

**Submission
No 32**

**PERFORMANCE OF THE REGIONAL INVESTMENT ACTIVATION FUND AND
THE REGIONAL JOB CREATION FUND**

Organisation: Ironbox Pty Ltd
Date Received: 30 November 2023

Dear Mr Butler and Investment, Industry and Regional Development Committee,

Thank You for this opportunity to give feedback about our companies experience with the Regional Development Fund.

Our small business offers Design, Prototype and Manufacture services, generally of mechanical componentry and machines. We support a broad range of industries, including Aerospace, Agriculture, Defence, FMCG, Mining and Research. We had a vision to relocate our business to a purpose built facility, which would provide an ideal environment for our precision advanced manufacturing , with room for the business to grow in the future without disruptive relocation.

Council and Regional Development team very helpful

We attempted to make contact with local councils, and found the Albury Council development team very helpful and suggested the Regional Development Fund and connected us with the Regional Development team to help with our project. We purchased land in Albury with that came with an Development Approval (DA) that was similar to our vision, and was successful in being awarded a grant to help with the project to build, relocate our business and extend our metrology capability.

Stymied by red tape

Because our building needed some special features which were not usual, we decided to plan the building process ourselves. We consulted the Albury planning department about what would be needed for small changes to the DA, and were advised an approval may take a few weeks because they were busy. (We could not use a CDC, because our site had a feature of a public land along one of the boundaries, and the previous DA built to this boundary without specially rated wall - and was keeping this feature.) A few weeks turned into many months, which put huge pressure on our project timing - but finally our DA modification was approved, but started the waiting process again waiting for CA to be approved after a few more months waiting the council told us that they were too busy to process this with any speed, and to go back to the civil engineer we had used as a consultant. After more months wait for our Civil Engineer, he needed written agreement for Council about public lands, and clarification of what they actually meant by an Urban Water Sensitive Design for the garden (neither question have still been answered by the council.) Realising that this was going to turn into more month waiting, we came to the conclusion we could not complete the project on time using this approach. (Our conclusion is the building approval system has no experts, and works on rubber stamping the work of a consultant.)

Attempt to recover timing

To attempt to rescue our project, we abandoned the "ideal environment" aspect of our project and sought standard shed builders for proposals, however they were having to start the planning process again, and would push the timings of our project beyond the limits of our grant. The delays were also creating business stagnation, as

much effort had been expended with no business improvement - and the spartan facilities testing the limits of the the staff patience.

Abandoning project

It was decided the stagnation was becoming a significant business issue and other business accommodation in Victoria was found - thus we have advice that we will be unable to complete this project.

Learnings

Proper execution at local councils level is critically import - to use an automotive analogy, having Regional Development with their foot on the accelerator, while Planning NSW have their foot on the brake, consumes a lot of energy, makes a lot of noise and gets nowhere. It would really help for the Regional Development to have a holistic "receiver" (or customer) outcome focus; with part of their charter to help each level of government and each department to deliver in a timely and smooth way - and take advice back to business on how they could better streamline works through the bureaucratic process.

I trust this submission is informative bur brief enough to be useful for you. Please do not hesitate in contacting me if you wanted further detail.

Andrew Oates

Business Advisor for Ironbox Pty. Ltd.