

Chapter 9

The Sustainable Regions Program

9.1 The Sustainable Regions Program (SRP) was announced on 29 August 2001 by the Hon John Anderson MP, then Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Transport and Regional Services as the major initiative under the government's *Stronger Regions, A Stronger Australia* regional statement. Its predecessor programs included the Regional Solutions Program and structural adjustment packages for various regions affected by closures of major employers or declines of major industries.¹

9.2 In line with the focus of this inquiry, this chapter discusses matters of interest to the Committee regarding the administration of the Sustainable Regions Program and points of comparison with the Regional Partnerships Program. The structure and operation of each of the Sustainable Region Advisory Committees (SRACs) are also briefly reviewed. Issues of concern with the program are drawn out in the following chapter with reference to particular SR projects.

The program

9.3 The DOTARS submission to the inquiry provides detailed information relating to the SR program, including its aims, guidelines, assessment criteria, application processes and internal procedures.² Other information about the program is available on the Sustainable Regions website.³

Funding and expenditure

9.4 Funding under the program was initially provided to eight regions facing major economic, social or environmental change.⁴ The eight 'prototype' regions selected in 2001 to receive up to \$100 million total funding until 30 June 2006 were the Atherton Tablelands, Qld, Wide Bay Burnett, Qld, Campbelltown-Camden, NSW, Far North East NSW, Cradle Coast, Tas, Gippsland, Vic, Kimberley, WA and Playford/Salisbury, SA. Six of the regions were allocated a maximum of \$12 million across the period of the program, while the Atherton Tablelands was allocated up to \$18 million and Wide Bay Burnett \$8 million.⁵

1 DOTARS, *Stronger Regions, A Stronger Australia*, August 2001; DOTARS, *Submission 14*, p. 4.

2 DOTARS, *Submission 14*.

3 DOTARS, Sustainable Regions website, www.sustainableregions.gov.au.

4 DOTARS, *Submission 14*, p. 4.

5 DOTARS, *Submission 14*, Attachment A, Sustainable Regions Programme Guidelines, p. 5.

9.5 DOTARS reported in its 2003-04 annual report that \$27.5 million had been spent in total on the SRP. \$20.9 million was expended on the program during 2003-04, and the SRP budget for 2004-05 was \$32.5 million.⁶

9.6 A further \$33 million of funding for two new sustainable regions was announced during the 2004 federal election period. The new regions selected to receive funding until 30 June 2008 were the Northern Rivers and North Coast NSW (up to \$12 million) and Western Qld and Western NSW (also known as the Darling Matilda Way Sustainable Region - up to \$21 million).⁷

Selection of the Sustainable Regions

9.7 The Committee has been unable to discover the process by which sustainable regions were selected by the minister. In public documents relating to the program or evidence to the Committee there is no mention of consultation or comparison with other regions. The DOTARS submission, however, states that the first eight sustainable regions were selected on the following grounds:

Regions (including urban fringe areas as well as those outside capital cities) were identified against criteria that included remoteness as well as important socio-economic and demographic indicators, such as levels of unemployment, family income and structural change indices, amongst others. Importantly, each of the eight regions selected initially demonstrated a strong degree of initiative, self-reliance and commitment to community action.⁸

9.8 The SRP website contains regional profile documents that provide an overview of each region's social and economic characteristics. The regional profiles are dated between December 2002 and March 2003.⁹ It is not known whether earlier iterations of these documents were developed prior to the commencement of the program to assist in selecting the regions or whether comparable analysis of other regions was undertaken.

