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The Government's Role in Promoting the Power of Community

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*If quoting from this speech, please acknowledge that it was presented to the

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Good morning and thank you, Rhonda, for your introduction.

I would first like to acknowledge the traditional owners of this land on which we meet today.

I also thank Our Community for the kind invitation to open the 2006 Communities in Control Conference.

The theme of this year's conference is "Challenging the Power of One". I like to think that the 'power of one' describes not only the independence of spirit that characterises so many individual Australian achievements but also the ability of committed people to work together as one to benefit the community as a whole.

Today I will focus on "The Government's Role in Promoting the Power of the Community". Naturally I will draw on my experience in the Australian Government Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (which I will refer to as FaCSIA) where I have particular responsibilities in relation to community policy.

But I also want to draw upon my professional experiences across the Australian Government, especially in conservation and natural resource management, regional development and before then when I spent a number of years in the administration of the ACT both before and after self-government.

In fact some of my perspectives have their origins well before I took to wearing a suit. I spent some years working in remote and rural Australia in the mining industry and in the rock music industry which is a community of sorts with some pretty unique characteristics.

My presentation today will go this way:

First, I will outline some of the quite dramatic changes that are occurring in Australian society and the challenges this creates for the way government is developing and delivering community programs.

Second, I will discuss how the government is collaborating as a member of the social coalition, and how we are working differently with

communities, non-government organisations and businesses to strengthen communities.

Third, I will pose some questions and challenges around the future directions for working with communities. Some of these issues are:

- How can we further strengthen the community sector? This includes the strategies FaCSIA is pursuing and the steps community organisations can take themselves to strengthen the sector

- How do we know we are doing good work – what measurement and evaluation techniques can we use so we clearly understand the impact of what we are doing?

- And, considering the well-documented benefits of active community involvement, how can we help to keep individuals motivated and involved in their community?

First let me talk for a moment on the role of FaCSIA as a social policy advisor to government and implementer of its policies and programs.

We work at three levels - "Improving the lives of Australians by helping to build the capacity and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities." Indeed that is the formal purpose of our department.

Of course these three social domains (the individual, the family and the community) cannot sensibly be thought of in isolation to each other. The actions we take for each need to be mutually reinforcing.

For example policies and programs that support families such as the Family Tax Benefit and other family payments need to have in mind their impact upon communities.

Noel Pearson in particular is challenging us to think hard about how such payments for families might influence outcomes for remote indigenous communities.

But it is not just the interconnectedness of individuals, families and communities that creates the policy challenge. The rapid and

fundamental changes occurring in Australia's social landscape create a further layer of complexity. Let me mention just a few of these. In combination they are startling.

1. <u>Social policy changes and emerging trends</u>

Substantial improvements in life expectancy have been a feature of the second half of the twentieth century. Between 1982 and 2001, life expectancy at birth increased by six years for men and just over four years for women.

There have been extensive changes in the way families are structured and function. While 'couple families' are still the most common family type, there have been increases in the proportions of 'one parent families' (an increase from 7% of families in 1976 to 11% in 2001).

The proportion of 'families with children' has declined to 60% of families largely due to the ageing of the population (creating 'empty nesters'), and also as a result of trends towards childlessness.

Assuming these trends continue, by 2021 the most common family type is projected to change from 'couples with children' to 'couples without children'.

'Lone person households' will also become more common. The number of 'lone person households' is projected to increase from 1.6 million households in 1996 to 3.4 million in 2021, increasing from 9% of the population to 15% of the population.

Young people are also living at home for far longer than ever before as a result of housing affordability and increasing educational attainment. There has been a significant increase in the number of people moving from metropolitan areas and regional cities to coastal areas.

For example the Bass and Surf Coasts in Victoria grew at more than double the state rate between 2002 and 2003. Some coastal communities across Australia are struggling to deal with rapid population growth.

For the past 10 years there has been an upward trend in the proportion of people with vocational or higher qualifications. Between 1993 and 2003 the proportion of people aged 25-64 years with a qualification increased from 45% to 55%.

Real income growth during the past decade grew by around 2.8% a year – appreciably faster than during the preceding twenty-year period. The way in which work is organised and carried out is reflected in the rapid growth in part-time and casual employment.

Between 1995 and 2002, there was an increase from 24% to 34% in the proportion of people aged 18 years and over who did some voluntary work during the previous 12 months.

