

**Submission
No 59**

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

Organisation: Leeton Shire Council

Date Received: 23 August 2020

Mr David Shoebridge MLC
Committee Chair
Public Accountability Committee
Parliament of New South Wales



Re: Submission to the Inquiry into the integrity, efficacy and value for money of NSW Government grants program

Leeton Shire Council welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Inquiry into the integrity, efficacy and value for money of NSW Government grant programs.

Leeton Shire has a population of around 11,400 and is the second largest regional centre in the Western Riverina outside of Griffith. Leeton Shire is the birthplace of the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area (MIA) and was purposely built as part of the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Scheme designed to drought-proof inland Australia and provide national food security. Highlights of Leeton Shire include our rich heritage; diverse agricultural production and manufacturing; quality health, education and sporting services; affordable housing; and a strong community spirit.

Leeton Shire Council appreciates the unprecedented and extremely welcome range and volume of grant funding that has been made available to regional areas in recent times. These funds have provided economic stimulus, built community pride and made rural and regional areas attractive places to live, work and play.

The photographs on page 2 showcase some of the projects we have been able to undertake as a result of grant funding. They demonstrate the real and positive difference the increased availability of grant funding is making to our local community.

Stronger Country Communities Fund

We have particularly appreciated the Stronger Country Communities Fund (SCCF) funding model. Under this model, which guarantees funding for Local Government Areas on a fair and equitable basis, our confidence that a quality application will yield results has grown. This model reduces the amount of time councils spend on making funding applications that, despite being quality applications meeting all the criteria, fail because of the sheer number of applicants and the limited supply of funds. Under the SCCF, our investment of time is rewarded, our costs are reduced, and we have more time to spend delivering projects to the benefit of our communities. Leeton Shire Council strongly supports this funding model and advocates for the continued existence of this model.

Regional sports and arts and culture funding

The Leeton Shire community has benefited greatly, and will continue to benefit greatly, from projects that are underway or have been recently completed as a result of funding through the Regional Sports Infrastructure Fund and the Regional Cultural Fund. Consequently, Leeton Shire Council is very supportive of the continued existence of these Funds. The Council believes, however, that minor improvements could be made to make it easier for councils to apply for grants, deliver projects and report on progress.



ROXY Theatre Redevelopment Project



*CBD Enhancement Project - Phase One
Stage 1 & 2*



Leeton Regional Swimming Pool



Leeton Showgrounds Improvements

Comparative weighting: We are comfortable with a Cost Benefit Ratio (CBR) being included in the application assessment process for regionally and nationally significant projects, but we advocate for the degree to which it is applied be proportionate to the size of the project. For example, the CBR for a stadium of 50,000 capacity should not be weighted as heavily as it would be for a smaller stadium for 3000 people. We would also argue that CBRs should not be applied to the assessment of local projects that have been included in adopted Delivery Programs and identified as needing grant funding to be progressed.

Political influence: While we accept some degree of political influence on the assessment/decision making process, we believe the decision as to whether to fund a project needs to be very much evidence based.

Streamlining/Timing: The grant application process should be streamlined. Timing is an issue. Too often, funding announcements are made, councils wait weeks for guidelines to be released, are given insufficient time to complete a considered and thorough application, and then wait months for the outcomes of the assessment process.

Working together: The competitive nature of the grant application process means that minor mistakes in an application result in that application being disqualified, regardless of the value to the community of the project needing to be funded. This

needs to change. State and local government should be collaborating to achieve outcomes for our communities. Applicants should be given the opportunity to rectify minor mistakes if the application is otherwise a quality application seeking funds for a beneficial project.

Discretionary funds

Leeton Shire has not been the recipient of discretionary grant funds such as the Premier's Discretionary Fund and the Deputy Premier's Miscellaneous Grants but supports the existence of such funding programs.

Funding for Joint Organisations

Leeton Shire Council advocates for priority funding to be given to regional projects initiated or supported by Joint Organisations (JOs). It would be of great benefit if this funding was to be made available under an SCCF-type funding model, with guaranteed funding allocated to agreed regional priorities endorsed by each JO and their relevant state government partners.

In closing, our Council considers that there should be a nomination process for activation precincts, be they special or local activation precincts. The concept of activation precincts is supported in principle for mobilising major nation building projects but there needs to be an opportunity for regions to submit their cases and for these to be assessed based on evidence. Also, the reasons for decisions and their prioritisation should be made known publicly.

Jackie Kruger
General Manager

22 August 2020