

Questions on Regional Development Australia Funding

18 October 2011

Senator McKENZIE: I have four questions relating to a specific program or application. They relate to the funding sought under the Regional Development of Australia Fund to facilitate the growth of the Latrobe regional airport in Gippsland Victoria as an aerospace industry centre and to expand regional employment opportunities. The application was rejected due to a failure to provide certain documentation. The project was going to give an additional 150 direct jobs to our community, already stressed in the coal industry. Can the department advise of the details around the decision to reject the application?

Mr O'Brien: I can take that on notice.

Senator McKENZIE: Thank you.

Mr O'Brien: It was deemed ineligible?

Senator McKENZIE: Yes.

Ms Beauchamp: Senator, you actually mentioned the failure to provide documentation. That in itself would be a reason why it was ineligible to be considered.

Senator McKENZIE: If that is the case—and my understanding is that it was a genuine misunderstanding rather than a deliberate attempt to withhold—is there an avenue for redress or reapplication or discussion with the department to have their application looked at again?

Ms Beauchamp: If round 1 has closed, in terms of round 2 they are eligible to reapply. Also, on the basis of them reapplying, they will have probably sought further advice from the department in terms of why their application was ineligible. They have also had the opportunity to seek that feedback.

Senator McKENZIE: This is the No. 1 project put forward by the whole—

Mr O'Brien: I spent a lot of time in the Latrobe Valley in recent months so I am well aware of the projects and I would expect that they will be resubmitting at the next round.

Senator McKENZIE: Yes, that is my understanding too. Given the higher rate of non-compliance in round 1, have the application forms or the required criteria change?

Mr O'Brien: Yes. We are reconsidering reviewing the guidelines as they currently stand—and we talked about that a little earlier. That process has not been finalised yet. It will be finalised shortly. With the minister's approval, we are looking to publish a new set of guidelines in early November. So they will change. We are looking at changing the process of application in terms of lodgement. I might get Ms Fleming to talk a little bit about that. The idea is to make available a more user-friendly e-form than we had previously.

Ms Fleming: The system we used before was a smart form that we had used in the third round of the RLCIP program so we had not anticipated the issues that arose in RDAF round 1 because it was a system that had been used before. Given the issues that arose with round 1, we are now developing a web form. That means people will lodge directly onto a web form; there is no downloading of documents or modifying of documents; they can amend the document and they can do it over time; there will be tab fields; there will be explanations;

there will be a how-to guide the user system; and we will provide as much support as we can to applicants who possibly have not used web forms before

Senator McKENZIE: How much money will be available under round 2?

Mr O'Brien: That is still to be determined.

Senator McKENZIE: Is there another program that will be available more quickly for access by Gippsland Aeronautics that you can advise them of?

Mr O'Brien: Not at this stage.

Senator McKENZIE: On notice, I would like to know which regional papers the \$35,000 spent on Media Monitors actually covers.

Mr O'Brien: I will have to take that on notice.

Senator RYAN: I presume you would be in a capacity to provide the brief you provide to Media Monitors. That would give the wholesale cost. If it is a commercially provided service, obviously the government would provide a brief saying, 'This is what we want covered, the search terms, newspapers, regions.' Would you be able to take that on notice and provide it to Senator McKenzie?

Mr O'Brien: We will take that on notice.

Senator RYAN: Is there any reason you could not?

Mr O'Brien: I am personally not sure.

Senator McKENZIE: I think what Senator Ryan is suggesting is that you have asked them to do a monitoring service and what you have asked them to do must be somewhere.

Senator Sherry: We will take it on notice.