Australians and businesses are giving and volunteering more than ever before, contributing more than $11 billion in 2004. Research shows the value of individual giving, $5.7 billion last year, has increased 88 per cent since 1997.

These and other changes have contributed to a shift in the focus of social policy and programs in Australia. Social policy has moved beyond responding to needs as they manifest themselves towards a greater focus on prevention and developing the community's capacity to be as self-reliant as possible.

Prevention and self reliance both require a much closer focus on community dynamics.

And this in turn requires community engagement through partnerships between individuals, families, business, government, and welfare and charitable organisations, all collaborating to solve social and economic problems. I will come back to these issues shortly in my discussion on working with the social coalition.

Policy changes

In response to the significant social changes that have occurred in Australia, the government has changed the way it develops and delivers social programs. In summary these changes include:

1. A greater focus on dealing with individuals in the context of their families and their community settings rather than on dealing with each person as they present to a service.

2. Seeing income support and services as part of an integrated package to help people develop capacity to make transitions over the life course rather than just discrete services meeting a single need at one point in time.

3. More active social interventions focussing on economic and social participation, rather than a passive social safety net.

4. Increasingly tailored assistance for individual circumstances rather than a 'one-size-fits-all' provision.

5. Government playing a more catalytic role influencing and facilitating activities at a local level to encourage more organic responses from communities in contrast to government intervening to <u>solve</u> problems by top down approaches.

6. Finally a greater role for organisations working outside government in policy development, financing and delivery of services rather than government working in isolation.

   In essence there is a shift away from government from 'trying to solve for society' to 'enabling society to solve for itself'.

   And once you move into this realm capacity building, participation and the development of shared objectives with stakeholders right across the community become key levers of change.

   Similarly this approach demands much greater attention to the continuum of social policy concerns such as the early childhood environment, family services, health, education, training, regional development, the tax/transfer system and so on.

2. Collaborating as a member of the social coalition

The changes I have described are driving a social policy department like FaCSIA to work in new ways with communities, business, community organisations and government.

We now see ourselves as a member of a social coalition … collaborating with all spheres of government, community leaders, the business community and individual members of the community to develop and implement social policy and programs.

This calls on us to emphasise behaviours like seeking advice from experts in business, research, academic and community sectors; building collaborative relationships with state, territory and local governments (something we need to do better at); forging partnerships with non-government organisations; and refining our attitudes to consultation and feedback.

This approach has been adopted because it utilises the broader expertise of the community and promotes local ownership. It also recognises that engaging the community provides stronger and more sustainable outcomes for individuals, families and communities.

Working with Indigenous Communities

My first example of this new way of working relates to Indigenous communities. In July 2004 the Australian Government started down a new path. It adopted what we call a whole-of-government approach to Indigenous specific policy, programs and services especially in remote Australia.

A whole of government approach can be defined as 'government agencies working across portfolio boundaries to achieve a shared goal and provide an integrated response to specific issues or to a particular community'.

This approach incorporates five basic principles:

1. Collaboration across and between governments, the community and the private sector;

2. Ensuring that local and regional needs and priorities are understood and communicated;

3. Flexibility in approach, particularly in enabling funds to be moved between agencies and programmes to support good local strategies and whole-of-government objectives;

4. Improved accountability, performance monitoring and reporting; and

5. Providing leadership, both within government and in the regional networks of representative Indigenous organisations

These principles are brought to life through Shared Responsibility Agreements, or SRAs, which spell out what communities, governments and others will contribute to achieve long-term changes in Indigenous communities. These agreements are made at a local level.

- SRAs start with ideas from the community on the changes people want to make and how these changes could be achieved. In agreeing to an SRA, communities make commitments and governments undertake to provide services or funding to assist the community to achieve its objectives.

- It is a two way deal.

- To support this approach the Government has established Indigenous Coordination Centres. These Centres represent a novel approach. They are led by the Office of Indigenous Policy and Coordination within FACSIA. But they also incorporate other Australian Government Departments.

- Each ICC coordinates Australian Government program funding and services to local Indigenous people. They work with local Indigenous communities and negotiate regional and local

agreements for effective partnerships based on shared responsibilities.

- This new approach gets community members working towards common community goals that improve outcomes for people in the community.

The Cape York Family Income Management project (FIM) demonstrates the success of communities, business and government working in partnership. The project is designed by Indigenous people to build financial competency, improve family functioning and living standards, and contribute to economic development in a culturally sensitive and practical way.