9.9 The Committee requested that DOTARS provide an objective needs assessment to explain why the government selected the two new sustainable regions. DOTARS witnesses said they were unable to provide this information because the department was not consulted about the selection of the new regions, as it was 'a government decision-making process in the context of an election'.¹⁰ However, Ms Riggs told the Committee the decision may have been based on the department's

6 DOTARS, *Annual Report 2003-04* pp 103, 110.

7 DOTARS, *Submission 14*, p. 5.

8 DOTARS, *Submission 14*, p. 4.

9 See, for example, DOTARS, Sustainable Regions website, www.sustainableregions.gov.au/qld/ath/profile.aspx.

10 Ms Riggs, *Committee Hansard*, 2 February 2005, p. 49.

analysis of the socio-economic indices of a number of regions identified by the minister's office. DOTARS provided this information to the minister at his request in mid-2004.¹¹

Program administration

Role of DOTARS

9.10 Like the Regional Partnerships Program, the Sustainable Regions Program is administered by DOTARS. Representatives of the department attend SRAC meetings and provide advice to the SRAC and the Minister for Transport and Regional Services on recommended projects. DOTARS receives information about projects after the SRAC has completed its assessment of an application and input the details into the TRAX system. The department then conducts any required due diligence checks and advises the SRAC when the due diligence process is complete, after which time the SRAC makes its recommendation to the minister. The department then provides the minister with advice on the SRAC recommendation and seeks the minister's decision. The department also liaises with other government departments in relation to projects that may impact on other portfolio areas or levels of government.¹²

Role of Sustainable Region Advisory Committees

9.11 The minister appoints a Sustainable Region Advisory Committee (SRAC) in each region. The SRACs' primary role is to provide advice to the minister on relevant regional issues, including recommendations to fund or not fund project applications.¹³ The role, structure and operations of the SRACs are discussed in more detail below.

Role of the minister

9.12 Funding decisions relation to the Sustainable Regions Program rest with the Minister for Transport and Regional Services. The SR guidelines contain a similar statement to the RP guidelines regarding the effect of the program's discretionary nature:

The *Sustainable Regions Programme* is a discretionary grants programme. The funding of projects is at the discretion of the Minister for Transport and Regional Services. Therefore, meeting the assessment criteria and addressing one or more regional priorities does not guarantee funding.¹⁴

11 *Committee Hansard*, 2 February 2005, pp 49-51; *Committee Hansard*, 12 August 2005, pp 27-28.

12 For a detailed explanation of the role of DOTARS, see DOTARS, *Submission 14*, Attachment C, Sustainable Regions Programme Internal Procedures Manual.

13 Sustainable Regions website, <http://www.sustainableregions.gov.au/index.aspx>, accessed 23 August 2005.

14 DOTARS, *Submission 14*, Attachment A, Sustainable Regions Programme Guidelines, p. 5.

9.13 In contrast to the fourteen RPP projects on which the minister's decision contradicted the department's advice, DOTARS gave evidence to the inquiry that there were no occasions on which the minister's decision to approve or not approve a Sustainable Regions application had differed from the department's advice.¹⁵

The SR guidelines

9.14 The *Sustainable Regions Programme Guidelines* (hereafter the 'SR guidelines') was the only publicly available guidance document on the program prepared by DOTARS.¹⁶ Unlike RPP, where applications can be submitted directly to DOTARS, applications for SRP funding must be submitted directly to the relevant SRAC and assessed against the regional priorities. Accordingly, the SR guidelines are a briefer and more general document than the RP guidelines.

9.15 The SR guidelines cover the rationale for the program, the eight 'prototype' regions, general project assessment criteria, a list of regional priorities for each region, eligibility, administration, funding and reporting requirements. There is also minimal information about the application and assessment process, bearing the disclaimer that the process may differ between each SRAC. The guidelines state that potential applicants should contact the executive officer of the relevant SRAC for more information about the program.¹⁷

Assessment criteria

9.16 There are ten general assessment criteria for the program set out in the SR guidelines, of which the following three are mandatory requirements:

- Retrospective funding will not be permitted for any projects.
- The project should not be inconsistent with other Federal Government policy objectives and relevant law.
- Proposals must comply with relevant planning and environmental laws.¹⁸

9.17 The remaining criteria include consistency with regional priorities, project sustainability and regional benefit, the absence of other avenues of government funding, the level of regional and partner support, project management experience on the part of the proponents and the project not directly competing with existing

15 Ms Riggs, *Committee Hansard*, 2 February 2005, p. 29.

16 In the course of this inquiry, the Sustainable Regions Programme Internal Procedures Manual also became public as Attachment C to DOTARS' *Submission 14*.

