

Committee Secretary  
Senate Finance and Public Administration Committee  
Department of the Senate  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600  
Australia



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Dear Mr Secretary

**Re: Inquiry into the Regional Partnerships Program and Sustainable Regions Program**

I refer to your Correspondence of December 13<sup>th</sup>, 2004 inviting submissions with respect to the above matter and wish to respond with the following comments.

I am currently the Chair of the Far North Queensland Area Consultative Committee (FNQACC) and have been Chair since September 1996. Through the course of my association with the various programs that ACC's have been associated with I believe that I speak from a point of knowledge.

The Regional Partnerships Program evolved from a series of programs originally known as Regional Assistance Program (RAP). This program, like Regional Partnerships was designed to allow the regions identify the specific areas where strategic funding could be directed to provide a region with a tangible and valuable outcome that was sustainable and on going.

As such ACC's are require to develop a Strategic Regional Plan which is a dynamic document that is reviewed annually and revised tri-annually. It is this document that is the foundation stone that provides the ACC with its ability to address the specific needs of its area of influence and by which it can measure its success and objectives for developing the region.

ACC's are a group of people who volunteer their time and share a common vision of seeing their region grow and prosper. These individuals are largely the quiet achievers who may also be considered the "movers & shakers" in their region. These people are highly respected for their contributions to the development of their region and this is one of the reasons why I believe Regional Partnerships has been one of the most successful government programs to date.

The region determines the make up of the ACC with the management committee being elected at the Annual General Meeting from the committee membership. In the FNQACC there are six (6) distinctive sub regions that have their own unique issues, subsequently the knowledge of each of these regions is represented on the management committee.

As Chair, I insist that all members remember that the ACC is a non-partisan organisation that has the prime responsibility of providing the various government departments reconnaissance on issues facing regional Australia. It is through this unique knowledge that the committee members have what enables the ACC to provide valuable assistance into the decision making process which Regional Partnerships guidelines stipulate.

While the ACC does not make the final decision it should be noted that in ALL instances the FNQACC has been consulted and the comments from the Committee have been well received by the departmental officers of DOTARS. In fact one of the great strengths of the process is the fact that the regional officers provide a very important link to the government. Over the years a strong rapport has developed between FNQACC & the Regional Office of DOTARS. This relationship goes back to when ACC's were a responsibility under DEWRSB.

This relationship has been beneficial in allowing the Committee Members to better understand the role and responsibility the ACC plays in the Regional Partnerships process. We are always mindful that the funding requests are for the Australian Taxpayer's money. ACC Members believe that they have a duty to

ensure this money is wisely spent in developing the region. We prefer to see these funds attracting complimentary & supplementary funds to further enhance the community nature of the Regional Partnerships Program.

I have been recently involved with a funding program from another Federal Government Department that does not have any regional office representation, In fact is totally Canberra based. This has resulted in the inability to have timely advise and answers to queries resulting in delays in providing timely information to both proponents and the Government Department. Subsequently, this is having a stifling the effective on the program's delivery and effectiveness. It is this fact that makes Regional Partnerships more appealing. As a funding program the Regional Partnership process is well thought out and the checks and milestones are communicated clearly, efficiently & effectively.

In closing, I believe that while there maybe issues that some regions attract more funding than others I believe that this is not based on "political allegiances or boundaries" but rather the fact that some ACCs continually provide consistently better applications that met the criteria than others.

FNQACC has no hesitation in "putting forward" projects that we believe are good for the region as a whole. We are of the belief that if a project has merit it should be assessed on its merit. If there is another ACC that is not performing then, they are not deserving. To simply provide funding to non-performing areas and rewarding them because they are not achieving THEIR goals is morally wrong and counter productive. This type of funding eventually results in welfare dependency and destroys to the sense of community and is determinantal to the economic health of regional Australia. Our belief is the government and the people of Australia deserve to get the best "bang for their buck"!

Yours sincerely

Robert Blanckensee  
Chair ~ FNQACC