As well as being community driven, Westpac supports FIM by providing secondees to work with community staff on a regular basis. This project is part of FaCSIA's Stronger Families and Communities Strategy and the success of this project has resulted in a budget announcement of funding for a further four years for this project.

These approaches are about ensuring a future where strong Indigenous communities are realised through a developmental approach that aims to help people address the root cause of problems in their communities.

It is important to emphasise that the involvement of community members in these responses it crucial to their success.

Communities for Children – Engaging at the local community level

The second example of the Australian Government developing the social coalition is through the Communities for Children initiative.

We know that social issues for children cannot be addressed in isolation from the family, community and broader social environments in which children live.

Yet traditionally Australian government policy and programs have been delivered within a national framework that is not so agile in taking into account local circumstances and needs. More recently a variety of

models for early intervention programs at the local level have emerged.

'Communities for Children' is an innovative model of government policy development and service delivery. It is grounded in community development principles.

> It redefines the non-government role in policy development and program management.

The initiative aims to assist children from birth to five years of age to have the best possible start in life. Since April 2004, this programme has been implemented in 45 sites across Australia through non-government organisations. Funding of $142 million has been provided over four years.

The Communities for Children approach provides a national framework, focused on sustainability and capacity building but which allows for individual approaches at the local level.

Under Communities for Children, the Australian Government provides funding to a Non Government Organisation (NGO), or consortium of NGOs, in a local community to work in partnership with various sectors of the community to develop and implement a Community Strategic Plan and annual Service Delivery Plans in relation to early intervention in early childhood.

The NGOs are called Facilitating Partners and one of their early roles is to establish a 'Communities for Children Committee' in the local community.

The Facilitating Partner has responsibility for bringing together community members and existing and new services to develop new ways for addressing the needs of children and families in that local community.

The Facilitating Partner coordinates the Communities for Children Committee, which comprises the major stakeholders in that community.

The Facilitating Partner also distributes the Communities for Children funding within the community according to the Community Strategic Plan and the annual Service Delivery Plan These identify the strengths and assets, and the needs and service gaps, for children in that community.

Once the department has approved the plan, the Facilitating Partner is then responsible for implementing the plan and monitoring performance against it.

In this way, Communities for Children utilises the expertise of the community and ensures local ownership and local responses.

It has to be said that there are some policy risks in this model. There is opportunity for divergence to occur between the broad national level policy intent and what actually takes place on the ground.

To manage this risk the Australian Government is working to provide clear policy frameworks within which a range of local community responses can emerge

Interestingly there are echoes in the Communities for Children Programme of the approach the Australian, State and Territory governments have taken in the field of natural resource management.

Supported by the Natural Heritage Trust community based natural resource management committees across Australia develop through strongly consultative processes strategic regional natural resource management plans. Once these plans are accredited governments support their implementation both financially and in kind.

There is wide community engagement both in the planning and delivery stages as well as the application of considerable scientific and technical expertise from a range of sources.

The field of natural resource management involves a rather different coalition to that engaged in the social policy issues I have mentioned.

Nevertheless the basics of community capacity building and engagement accompanied by planning and delivery to meet locally identified needs within a national policy framework are all there.

These three examples are illustrative of just some of the different models that the Commonwealth is using tackle difficult social policy and other challenges where working with and through the community is at a premium.

The extent of innovation is much greater than many appreciate. Of course with all innovation come risks but also opportunities to learn. And right now there is plenty of learning going on by governments and communities.

3. <u>Questions and challenges for us in working with communities</u>

Now let me turn to some questions and challenges around the future of working with communities. Three are currently provoking some interesting debate and discussion within the sector.

Firstly, how can we further strengthen the community sector and assist community organisations to maximise the positive outcomes from their efforts?

- At the federal government level, we acknowledge that we have not yet successfully reduced the administrative load on community organisations that goes with grants or other types of government funding.

- FaCSIA has been working on a Red Tape Reduction project. We have consulted widely with the sector in developing options to help the sector to be more efficient and effective, and to spend more time on clients and less time on filling out forms.

- We want to streamline the administration that organisations and communities have to bear, while maintaining standards of accountability that the public expects of governments

- This is an area we are strongly focused on at the moment and we are looking forward to making a real difference.

- The Prime Minister's Community Business Partnership has also initiated a number of programs aimed at strengthening the community sector.

