

**Submission
No 62**

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

Organisation: Nambucca Valley Youth Services Centre

Date Received: 23 August 2020

Thank you for the opportunity to put a submission to the Inquiry into the Integrity, efficacy and value for money of NSW Government grant programs.

The Nambucca Valley Youth Services Centre (NVYSC) is located in Nambucca Heads on the mid-north coast of NSW. The NVYSC has been supporting young people through diverse projects and programs since 2003. We are not in receipt of any recurrent NSW government funding despite being in an area of significant disadvantage and need.

I believe that the Nambucca Valley Youth Services Centre experience of a recent funding opportunity may inform this inquiry.

The grant, Stronger Country Communities (SCC) Fund Round 3, closed in late September 2019 with successful applicants to be informed in the first half of January 2020. The total amount of funds to be distributed through Round 3 was stated to be \$100million, with at least half (\$50m) to be dedicated to youth related projects.

“The objectives of the [3rd round of SCC] fund are:
to boost the liveability of communities in regional areas by providing new or upgraded social and sporting infrastructure or community programs that have strong local support
to provide programs and infrastructure that enhance opportunities for young people to be work ready and thrive in regional NSW”.

Further -

“Youth-related projects must be for: • development of new or upgrades to existing infrastructure for young people; or • delivering programs for young people.
Youth-related projects must be aligned to the areas of community, wellbeing, connectivity and work readiness.”

It was understood that funding would be by LGA and this would mean approximately \$800,000 per LGA. We saw that the SCC Fund could offer the NVYSC a real opportunity to be able to support the young people in a substantive and ongoing way.

As regionalnsw.business@dpc.nsw.gov.au was the contact for more information, my colleagues, the writers of the Youth Service’s application, travelled to meet with the local representatives of the DPC at Coffs Harbour on at least one occasion and were strongly encouraged to submit for the amount they did. This would also equal most of the money available in our LGA. The implication was that the NVYSC, despite receiving no on-going funding, was well placed to meet the youth related outcomes desired by the fund. In addition, they were encouraged to also to apply for funds to expand the existing youth centre building and to meet some needed accessibility requirements. There seems to have been quite a disconnect between the advice received and our lack of any success in gaining any funding from Round 3.

We waited well past the early January date to hear anything of the success or otherwise of our submission, and when we did the results were rolled out gradually. That is there was not a single government announcement of the successful tenders in our shire. We were informed of our lack of success near the end of March. Then, in the Nambucca Valley, the first public announcement came in early April. With much fanfare, we heard that the heating of the Macksville Swimming Pool would be funded for a cost of about \$500,000. Later, and over the coming weeks, and sometimes only by digging, we heard that there would be Bowraville tennis courts, Valla Netball courts surrounds (this varied to sometimes being the courts themselves), Nambucca Heads a half basketball court. Not

much fanfare there. We also heard that there would be a Driver Education program run by Uniting to assist young people get their driving hours up (approximately \$95,000).

All up we think the Nambucca Valley LGA has received nearly \$900,000 but it's been very hard to get this clearly stated. Round 3 funded projects were simply added to the existing map of Round 1 & 2 projects on the SCC website. The spreadsheet of all projects funded similarly obfuscated Round 3 projects. It is very hard to see a logic to its presentation. (<https://www.nsw.gov.au/regional-growth-fund/stronger-country-communities-fund>)

A bit of detective work led me guess the amount of \$900,000 so it seems our LGA received possibly more than its share of the Round 3 funds. However, I have also been informed that ALL the projects funded in the Nambucca Valley were designated as YOUTH related projects. I have not been able to verify this anywhere but I have no reason to doubt the source. The same source also told me that there had been a late decision to allocate the 50% of the Round 3 monies to youth across the state NOT per LGA. To spell this out the whole of the approximately \$900,000 apportioned to our LGA was designated as youth related projects. It is very hard to see where the bulk of this funding aligns with the areas of well-being, connectivity and work readiness. The exception is the driver program which represents approximately one-eighth of the money received in the LGA. I believe the rest of the funding can easily be seen to be community infrastructure and is of benefit to the community as a whole, and perhaps the Council, and the local member.

I have also found some detail of what was funded in Round 3 across the state and much of it seemed to be community infrastructure. I wonder how many were designated youth projects, and how many were Council sponsored projects.