17 DOTARS, *Submission 14*, Attachment A, Sustainable Regions Programme Guidelines.

18 DOTARS, *Submission 14*, Attachment B, Guidelines – General Assessment Criteria.

businesses.¹⁹ The application of and adherence to these criteria are discussed in the following chapter.

9.18 Although it is not listed as a mandatory requirement, elsewhere the SR guidelines state that applications under the program must address one or more of the regional priority areas identified by the SRAC.²⁰ Regional priorities are discussed below in relation to each sustainable region.

Administrative processes

Due diligence

9.19 The Committee noted that the due diligence process for Sustainable Regions applications is more rigorous than the Regional Partnerships requirements. The *Sustainable Regions Programme Internal Procedures Manual* provides a three point scale outlining the level of due diligence required according to the amount of funding sought. Each step in the due diligence process is outlined.²¹ It is of particular interest that due diligence checks are conducted *prior* to the SRAC recommendation and the department's advice being presented to the minister, in contrast to the practice found in some cases with RPP where due diligence checks only occurred *after* funding had been announced.²²

Funding contracts and recovery of grant monies

9.20 Like RPP, successful applicants for SR funding enter into a funding contract with DOTARS. The Committee sought to ascertain whether SRP grant monies could be recovered if circumstances were discovered that demonstrated the grant should never have been made due to a breach of the program guidelines. The department's response indicated that while funding agreements provided for termination, there was no formal process for recovering any milestone payments that had already been made.²³ Mr Yuile, Deputy Secretary of DOTARS, told the Committee:

The question of recovering money would depend upon the circumstances involved. Clearly, the funding agreements would provide for termination if there was some breach which is contrary to the Commonwealth's intention or the Commonwealth's agreement to the grant. The question of recovery would have to be looked at in relation to individual circumstances.²⁴

19 DOTARS, *Submission 14*, Attachment B, Guidelines – General Assessment Criteria.

20 DOTARS, *Submission 14*, Attachment A, Sustainable Regions Programme Guidelines, p. 5.

21 DOTARS, *Submission 14*, Attachment A, Sustainable Regions Programme Internal Procedures Manual, pp 8-9.

22 DOTARS, *Submission 14*, Attachment A, Sustainable Regions Programme Internal Procedures Manual, p. 12.

23 *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2005, pp 104-107.

24 Mr Yuile, *Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2005, pp 104-107.

Audit and review

9.21 The SRP was the subject of an internal audit which had not been completed at the time of DOTARS' submission to the inquiry. The DOTARS submission outlines the program evaluation framework and states that the first stage post-implementation review of the SRP, completed in 2004, found that the implementation of the program had been satisfactory.²⁵ However, the Committee was only provided with summary information regarding the outcome of the review, and was therefore unable to make its own assessment.

Sustainable Region Advisory Committees

9.22 The Committee invited all eight SRACs to make a submission to the inquiry, but none responded. This was particularly inappropriate. SRACs are publicly funded bodies and play an important role in the administration of millions of dollars in public funding. As such, they need to not only be accountable but also to participate in the scrutiny of their performance and conduct.

9.23 However, the chairs and executive officers of the Atherton Tablelands SRAC (ATSRAC), Cradle Coast SRAC and Kimberley SRAC gave evidence to the Committee at public hearings and a number of SRACs included information about their evaluation processes when responding to the Committee's request for minutes and recommendations.²⁶ The composition, regional priorities and practices of each SRAC are briefly discussed below.

9.24 According to the SRP guidelines, the role of the SRAC is:

...to advise the Minister on matters relating to the implementation and management of the *Sustainable Regions Programme*, including assessment and recommendation of projects.²⁷

9.25 More specifically, SRACs are responsible for determining regional priorities in consultation with the local community, calling for expressions of interest for funding, inviting applications and assessing applications against the regional priorities and the project assessment criteria. SRACs then input information about the project into TRAX and recommend projects to the Minister for Transport and Regional Services.²⁸

9.26 Unlike the advice of ACCs in relation to RPP applications, which is only provided through DOTARS, SRACs provide recommendations about SRP applications directly to the minister. As discussed above, SRP applications cannot be

25 DOTARS, *Submission 14*, p. 21.

26 For a discussion of the Committee's request for SRAC minutes and recommendations, see Chapter 1.

27 DOTARS, *Submission 14*, Attachment A, Sustainable Regions Programme Guidelines, p. 5.

28 DOTARS, *Submission 14*, Attachment A, Sustainable Regions Programme Guidelines, p. 5.

submitted directly to the department.²⁹ This avoids some of the pitfalls associated with RPP projects where the ACCs' advice was not passed on to the minister by the department or the ACC was given insufficient time to assess an application.

