



An Australian Government Initiative



Regional
Development
Australia
SOUTHERN INLAND

18th December 2023

Mr Roy Butler
The Chair
Investment, Industry and Regional Development Committee
NSW Parliament House
6 Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Via: investmentindustry@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Re: Inquiry into the performance of the Regional Job Creation Fund – Supplementary Questions

Please find below responses to the Supplementary Questions as requested.

1. Apart from regulatory changes, how can the government address the significant delays in Development Applications faced by regional businesses?

Delays in development applications in regional areas can be addressed through a combination of strategies, including improving processes, increasing resources, and fostering collaboration between stakeholders. The government can provide support in the following ways:

- Financial Support:
 - Funding for Training: Allocate funds for training programs to ensure that local government staff are well-equipped to handle development applications efficiently.
 - Funding to support increased internships for planning cadets within councils.
 - Investment in Technology: Provide financial support for the implementation and maintenance of advanced technological systems that streamline the application process.
- Capacity Building:
 - Training Initiatives: Develop and implement training initiatives to build the capacity of local government officials, planners, and other stakeholders involved in the development application process.
 - Professional Development: Support ongoing professional development opportunities for staff to stay updated on industry best practices and regulatory changes.
- Incentives:
 - Financial Incentives: Introduce financial incentives for local government authorities that consistently meet or exceed performance benchmarks in processing development applications.
 - Recognition Programs: Establish recognition programs to acknowledge and reward local governments that demonstrate exceptional efficiency in handling applications.
 - HELP debt reductions for planning graduates to move regional for fixed periods of time, similar to health.

- **Technology Infrastructure:**
 - **Government Funding for Technology:** Provide financial assistance or grants to local councils to invest in and upgrade their technology infrastructure for improved online application submission and tracking.
 - **Centralised Platforms:** Develop and maintain centralised digital platforms that facilitate communication and collaboration among various stakeholders.
- **Community Engagement:**
 - **Community Programs:** Support community engagement programs that facilitate early and constructive dialogue between developers, local government, and residents and provide information to the community about the development process and the importance of timely decision-making.
- **Performance Monitoring and Reporting:**
 - **Government Oversight:** Monitor the performance of local government authorities in processing development applications and implement reporting requirements that require local authorities to regularly report on the status and timelines of development applications, providing feedback to support process improvements.
- **Research and Development:**
 - **Funding for Research:** Allocate funds for research initiatives that explore innovative approaches to development application processes, with a focus on regional contexts.
 - **Pilot Programs:** Support pilot programs that test new strategies and technologies in real-world scenarios to identify best practices.
- **Inter-agency Collaboration:**
 - **Facilitate Collaboration:** Establish mechanisms for collaboration between different government agencies involved in the development application process.
 - **Shared Resources:** Encourage the sharing of resources and expertise among agencies to improve overall efficiency.
- **Policy Development and Reform:**
 - **Review and Update Policies:** Regularly review and update policies related to development applications, considering the specific needs and challenges of regional areas.
 - **Flexible Legislation:** Consider introducing legislation that allows for flexibility in certain situations to accommodate regional variations.
 - **Reduce barriers:** Remove or significantly reduce red, green and black tape.
- **Legislative Support:**
 - **Legislation Review:** Commit to regular reviews of relevant legislation to ensure it remains responsive to changing needs and challenges.
 - **Enabling Legislation:** Enact legislation that enables local authorities to adopt streamlined processes without compromising on regulatory requirements.
 - **Expedited timelines:** Targeted legislation to expedite the DA process when applications are connected with approved public funding projects.

By actively supporting these initiatives, the government can play a key role in creating an environment conducive to efficient and timely development application processing in regional areas. Collaboration with

local communities and stakeholders should be undertaken to ensure that the strategies implemented align with the specific needs of each region.

2. How can the application process provide greater assistance to regional businesses?

Funding to assist businesses to reach the shovel ready stage (design, planning, strategy development) before applying for funding for investment projects under funds such as the RIAF, as well as a longer funding application stage and a shorter application assessment stage, would provide greater assistance to regional businesses.

3. In your opinion what impact does the end of the Regional Investment Activation Fund (RIAF) have on businesses?

Business is the cornerstone of our economy and with small businesses (less than 20 employees) making up 97.3% of all Australian businesses with just 31% of those located in regional Australia, it is more important than ever to maintain support of these entities.

In regional communities it is the small business owners who sponsor sporting groups, provide auction items for fundraisers, give employment opportunities to our youth, create strong community connections and enable, vibrant, unique and interesting experiences for visitors and locals alike.

With more manufacturing going offshore due to rising expenses in Australia, it is imperative we rebuild core industry sectors to maintain sovereignty in times of crisis, as we saw through the Covid pandemic. Australian business capacity building needs to be a focus for all levels of government, and allowing business access to investment opportunities will attribute to this.

The end of the RIAF will certainly have an effect on the speed at which regional businesses may be able to build their capabilities, but it does not mean they will cease expansion altogether. I believe strong businesses will continue to grow through focussed strategy and sound business practices, albeit slower than if they were provided support through programs such as RIAF.

RDASI supports the continuation of programs such as RIAF for the improved economic and social development of the regions.

I thank you for the opportunity to provide additional feedback on the Performance of the Regional Job Creation Fund.

Kind regards,



Carisa Wells
CEO and Director of Regional Development