

**INQUIRY INTO INTEGRITY, EFFICACY AND VALUE FOR
MONEY OF NSW GOVERNMENT GRANT PROGRAMS**

Organisation: Canberra Region Joint Organisation

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21 August 2020

Mr David Shoebridge MLC
Committee Chair
Public Accountability Committee
Parliament of New South Wales
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Mr Shoebridge

Re: Inquiry into the integrity, efficacy and value for money of NSW Government grant programs (the Inquiry)

On behalf of the 10 Member Councils represented by the Canberra Region Joint Organisation (CRJO) I make the following submission to the NSW Governments Inquiry into the integrity, efficacy and value for money of NSW grant program (the Inquiry).

This submission speaks to the importance of a continued commitment to regional funding and to the significant role played by Joint Organisations in delivering programs on behalf of their members and funding partners.

The role of Joint Organisations

Recognition of the benefits arising from regional collaboration between local governments led to the NSW Government establishing, under the *NSW Local Government Act 1993*, thirteen Joint Organisations (JO's) across regional NSW. Commencing 1st July 2018, Joint Organisations are local government entities with legal powers to support councils to work together for better rural and regional outcomes, and to enhance the way local and state governments work together to plan and deliver important regional infrastructure and investment. The core statutory functions established for Joint Organisations are:

1. **Strategic planning and priority setting** – to establish strategic regional priorities for the Joint Organisation area and to establish strategies and plans for delivering those priorities
2. **Intergovernmental collaboration** - to identify and take up opportunities for inter-governmental cooperation on matters relating to the Joint Organisation area.
3. **Shared leadership and advocacy** - to provide regional leadership for the Joint Organisation area and to be an advocate for strategic regional priorities,

With the enabling of JOs there is an opportunity for regional NSW to do business differently with the State and Federal Governments. The CRJO, like all JO's, plays a key role in leveraging and brokering strategic regional outcomes. Through the auspice and administration of key NSW grants the CRJO has been able to deliver beneficial outcomes across the region.

NSW State Government agencies benefit from their association with JOs. They engage with them to:

- Provide advice on regional priorities
- Coordinate / facilitate the input of Councils to State agency planning and consultation processes
- Provide a forum through which to reach and engage with regional leaders (Mayors and General Managers) or other Council personnel
- Provide support to navigate engagement and connections with local communities including on infrastructure projects, regional water strategies, biodiversity issues, and importantly on matters relating to the visitor economy and regional tourism.
- Provide a bi-partisan and a-political mechanism to deliver better value from State programs through aggregation / centralised delivery (contaminated land programs, regional waste programs, bridge assessments, disaster preparedness programs)
- Provide representation from a Local Government perspective at the Regional Leadership Executive
- Offering consistent points of reference and repositories for maintaining local and regional knowledge and information as State agencies go through machinery of government changes.

Representing regional communities

The CRJO strongly supports the continued commitment to grant programs targeted for regional communities. It is important that future funding criteria and frameworks recognise that inherent value of programs in regional communities where the indirect benefits to towns, businesses and families is often multiplied many times over. For example, the application of a Benefit Cost Analysis (BCA) ratio to certain development and infrastructure funding streams unfairly skews outcomes in favour of large metropolitan centres and cities. As representatives of local governments and the communities they serve it is clear to us that regionally targeted programs play a vital role in delivering crisis assistance, new skills, job creation and vital infrastructure to the regional economies of NSW.

By supporting project funding and delivery through the JOs, Governments have the opportunity to coordinate regional delivery of projects and initiatives that benefit a network of smaller towns and communities, many of whom may not be in a position to design and deliver impactful projects individually. Given the representative role JOs play across a region they remain an a-political broker able to advocate on behalf of Councils and communities representing all sides of the political spectrum.

Recommendations to the Inquiry

The following recommendations are made to reflect the continued importance of targeted regional funding and the role of JOs in providing a well governed, transparent and efficient model for delivery of programs.

1. Integrity

- a. A review of the assessment criteria and Guidelines for funding under programs administered by NSW Treasury be undertaken that better reflects the benefits and significance of programs and infrastructure in regional communities.
- b. That grant programs continue to be earmarked for delivery in regional communities and that the criteria for assessment reflect the needs and requirements of local communities who have a voice in their design and implementation.

2. Efficacy


- a. Recognize the critical brokerage and coordination role played by JOs in supporting State government priorities and programming, by supporting them to auspice and deliver grant funded programs.

3. Value for money

- a) Support grant funded programs that focus on regional delivery and benefit multiple communities through investment in longer term (minimum 3-5 years) regional support programs.

Finally, in appreciation of what has been an incredibly challenging year we commend the NSW Government in its commitment to the communities of NSW as they recover, rebuild and re-define the way forward. The CRJO stands ready to continue to support the region to take advantage of the new initiatives and opportunities as they emerge.

Yours sincerely


Cr Rowena Abbey
Chair
Canberra Region Joint Organisation