based approach to regional development.

Recommendation 26

11.79 The Committee recommends that the Regional Partnerships and Sustainable Regions programs should complement, not compete with state and local government funding programs.