SRAC composition

9.27 SRAC members are appointed by the minister and usually comprise business, community and local government representatives.³⁰ The nature of membership of each SRAC is outlined below.

9.28 Each SRAC is supported by an executive officer (EO) who reports to the SRAC Chair. The EO's role is similar to that of ACC EOs, and involves providing information about the program to the local community and assisting applicants to develop project proposals.³¹

Relationship with ACCs

9.29 Most SRACs have a member or an 'observer' from a local ACC who attends committee meetings. Evidence to the Committee indicated that ACCs and SRACs communicate about projects. For example, Mr Vieira, FNQACC EO, was aware that ATSRAC had considered and expressed concerns about an expression of interest for SRP funding made by A2 Dairy Marketers, as discussed in a previous chapter of this report.

9.30 One SRAC from which the Committee took evidence – Kimberley SRAC – shared administrative arrangements with the Kimberley ACC. The SRAC and ACC shared office space, an executive officer and a chairperson. This raised concerns about loose application of program guidelines and encouraging applicants to apply for the 'easiest' source of funding. For example, the Kimberley Aboriginal Pastoralists Association (KAPA) first applied for funding under one program, and when their application was rejected, applied under the other program and received funding. The project was later rescinded after a project partner withdrew its funding and KAPA provided an unsatisfactory milestone report to DOTARS.³²

Funding of SRACs

9.31 The Committee received no evidence on general arrangements for SRAC member remuneration. However, Mr McDade, former chair of ATSRAC, told the Committee he was paid \$440 per ATSRAC meeting.³³

29 DOTARS, *Submission 14*, Attachment A, Sustainable Regions Programme Guidelines, p. 5.

30 DOTARS, *Submission 14*, Attachment A, Sustainable Regions Programme Guidelines, p. 5.

31 DOTARS, *Submission 14*, Attachment A, Sustainable Regions Programme Guidelines, p. 5.

32 Ms Riggs and Ms Gosling, *Committee Hansard*, 12 August 2005, p. 35.

33 Mr McDade, *Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2005, p. 140.

9.32 The Cradle Coast SRAC, which has different administrative arrangements as discussed in the next chapter, pays its board members an annual stipend and employs administrative and management staff. All of the SRAC's costs are funded by the nine councils that own the Cradle Coast Authority rather than from the \$12 million allocated to the region. The Committee was told that this administration emerged from the Authority's request, because the arrangements already existed and they preferred to 'keep the money in the pool for projects rather than swallowing it up in administration'.³⁴

Regional priorities

9.33 Each SRAC has different regional priorities, which form part of the mandatory requirements for applicants—their project must fit with at least one of the region's priorities. The SR guidelines state that the regional priorities were developed by each SRAC through a community consultation process.³⁵

9.34 As discussed below, the priority areas for each region differ widely. However, the SRP guidelines identify some common themes:

While each region has differing priorities, some common themes to emerge across the regions include job creation opportunities, a regional identity, education and training at all levels, community development, sustaining the environment, value adding to existing and growing industry, and establishment of a new industry.³⁶

Far North East NSW

9.35 The Far North East NSW (FNENSW) region includes the local government areas of Tweed, Ballina, Byron, Lismore and Kyogle.³⁷ \$8.5 million worth of projects from FNENSW from the region's \$12 million funding have so far been approved.³⁸

9.36 The FNENSW regional priorities include business and development, community development, environment related industries and issues, knowledge and learning industries, cultural, creative and multi-media industries, new rural and agricultural industries, industries associated with population growth, infrastructure as an enabler of development, tourism, and value-adding to traditional industries.³⁹

