

Millions remains in limbo

■ **Tim Edmunds**

The status of three major sporting infrastructure projects in the region remain in limbo with news the Federal Government is yet to officially notify the local governments involved if they will receive millions of dollars of funding.

Albany's long-awaited \$42 million Centennial Park Sporting Precinct redevelopment, Mt Barker's \$9.5 million Sounness Park development and the \$2.2 million Denmark Riverside Club each received significant allocated funds through the Regional Development Australia Fund earlier this year.

However, it was revealed earlier this month the Federal Government was reviewing funding pledges made by the previous Government which had not reached contract stage.

As a result, the \$8.25 million funding to the Centennial Park project, \$1 million to Sounness Park and \$500,000 to the Denmark project were being reassessed.

A spokesman for Infrastructure Minister Warren Truss said on Tuesday the Government had only made contact with local governments which had queried the status of their allocated funds.

Regional Development Australia Great Southern executive officer Simon Lyas confirmed the region's local governments were yet to receive official confirmation of the state of their funding from the Federal Government.

Mr Lyas said it was important to "press the point" to Mr Truss on the benefits of the projects to the local communities.

"It's an opportunity to take the minister's office up one-on-one," he said.

"We are as disappointed as anyone in the community. So much time and effort has been put into these project applications.

"There is a lot at stake. The shires need to push ahead and apply the pressure on behalf of the community."

Shire of Plantagenet chief executive Rob Stewart said the Shire had written to the minister urging him to reconsider his funding position and was yet to receive a reply.

"I think it has knocked a lot of people around that local government would be treated like this," he said.

"We will be maintaining the pressure, but from everything we have heard we are not confident."

Shire of Denmark chief executive Dale Stewart said he was hopeful the Federal Government could see the benefits of the \$2.2 million Riverside Club and would write to Mr Truss.

The City of Albany is also yet to receive a reply from the Minister after recently querying funding for Centennial Park and requesting a written response.

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Shires at mercy of new Govt

The lack of communication by the new Federal Government to local shires waiting to know if millions of dollars in funding committed by the previous government will be honoured is disappointing (Page 1).

Major infrastructure projects in the City of Albany and shires of Denmark and Mt Barker are in limbo while this funding is up in the air.

Reviewing the funding pledges is fair enough — no one can argue against the Federal Government's intent to ensure money has been allocated to worthwhile projects and is not wasted — but the shires remain in the dark.

They learned through local media that funding for the Centennial Park Sporting Precinct (\$8.25 million), Sounness Park (\$1 million) and Riverside Club (\$500,000) was being reviewed, not through official communication.

While there remains little detail on the funding review, the immediate future of these funds remains in doubt.

The local governments are still committed to delivering these vital projects but would no doubt be concerned about where the money may now come from.

Regional Development Australia Great Southern executive officer Simon Lyas painted the situation as an opportunity for councils to get on the front foot and reinforce to the Government the wide-reaching benefits of these projects.

However, the Government's poor communication cannot be ignored.

It should not have been left to the councils to pursue the matter when they had already undergone hard work to secure the funding commitments.

The councils applied for funds in good faith that the entity the Federal Government would honour their pledges, regardless of which party was in power.

The onus then is on the Government to liaise more closely with councils on the review process and keep them better informed on the status of funding.

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