



Reports from the Regions

South Australia

Encouraging Feedback to Regional Funding and Grants Register

The Regional Funding and Grants Register web-site has received over 14,500 'hits' to the homepage so far. This is further confirmation of the prosperity and confidence, which is emerging throughout regional communities, which are increasingly accepting responsibility for their own development. There are over 500 different types of grants and funding solutions searchable on the database and there are over 263 organisations and individuals registered to receive regular weekly updates. The site also includes the names of 31 organisations and individuals located in regional South Australia who assist with the preparation of funding submissions. The Grants register has now been in operation for about a year and has received considerable positive community feedback. The website can be found at:
<http://grants.ord.sa.gov.au/>

Regional Accommodation Needs to be Met

The Regional Workforce Accommodation Solutions project is close to completion, with the Final Report being prepared for broad distribution in March. This has resulted in a detailed analysis of the nature and extent of shortages, a broad search for solutions (including international, interstate and

local examples), and the development of tailored solutions for each of the case study areas (upper South East and Murraylands).

The key findings from stage one, which focused on assessing the scope of the accommodation problem confirmed shortages of:

- inexpensive accommodation for seasonal workers, eg hostels, caravan park cabins;
- rental accommodation for year long seasonal workers and permanent workers;
- quality dwellings for professionals and workers with long-term careers aspirations.

As part of stage three, consultation has taken place with regional stakeholders to develop tailored solutions for towns in the two case study regions. The response has been very positive, with genuine engagement and commitment being expressed for partnership solutions. Many of the proposed solutions are low cost, feasible and appropriate for local circumstances. Local government, particularly in the South East, has demonstrated a pro-active interest in being part of the solutions. State Government has established a cross-agency Implementation Group on Regional Workforce Accommodation Solutions, which is considering a range of policy responses, involving partnerships with local government, regional communities and business, and will recommend an implementation plan to Government.

A number of strategies have emerged as potential solutions including:

- increase the supply of caravan park and hostel style accommodation for transient workers;
- promote accurate and up-to-date information about regional housing markets to potential investors;
- introduce additional community housing projects in rural SA;
- make changes to Local Government Development Plans to encourage workforce accommodation;
- explore funding mechanisms (such as residential property trusts, investment bonds, HomeStart finance) to build and purchase workforce accommodation.

Vocational Training for Regional Areas

The Department of Education Training and Employment will implement an extensive vocational training program this year in response to the unprecedented levels of development in regional areas. This growth has contributed to some localised shortages of regional tradespeople and the Regional Development Council of South Australia is keen to see a greater focus on training in this area.

The Premier and Chair of the Regional Development Council told the recent meeting of the Council that apprenticeships and traineeships currently stand at a record high of 32 000 – a major jump from 12 000 in 1998. ‘However, we need to ensure there are specific targeted training programs for regional South Australia and I am pleased that the Department of Education, Employment and Training is looking at ways to increase access to specialist training for tradespeople in regional areas through vocational education programs’, said Mr Kerin. Up to \$1.9m will be spent on providing accredited training to an estimated 880 participants in sixteen regions. The program is designed to address regional skill shortages with its primary target group being unemployed people, particularly recent school leavers.

The Office of Vocational Education and Training will continue its comprehensive apprenticeship program, which provides for approximately \$8m to be spent in regional and rural areas, particularly through the TAFE institute network and the rurally based institutes of Spencer, Murray, Onkaparinga and South East. Other metropolitan-based institutes such as Douglas Mawson, Regency and

Torrens Valley also provide extensive training services to regional and rural SA in the field of apprenticeship and traineeships. In addition to TAFE institutes, a substantial number of private registered training organizations are also funded.

This financial year, the State Government will provide in excess of \$40m for its training and vocational development programs with apprenticeship and traineeship numbers at record levels.

In addition, the Government increased its funding to Regional Development Boards to assist in employment development in regional areas. An additional \$800,000 will be provided to Boards over four years through the Regional Employment Strategy. Administered by the Office of Employment and Youth, the program provides regions with the flexibility and autonomy to tailor initiatives to meet local employment needs. The Office of Employment and Youth has also identified the uptake of group training apprenticeships and traineeships in regional and remote areas as a priority.

Northern Territory

Change has been the order of the day in the Northern Territory for the past six months.

The NT election, in August 2001, saw a change in government for the first time in 26 years. The new Labor Government was then hit with the September 11 terrorist attack; the collapse of Ansett; teacher and nurses disputes; delays with major gas projects and a Budget ‘blackhole’. To add to the change process, in November 2001 the Government restructured the NT Public Service reducing the number of agencies from 35 to 18.

In early November 2001 the Government also held an Economic Development Summit. The Summit was preceded by community forums in Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, Katherine, Nhulunbuy and Darwin. The major message was that sustainable development must be the approach throughout all of the Territory. It was also acknowledged that indigenous economic development needed to be a major thrust. Indigenous Territorians make up 30 per cent of the population and control approximately 50 per cent of the land.

What Has This Change Meant for Regional NT?

Tourism was dealt a harsh blow following the terrorist attack and the collapse of Ansett. International tourists make up around 30 per cent of visitors to the NT and this dropped off almost immediately following the attack in New York. Ansett carried just over 40 per cent of passengers into the NT and the loss of this capacity has had a major effect on regional NT, particularly central Australia (Alice Springs and Ayers Rock/Uluru). Qantas has now picked up much of the slack but only to the major regional centres. The NT Government, through the Tourist Commission, is working hard to ensure that there is no long term slump and tourist numbers appeared to be back to 'normal' towards the end of last year.

Access Economics has recently released a very positive report suggesting that the NT economy is looking strong for the coming years. In large, this is due to the construction of the Alice Springs to Darwin railway. This project has had a very positive impact on regional NT, particularly in Tennant Creek (population 3000 approx.) and Katherine (population 11 000 approx.).

As in all other States and Territories, the government is focused on regional development, with indigenous economic development being a high priority.

The change process is likely to continue for some time in the Northern Territory.

Western Australia

A selection of issues currently of importance to regional Western Australia:

Continuing processes of native title claims remain a significant aspect of negotiating for future development in Western Australia. There are examples of success and failure, but irrespective, there is a complex template of claims and stakeholders.

New high speed passenger trains for the Avon Valley and Kalgoorlie Boulder are under construction. Capable of 160 and 200 kph respectively they should be commissioned around Easter next year.

Major restructuring of country health administration and service delivery, with much debate over both process and potential results.

Debate continues in Parliament about one vote one value, which would see a significant reduction in the number of regional electorates and a huge increase in their size.

A review of State statutory authorities is continuing. The review covers the regional port authorities, regional development commissions and regional TAFE colleges, either directly or indirectly through associated review processes.

WA opens a trade office in Dubai to coincide with the commencement of Emirates Air service direct to Perth in August.

The current WA government has ministers for regions, so each of the nine regions has a minister with specific responsibility and interest in it. This is a change from the coalition which had all nine regions with the same minister (Deputy Premier). The model is one devised by previous State Labor governments.