34 Mr Jaensch, *Committee Hansard*, 30 June 2005, p. 65.

35 DOTARS, *Submission 14*, Attachment A, Sustainable Regions Programme Guidelines, p. 5.

36 DOTARS, *Submission 14*, Attachment A, Sustainable Regions Programme Guidelines, p. 5.

37 DOTARS, *Submission 14*, Attachment A, Sustainable Regions Programme Guidelines, p. 4.

38 DOTARS, Sustainable Regions website, www.sustainableregions.gov.au/nsw/fne/projects.aspx, accessed 23 August 2005.

39 DOTARS, Sustainable Regions website, www.sustainableregions.gov.au/nsw/fne/priorities.aspx, accessed 23 August 2005.

9.37 The FNENSW SRAC has four members, including a director of a national sporting body and former federal councillor with a national tourism association; a production manager with a news and media company; a local hotelier and property developer; and a local mayor.⁴⁰

Campbelltown/Camden, NSW

9.38 This sustainable region includes the Campbelltown and Camden local government areas, and has \$11.3 million of approved projects from its allocation of up to \$12 million.⁴¹ Campbelltown-Camden SRAC has a strong business focus in its committee membership, which includes members of a local business enterprise centre, business proprietors, and the manager of a local university's Office of Regional Development.⁴²

9.39 Its priorities include addressing the region's social issues, improving regional employment opportunities, developing and supporting local industry, attracting sustainable and environmentally friendly industry, youth needs, natural and built environment sustainability, and improving transport infrastructure.⁴³

Gippsland, Vic

9.40 The Gippsland Sustainable Region covers the local government areas of Latrobe, Bass Coast Shire, South Gippsland, Wellington, East Gippsland and part of Baw Baw. It has also been allocated up to \$12 million and has approved projects of \$12.8 million.⁴⁴

9.41 The Gippsland regional priorities include developing local leadership capabilities, supporting existing industries, developing and promoting a regional identity, identifying consequences of an ageing population, facilitating investment, education and training, small business assistance, provision of water, sewerage and transport infrastructure, sustainable natural resource management, access to energy sources and telecommunications.⁴⁵

40 DOTARS, Sustainable Regions website, www.sustainableregions.gov.au/nsw/fne/priorities.aspx, accessed 23 August 2005.

41 DOTARS, *Submission 14*, Attachment A, Sustainable Regions Programme Guidelines, p. 4.

42 DOTARS, Sustainable Regions website, www.sustainableregions.gov.au/nsw/cam/committee.aspx, accessed 23 August 2005.

43 DOTARS, Sustainable Regions website, www.sustainableregions.gov.au/nsw/cam/priorities.aspx, accessed 23 August 2005.

44 DOTARS, Sustainable Regions website, www.sustainableregions.gov.au/vic/gip/projects.aspx, accessed 31 August 2005.

45 DOTARS, Sustainable Regions website, www.sustainableregions.gov.au/vic/gip/priorities.aspx, accessed 31 August 2005.

9.42 The Gippsland SRAC is chaired by a former energy industry executive and includes a local government director of shire development and a retired police officer, author and historian.⁴⁶

Wide Bay Burnett, Qld

9.43 This SRAC covers the largest number of local government areas of the first tranche of SRACs—Biggenden, Bundaberg, Burnett, Cherbourg Community Council, Cooloola, Eidsvold, Gayndah, Hervey Bay, Isis, Kilkivan, Kingaroy, Kolan, Maryborough, Miriam Vale, Monto, Mundubbera, Murgon, Nanango, Perry, Tiaro, Wondai, Woocoo and Yarraman District of Rosalie Shire. It has access to up to \$8 million and has approved projects of \$7.6 million.⁴⁷ The Wide Bay Burnett region also has an additional \$4 million allocated to it under a structural adjustment package.⁴⁸

9.44 The committee has a broad membership, including two mayors, a TAFE campus director, a grazier and two local business representatives.⁴⁹ Its priorities include fostering innovative industries, enhancing social infrastructure, supporting sustainable use of natural resources, building on the culture of the region and encouraging youth retention.⁵⁰

