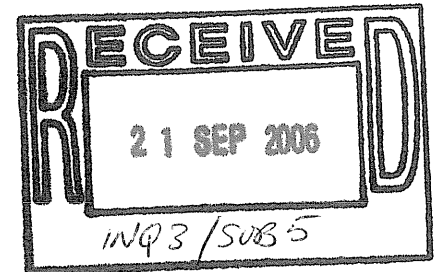


Our Ref: 65/70/00

19 September 2006



Attn: Natalie-Mai Holmes
Office Manager
Outer Suburban/Interface Services & Development Committee
Parliament of Victoria
Level 3, 157 Spring Street
Melbourne VIC 3000

Dear Outer Suburban/Interface Services & Development Committee

**RE: INQUIRY INTO LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN OUTER SUBURAN
AREAS**

Maroondah City Council wishes to make a submission to The Outer Suburban/Interface Services Development Committee regarding the aforementioned Parliamentary Inquiry.

Please find following Maroondah City Council's contribution as they relate to the terms of reference highlighted below.

Maroondah City Council understands that this document is considered a public document.

Maroondah City Council does not intend to speak before the Committee.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. Examine existing local economic development programs being carried out by municipalities in outer suburban areas;

Maroondah City Council strongly supports and encourages business development and growth within its municipal borders. It further recognises its role in a regional context.

The following are just a few of the activities undertaken by Council to assist with this endeavour:

- Maroondah Business Week – a week long event that covers training/workshops/seminars/networking events. It includes a number of training programs that are sponsored by the Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development and a host of other business events that are kindly sponsored by local businesses and local business networks. Free and extensive publicity is also provided

by Council for sponsors and Award nominees throughout the year leading up to the event.

- Maroondah Business Expo – hosted in previous years, the Maroondah Business Expo provides business operators of all sizes the opportunity to exhibit their products and/or services to the business and general community at a subsidised rate.
- Maroondah City Council Business Excellence Awards Program – provides an opportunity to recognise, reward and celebrate business achievement and development in the municipality.
- Free listing on Maroondah City Council's Business Directory (www.bizmaroondah.com.au) – an opportunity to gain a web based presence and Internet search facility for potential clients/customers and increase the exposure of local businesses to the community.
- The Maroondah City Council Better Business Kit CD – an interactive and extensive business start up and growth resource kit that covers all aspects of setting up and building a business in Maroondah.
- A number of electronic and hard copy publications are produced and distributed to the business community at regular intervals as a means to inform local businesses and provide them an opportunity for feedback.
- Support is provided on an annual basis to a number of business networking groups in the area. Networking groups have proven to be quite a valuable resource to Council in assisting access to their business membership.
- Maroondah hosts the Maroondah Business Breakfast Series throughout the year. This series acts as a learning forum and provides opportunities to local business owners/operators to network, form alliances with potential clients / suppliers / competitors.
- Maroondah also supports a number of retail initiatives including capital works improvements to shopping strips/centres to improve the visual appeal and safety of a shopping precinct, the management and promotion of Special Rate and Charge Scheme and support of Trader Associations amongst others.
- Participation in StreetLife Funding Programs. Through this program, Maroondah City Council has formed and developed some valuable and important partnerships between business / trader associations and small business operators. Maroondah's StreetLife Grants in 2002 - 2004 with Maroondah HomeBiz and in 2004 - 2006 for the McAdam Square Shopping Centre have both been beneficial in strengthening a local business precinct, facilitating small business growth and improving small business capabilities and networks.
Maroondah City Council would like to strongly recommend the continuation and expansion of the StreetLife Program with perhaps investigation into the simplification of the grant application and reporting process.
- Maroondah has also formed a number of strategic alliances with local educational institutions and industries to address a number of local and regional issues including skills shortages, industry-based learning, employment and business development.
- Maroondah City Council is a member of the Melbourne South East (MSE) group. The MSE consists of a strong alliance of 11 local government authorities representing Melbourne's South East region, tertiary institutions, utility providers and a range of other regional stakeholders. This partnership aims to deliver regional prosperity

through a number of strategic economic initiatives as outlined in *Prosperity For the Next Generation – A Regional Economic Strategy for Melbourne’s South East (2003 – 2030)*. As a partner of the Melbourne South East group, Maroondah recognises its membership within a nationally economic significant regional location and has allied itself with outer eastern municipalities to consolidate the strength of individual municipalities within this region to effect economic strengthening and growth on a larger scale through various marketing and investment initiatives. The group is a project-based venture whose aims are to participate in policy development, land use management and strategic planning. Visit www.investinmelbourne.com.au

2. Identify the barriers to local economic development and the ways in which these can be addressed;

- a. Economic development activities and initiatives at the local government level are largely based on assumptions regarding the size and profile of the enterprises within its respective boundaries.

Business enterprises are not required to register with Council and assessing the number, type and size of businesses across different Councils is not uniform and homogenous. The task of determining exact numbers of enterprises becomes an elusive and onerous task. We are in effect, providing services and products to an unknown market where their specific needs are similarly unknown. Maroondah’s participation and uptake rates of the products and services it provides indicate that there is certainly a place for these products and services. Participation however, is voluntary and does not enable us to collect comprehensive statistics of businesses within the municipality.

Whilst State and Federal Governments are able to provide macro statistical data, the micro statistics within a local government area are largely considered the domain of Councils. As there is a limited budget and resources to enable research initiatives to compile a comprehensive database, notwithstanding the fact that the business landscape is mutable, Councils would benefit from extra resources or access to information that other tiers of government have in order to compile a more comprehensive economic identity that it would subsequently be better able to serve.

Suggested options are:

1. Councils to receive monthly details of new business registrations broken down into local government areas through the Australian Business Register or its State equivalent. In this way, Council would have access to new business information starting operations in the area and would be able to capture this market from the start by introducing them to the various resources and assistance available to them through their local Council.
2. Councils be given access to subsidised or gratis reports offered by the Australian Bureau of Statistics upon specific Council requests to highlight their respective local government area on a needs basis rather than having to wait for general public statistics that quickly become outdated by the time of their release.

3. Councils to gain direct feeds from the Department of Sustainability and Environment, regarding the updated statistics of each local government area.

- b. Business Associations / Trader Groups are only as strong as the Committee which supports the Association/Group. The workload, in particular the administrative requirements of running an Incorporated Body (lodging forms, monthly minutes and agendas) and fielding the number of inquiries and phone calls which are generated by interested parties, often puts a strain on Committee members - in particular those who officiate in the Secretary role. Many cease to exist because they cannot consistently attract new Committee members to replace those who resign.
If some sort of subsidy were available to make this position a paid role, or if one person could be funded and shared by a number of local 'business support' groups this would alleviate the pressure put on such Associations/Trader Groups and would further assist to ensure their longevity and compliance with State requirements.

- c. Home Based Businesses are a growing sector throughout Australia. Maroondah undertook a StreetLife project (2002-2004) which aimed to increase the profile of these businesses locally and highlight their contribution to the local economy, work/family balance and the community. A key objective of this project was to raise the profile of home based businesses beyond the general 'public perception' of 'hobby-type/part-time businesses'. A program, or further funding which would assist to further highlight the innovative and professional nature of many home-based businesses would be a great way of supporting this sector and recognising the contribution they make to the National economy.

We hope that our comments prove useful with your Inquiry. We thank you for providing us the opportunity to provide feedback.

Yours faithfully



MICHAEL MARASCO
Chief Executive Officer