



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Main Committee

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Area Consultative Committees

SPEECH

Monday, 1 June 2009

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Robert, Stuart, MP

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Mr ROBERT (Fadden) (8.20 pm)—The government would have us believe that the change in area consultative committees to Regional Development Australia is for a noble purpose—that it is designed to bring consultation to its highest zenith and pull together partners from local, federal, state and other bodies to work together to achieve suitable and sustainable outcomes. That is what the ACCs were specifically designed for, and they achieve their function well. The area consultative committees were first put in place by a Labor government to bring together partnerships for wide consultation across communities and key stakeholders. Their role was to ensure that projects that were of great benefit to communities were started by communities, were ensured engagement by communities and had partnerships across all levels of government and industry. Indeed, 54 area consultative committees Australia wide—not-for-profit incorporated bodies under various state incorporation acts—were put together to achieve this very point and operate with a range of funding considerations to achieve outcomes for communities. I look at my electorate of Fadden, where Gold Coast-Beaudesert shared one area consultative committee. It was incredibly successful in its ability to pull together stakeholders and partners to achieve great outcomes.

Considering the success of the ACCs, I cannot help but be cynical that the government's attempt to simply change it to Regional Development Australia, to RDAs, is no more than a name change with a very strong Labor bent to it. There is a great saying where I come from—indeed, Minister Albanese should learn it: if it ain't broke, don't try and fix it. The ACCs, in that great colloquial language, ain't broke. So, Minister, may I politely recommend that you take your grubby little fingers away from what works so successfully across the nation, back away from where you took yourself and reconsider your decision to axe the organisation, the staff and everything that went with it. Indeed, the minister should note the failure to facilitate a seamless transition of staff to these new state based bodies, despite assurances from the minister himself, which I find most vexing in the outcome and, indeed, what has transpired. There is a failure to value and indeed recognise the great voluntary effort of those great people in the community who pulled together the partnerships that made ACCs work. I look at some of the great projects in my area, including the Oxenford and Coomera Community Youth Centre, where land was donated by the city council, where the state government came up with a range of funds and the federal government matched those funds and where the federal government would only play in an environment where true partnerships existed. That was one of the great beauties of the ACCs, the various partnership programs and the funding sources they used.

So may I encourage the minister to have a good hard look in the mirror at exactly where he is taking the program and where it needs to go. The policy for RDAs is a retrograde step. It is moving away from what has worked so incredibly well across the whole vast range of communities across the nation. The way the Minister is disingenuous has treated chairmen and executive officers of the ACC. The way that he left them hanging out on a limb for 12 months is disingenuous. It is disingenuous how the Regional Partnership program, one of the major funding sources the ACCs used, was axed and nothing put in its place, how so many projects were told, 'You're not getting funding,' even projects that were approved. The ultimate height of insult was when David Koch on *Sunrise* said, 'This is outrageous; 140 projects approved, including disabled playgrounds,' and dragged the minister on. The minister was embarrassed on Channel 7 television and had a backward step and allowed a hundred projects through. Clearly Channel 7 TV can make the minister move but parliament at times cannot. The minister needs to have a good hard look at what he is doing. (*Time expired*)