Kimberley, WA

9.45 The Kimberley SRAC includes the local government areas of Broome, Halls Creek, Derby West Kimberley and Wyndham East Kimberley.⁵¹ The SRAC has approved projects of approximately \$11 million.⁵²

9.46 It shares its chair, executive officers and offices with the Kimberley ACC. Some of the implications of this joint administrative support structure are discussed above. The Kimberley SRAC members include three shire presidents and four people from business and community organisations.⁵³

46 DOTARS, Sustainable Regions website, www.sustainableregions.gov.au/vic/gip/committee.aspx, accessed 31 August 2005.

47 DOTARS, Sustainable Regions website, www.sustainableregions.gov.au/qld/wbb/projects.aspx, accessed 22 August 2005.

48 DOTARS, *Submission 14*, Attachment A, Sustainable Regions Programme Guidelines, p. 4.

49 DOTARS, Sustainable Regions website, www.sustainableregions.gov.au/qld/wbb/committee.aspx, accessed 22 August 2005.

50 DOTARS, Sustainable Regions website, www.sustainableregions.gov.au/qld/wbb/priorities.aspx, accessed 22 August 2005.

51 DOTARS, *Submission 14*, Attachment A, Sustainable Regions Programme Guidelines, p. 4.

52 DOTARS, Sustainable Regions website, www.sustainableregions.gov.au/wa/kim/projects.aspx, accessed 23 August 2005.

53 DOTARS, Sustainable Regions website, www.sustainableregions.gov.au/wa/kim/committee.aspx, accessed 22 August 2005.

9.47 Kimberley SRAC's regional priorities include regional infrastructure, local cooperative projects, indigenous enterprise and economic development, regional marketing and new sustainable industry.⁵⁴

Playford/Salisbury, SA

9.48 Playford/Salisbury SRAC covers the local government areas of Playford and Salisbury. Approved projects from the region total \$8.5 million.⁵⁵ The SRAC includes two people from the private sector and three from local government.⁵⁶

9.49 Its priorities focus on improving education, training, infrastructure, community health, social inclusion and industry.⁵⁷

Cradle Coast (North West and West Coast Tasmania)

9.50 Cradle Coast SRAC covers the local government areas of King Island, Circular Head, Waratah/Wynyard, Burnie, Central Coast, Devonport, Latrobe, Kentish and West Coast.⁵⁸ Approved projects in the region total \$7.8 million.⁵⁹

9.51 The regional priorities include participation in education, training and employment, investment in growth industries and value-adding to traditional industries, creation of new industries, environmental protection and reversing population decline.⁶⁰

9.52 CCSRAC membership has a broad base of skills and knowledge, including ten members from banking, business, small business, a university, several mayors and an ACC Tasmania member.⁶¹ CCSRAC is based on the previously existing Cradle Coast Authority, and the Committee considered that its structure represented best practice among the SRACs. It is further examined in the following chapter.

54 DOTARS, Sustainable Regions website, www.sustainableregions.gov.au/wa/kim/priorities.aspx, accessed 22 August 2005.

55 DOTARS, Sustainable Regions website, www.sustainableregions.gov.au/sa/pla/projects.aspx, accessed 22 August 2005.

56 DOTARS, Sustainable Regions website, www.sustainableregions.gov.au/sa/pla/committee.aspx, accessed 22 August 2005.

57 DOTARS, Sustainable Regions website, www.sustainableregions.gov.au/sa/pla/priorities.aspx, accessed 22 August 2005.

58 DOTARS, *Submission 14*, Attachment A, Sustainable Regions Programme Guidelines, p. 4.

59 DOTARS, Sustainable Regions website, www.sustainableregions.gov.au/tas/nwwc/projects.aspx, accessed 23 August 2005.

60 DOTARS, Sustainable Regions website, www.sustainableregions.gov.au/tas/nwwc/priorities.aspx, accessed 23 August 2005.

61 DOTARS, Sustainable Regions website, www.sustainableregions.gov.au/tas/nwwc/committee.aspx, accessed 23 August 2005.

Atherton Tablelands

9.53 The Atherton Tablelands SRAC (ATSRAC) covers the local government areas of Atherton, Eacham, Herberton and Mareeba.⁶² ATSRAC is comprised of the chair of the Far North Queensland ACC, a university professor and the mayors of the four local government areas covered by the SRAC.⁶³

9.54 It was allocated up to \$18 million until 30 June 2006 and has approved projects totalling \$14.6 m.⁶⁴ A number of projects recommended for approval by ATSRAC are discussed in the following chapter, as is the committee's composition.

