

Disappointment over fund 'freeze'

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THE Federal Government's apparent "freeze" on future rounds of the Regional Development Australia Fund has been labelled a disappointment by the executive officer of the Great Southern arm of the program.

Simon Lyas said while he had not received official word from the Department of Regional Australia on what was happening, it was disappointing and annoying the announcement of the next RDAF

round would now likely be further delayed.

The final grants of round two of the program were announced in July, with no money going to the Great Southern despite expectations at least one of the three projects shortlisted would receive funding.

Those projects included the Centennial Park redevelopment in Albany, a major sporting precinct upgrade in Mt Barker and a regional entertainment centre in Katanning.

Last Thursday, Nationals Sen-

ator Barnaby Joyce raised concerns about the future of the program and accused the Government of redirecting RDA funding towards a new national dental care scheme.

In response, Regional Development Minister Simon Crean confirmed the Government had placed a freeze on the program, but remained adamant it was temporary and future funding rounds would still happen.

"I think freeze is one way of expressing (it)... I think the more correct way is to say that what we're

doing is a stocktake of all the programs," he said.

"What we've done is say we need to take a stocktake, assess our priorities, and move forward accordingly."

Mr Crean did not put forward a timeframe for the "stocktake" process.

Mr Lyas expressed concern about delaying the program as the election cycle loomed.

"It runs the risk of going into the time period closer to the election... the caretaker period when government effectively shuts down on

these sorts of things," he said. "That would be one of my concerns, (but) I have to take the minister at his word that RDAF round three will be going ahead at a date of their choosing."

RDA Great Southern is one of 55 committees Australia-wide which locally co-ordinate the \$1 billion program. Round two delivered about \$200 million to 46 projects across Australia.

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