- Workplace Giving Australia aims to increase the level of donations to the non-profit sector through payroll giving. If just 10% of the Australian workforce donated $5 per week an additional $250 million would flow to the not for profit sector each year. The Partnership has also recently commissioned work to develop a toolkit for small and medium enterprises to assist them to form community business partnerships. We are also aware we need to do further work on small and medium non-profit organisations accessing this potential income stream.

- We are continuing to support the work of Non-profit Australia with its role in building the capacity of the non-profit sector. In particular this includes increasing the capabilities of non-profit leadership teams and board members, improving the financial capacity of the sector and further stimulating collaboration.

- We have also been thinking about the possibilities of different business models for organisations in the community sector, including social enterprises and the options for social venture capital funding. The department is investigating a number of models for supporting a venture capital fund including a specific Social Venture Community Foundation.

- Finally to help us take a closer look at issues across the sector, FaCSIA has, for the first time, set up a Community Sector Support Team. This team will look broadly at support and development strategies for the sector and will work with the sector to address some of the challenges it faces.

Secondly, how do we know that we are doing good work and that we are achieving positive outcomes for the communities in which we work?

This is a critical issue. To some it may be self evident that good outcomes are being achieved through community based

interventions. But measuring the impact of social policy in any domain is notoriously problematic

FACSIA has a responsibility to understand the results of the interventions it funds. Our Ministers, the Government and the Parliament have high and legitimate expectations in this regard.

Indeed all organisations be they government, business or community have similar obligations to those that fund them.

With strong encouragement from Minister Brough FACSIA has formally identified as one of our priority business results for 2006/2007 the following "Measurable improvement of the impact in communities of our community based programs and interventions"

A prerequisite of success will be identifying how impact is to be measured.

This is no easy task. It is one that will require rigour. As part of this FaCSIA is looking closely at measures of community strength and resilience that have been developed recently, and we are thinking through what it means to have independent, objective measures of community interventions.

In the end we're looking at ensuring we're getting the best value for the community for the money that is spent, and at how we might be able to structure our programs and funding options differently to get better outcomes for individuals, families and communities.

Lastly, how can we promote active community involvement and help to keep individuals motivated and involved? Or, to refer back to our conference theme, how can we increase the 'power of one' for the benefit of all?

The Australian Government plays an important role here by deliberately and actively supporting volunteering. Examples of action in this field are the Volunteering Management Programme

and the Volunteer Small Equipment Grants, or VSEG, programme.

And I'll just make a brief plug here for VSEG. In early June 2006, the Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Hon Mal Brough MP announced funding of $3 million for the 2006 Volunteer Small Equipment Grants programme. We have has just advertised for applications from community organisations to help them purchase small equipment items that will make the work of the volunteers easier, safer and/or more enjoyable.

We also know that business has great potential to contribute to the community, including through philanthropic activities, support for corporate volunteering, opportunities for skills transfer from the corporate to the community sectors, and the development of mutually beneficial partnerships with a focus on delivering benefits for the community.

The Prime Minister's Awards for Excellence in Community Business Partnerships has showcased some outstanding examples of community business collaboration.

Among recent Award winners is an inspiring partnership between a small recruitment company with less than 10 staff which has worked with a homeless service. Through the partnership, the service has been able to expand its counselling and support services and minimise administrative costs. The recruitment company has helped young people develop their interview skills and assisted with a range of development programs.

We've seen the results of social isolation for individuals and for communities of interest, and the consequent fragmentation and even violence that can result from this isolation. We need to find ways to ensure people from all kinds of backgrounds have the opportunity to participate in the wider Australian community and that this activity is encouraging, affirming, and even ennobling.

Conclusion

Looking to the future is by definition a less certain pastime than contemplation of the past.

And I am not going to make any brave predictions here.

But I don't see the pace of social change slowing.

For Governments I believe this will demand continuing innovation in social programs and policies generally.

And it will put a premium on the agility of those interventions in the face of the highly differentiated needs of Australian individuals, families and communities.

Citizens and governments alike will expect more not less integration of effort within and between governments and between government, community and business.

And they will expect more of dealing with causes not symptoms over the life course of individuals and families

And they will expect to measure with much greater certainty the impacts of their actions precisely because this will inform the innovation so necessary to dealing with change.

All the best for the conference, FaCSIA staff will be here throughout to listen and learn from your ideas so that we do our job better.

We look forward to some stimulating dialogue over the next two days and to working with you all in 'Promoting the Power of Community'. I now officially open the Communities in Control Conference for 2006.