Western Queensland and Western NSW (Darling Matilda Way)

9.55 The Darling Matilda Way SRAC was one of the new regions announced during the 2004 election period. It covers the largest geographical region of any SRAC. The Committee heard that as of August 2005 the SRAC had been appointed, had met twice and was developing a community consultation process to determine regional priorities.⁶⁵

9.56 The Darling Matilda Way Sustainable Region covers all or part of the local government areas of Aramac, Balranald, Barcaldine, Barcoo, Blackall, Bogan, Boulia, Bourke, Brewarrina, Broken Hill, Bulloo, Carrathool, Central Darling, Cobar, Diamantina, Hay, Ilfracombe, Isisford, Jericho, Longreach, Murweh, Paroo, Quilpie Tambo, Unincorporated NSW, Wentworth and Winton. Darling Matilda Way has been allocated funding of up to \$21 million until 30 June 2008.⁶⁶

9.57 The SRAC is composed of four representatives from ACCs, one mayor and several business and community representatives.⁶⁷ Its draft regional priorities address tourism, industry, skilled workforce, lifestyle and business services, infrastructure, natural asset management and business development capability.⁶⁸

62 DOTARS, *Submission 14*, Attachment A, Sustainable Regions Programme Guidelines, p. 4.

63 DOTARS, Sustainable Regions website, www.sustainableregions.gov.au/qld/ath/committee.aspx, accessed 30 August 2005.

64 DOTARS, Sustainable Regions website, www.sustainableregions.gov.au/qld/ath/projects.aspx, accessed 30 August 2005.

65 Ms Riggs, *Committee Hansard*, 12 August 2005, p. 27.

66 DOTARS, Sustainable Regions website, www.sustainableregions.gov.au/DMW/projects.aspx, accessed 30 August 2005.

67 DOTARS, Sustainable Regions website, www.sustainableregions.gov.au/DMW/committee.aspx, accessed 30 August 2005.

68 DOTARS, Sustainable Regions website, www.sustainableregions.gov.au/DMW/priorities.aspx, accessed 30 August 2005.

Northern Rivers and North Coast NSW

9.58 The Northern Rivers and North Coast NSW Sustainable Region covers the local government areas of Kempsey, Nambucca, Bellingen, Coffs Harbour, Clarence Valley and Richmond Valley Shires. Northern Rivers and North Coast NSW has been allocated funding of up to \$12 million until 30 June 2008.⁶⁹

9.59 The SRAC's draft regional priorities are job creation, retention and sustainability, skilling the region, youth retention and indigenous employment.⁷⁰ At August 2005 it had met twice and had requested its executive support staff to seek expressions of interest from organisations in the region. The ACC shares its chair and executive support staff with the Mid North Coast ACC.⁷¹ The six members include a local government and business and community representatives.⁷²

Issues with the program

9.60 The Committee's examination of the Atherton Tablelands Sustainable Region Advisory Committee and SR projects in the region drew out some concerning issues, which are discussed in the following chapter. The Committee also made a number of recommendations aimed at improving the transparency of the process of appointing SRAC members and increasing scope for community awareness of and participation in the application process, as outlined in Chapter 11.

69 DOTARS, Sustainable Regions website, www.sustainableregions.gov.au/nsw/nrnc/index.aspx, accessed 30 August 2005.

70 DOTARS, Sustainable Regions website, www.sustainableregions.gov.au/nsw/nrnc/priorities.aspx, accessed 30 August 2005.

71 Ms Riggs, *Committee Hansard*, 12 August 2005, p. 27.

72 DOTARS, Sustainable Regions website, www.sustainableregions.gov.au/nsw/nrnc/committee.aspx, accessed 30 August 2005.

