



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**Federation Chamber**

**CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS**

**Ballarat Electorate: Tourism  
Industry Regional Development Fund**

**SPEECH**

**Wednesday, 20 November 2013**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

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<b>Questioner</b>		<b>Responder</b>	
<b>Speaker</b>	King, Catherine, MP	<b>Question No.</b>	

**Ms KING** (Ballarat) (10:19): I want to raise this morning the decision by the Abbott government to axe the Tourism Industry Regional Development Fund. This program offered dollar-for-dollar matched funding of between \$50,000 and \$250,000 to assist tourism operators to increase the quality and range of visitor experiences in regional Australia. Funding of \$9.6 million was available in the current round of the program, which closed to applications just at the beginning of August. Yet this week the department has contacted applicants to advise that round 2 of the program has been cancelled. Despite the fact that many of these applicants have spent a lot of money and a lot of hours to put those applications together, the government has axed them. This comes on the back of them nearly axing round 1, which was previously committed and announced by the previous government, but, thanks to lobbying by organisations like the iconic Sovereign Hill in my electorate, the government has seen sense and has gone ahead with those grants.

The axing of round 2 has some very significant implications for regional tourism and for regional communities. These grants offer unique opportunities for rural and regional tourism operators to improve the quality of their tourism products and to increase the numbers of visitors to their regions. We have seen under previous rounds of both this and the TQUAL grants funding go to Sovereign Hill to upgrade their conference facilities and to provide all-abilities access at their accommodation facilities. Kryal Castle again is providing a fantastic experience for young people and families who want to experience a dragons and dungeons culture. Small children just love being able to dress up as knights and princesses. Creswick Woollen Mills again is an iconic tourism infrastructure.

One of the projects that had applied under round 2 is a fantastic couple who run Peppers Retreat in Hepburn Springs. They have invested millions of dollars into that facility and in fact have been really responsible for increasing tourism numbers in Hepburn. Their second project, the Clunes Club Hotel, has been sitting vacant for 12 years in the heart of a small town that has enormous tourism potential. They wanted to apply for a grant that would have allowed them to leverage off that to get finance in order to redevelop the hotel into an accommodation facility. They have now been denied that opportunity. The people of Clunes are absolutely devastated by this. We have been waiting for years to have someone invest in that facility. The fact that the government has cancelled this round—'We'll have something else to replace it eventually'—is an absolute slap in the face to regional communities. It stalls economic development in regional communities when you do not have a pipeline of projects. What this government has done is disgraceful in not supporting regional communities and slowing growth in our economies.