We sought and received feedback in May. This lack of timeliness was, we were informed, in part due to the Corona Virus and in part due to the large number of projects which were not funded. In the somewhat formal feedback process we were informed that in the first instance our project was deemed to be an "eligible project"; that its "alignment" with the Fund's stated objects was "high"; our community support was "high" (with over 30 letters of support). The only area in which we fell down was on lack of detail in the quote for refurbishment of our centre and submitting only one quote (only one quote was required). We knew that if funded we would need more than one quote, however, we were not asked for more detail or for more quotes during the process. In regional areas it can be difficult to ask builders for quotes especially when the likelihood of getting actual work out of the process is very low.

It was very disappointing to receive NO funding at all given the high degree that the project addressed the Fund's youth objectives and that Nambucca Heads, and the Nambucca Valley as a whole, have long standing high levels of disadvantage. This has been well documented from the 1999 Vinson Report to the 2015 Dropping off the Edge, Mid North Coast Regional Social Profile, NSW Health and NSW Education reports, and ABS Statistics. The recent NSW Government's Their Futures Matter identifies 17% of young people between 15-8 years are affected by mental illness, and provides key insights into vulnerable children and young people and indicators associated with poorer outcomes in later life. The most recent NCOSS report has continued this measure of disadvantage identifying Nambucca Heads 5th highest rate in NSW at 24.2% and Nambucca Heads having 41.7% of children living in poverty. This is the highest level across the state outside of Sydney (<https://www.ncoss.org.au/policy/mapping-economic-disadvantage-in-nsw-report>).

ADDENDUM: Detail of projects I believe were funded in Round 3 in Nambucca Valley

Half Court Basketball for the Nambucca River foreshore at Bellwood Park

Construction of a half court basketball court in the recreational area of Bellwood Park located on the Nambucca River foreshore. This addition to the park would make this area a "Destination area" in keeping with Council's adopted Open Space Plan. The half court would add to the already inviting amenity of the park for the youth of the Nambucca Valley.

Total NSW funding:55,650

Bowraville tennis court refurbishment completion - bleachers, retaining wall, lighting upgrade, fencing and resurfacing

This project would complete the refurbishment of the tennis courts located in the sporting precinct of Bowraville at Hennessey Tape Oval. Council has established 2 all-purpose courts at the centre, however resurfacing is required on the remaining 2 tennis courts, line marking, installation of a retaining wall, and extension of the new bleacher seating. A lighting upgrade is required so the newly established Bowraville Netball Club can hold twilight games, and the Tennis Club can hold a night competition. The rejuvenated courts look incredible and the community feedback has been tremendous and it would be excellent to complete the project.

Total NSW funding:94,500

120 Countdown - Nambucca Valley Learner Driver Program

Transport can be a major barrier to participation in education, employment and connection in regional and rural areas. Young people who do not have regular access to a car, or an adult driver willing and able to teach them struggle to achieve the 120 practice hours they need for their provisional licence. 120 Countdown is a free learner driving program, which supports young people in our community to obtain the 120 practice hours they need. The program works by linking young people with volunteer mentors. The mentors supervise the learners providing guidance and support in good driving behaviour.

Total NSW funding:95,000

Upgrade Macksville Memorial Aquatic & Fitness Centre - Stage 1: Heating 50m outdoor swimming pool

Nambucca Shire Council has adopted a Master Plan for upgrade of the Macksville Memorial Aquatic Centre. The Macksville Marlins Amateur Swimming Club, which represents the youth of the Nambucca Valley, who undertake competitive swimming, requested the first stage of the upgrade be the heating of the 50m Olympic pool. Stage 1 is procuring and installing a heating system for the 50 metre, 8 lane, outdoor pool to heat the facility for four months, being April, May, September and October. Upgrade also requires Essential Energy to provide a transformer, and major electrical works are necessary, to support the new heating system.

Total NSW funding:550,395

Seating and landscaping for new all-purpose courts at Anderson Park, Valla Beach

The Nambucca Valley community has recently been awarded funding to build two all-purpose courts at Anderson Park at Valla Beach. To enable this project to be better for the youth of the area, this project proposes to install bleachers type seating next to the courts, and landscape the surrounding areas, to prevent the ball running away to the creek, and making this an incredible place for local youth to play and enjoy a game of netball or basketball in safety and comfort.

Total NSW funding:40,231

Half Court Basketball for the Nambucca River foreshore at Bellwood Park

Construction of a half court basketball court in the recreational area of Bellwood Park located on the Nambucca River foreshore. This addition to the park would make this area a "Destination area" in keeping with Council's adopted Open Space Plan. The half court would add to the already inviting amenity of the park for the youth of the Nambucca Valley.

Total NSW funding:55,650