



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Main Committee

CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS

Farrer Electorate: Area Consultative Committees

SPEECH

Wednesday, 3 June 2009

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Ley, Sussan, MP

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Ms LEY (Farrer) (9.42 am)—I am pleased to speak today on the area consultative committees and the important role they played under the previous government in my electorate of Farrer. I am terribly disappointed to see that the current government has dismantled this important network, which was a regional development shopfront to assist regional communities through the process of applying for government grants. It was established, actually, under a previous Labor government. This was a national network of area consultative committees. It was an important link between the Australian government and rural and metropolitan Australia. I believe that link has now been lost. There were 54 area consultative committees Australia wide, and I would like to recognise those in my electorate: the Albury-Wodonga, Central Murray, Sunraysia and Broken Hill area consultative committees. I am appalled at the decision to eliminate these committees. Labor, with its basic philosophy of tax, spend and interfere, has interfered in the business of regional development in a most unfortunate way.

The stimulus package is one size fits all. My local councils were told, 'If you have a project worth \$2 million for round 2 of the government stimulus package, apply. If you haven't, don't bother.' They did not have packages ready on the shelf to just take down and roll out, and for that reason many of them missed out—in the same way that the stimulus package that has gone to schools has caused some perverse and silly results. One town in my electorate is putting up portables at its school that it does not even need, while its community sporting facilities are falling to bits, because there is actually no application process or funding package that can work in that town. But for the people it is clear what is needed. This was the strength of the area consultative committees: they were decentralised and they had the capacity to consider the needs and the interests of every local community in every local area and to appreciate and recognise the differences between the communities.

Community effort funded so many of these projects. You had government money, often matching state government money, and sometimes local government, but you had an amazing volunteer effort, which created some astonishing results under what was known as Regional Partnerships projects. If I look back over the last couple of years the variety just does demonstrate the importance of this program, why it worked so well and why we are really going to miss it. There was a water scheme in Urangeline—\$195,000 to provide fresh stock and domestic water; nearly \$600,000 for the Royal Flying Doctor Service at Broken Hill's medical facility; \$165,000 for a library and community centre in Jerilderie; a new weir at Pooncarie; \$330,000 for the Mulwala football club sporting facilities; \$214,000 for the Wanganella Community Centre, without which that community would not have had a place to meet and share and celebrate; the environmental centre at Wirramina, near Albury; and \$330,000 for the Albury Regional Museum, which services a larger area around my home town. (*Time expired*)