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Statement by the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional
Development and Local Government, the Hon Anthony Albanese, MP

Regional Development Australia

20 March 2008

This Government is committed to supporting Regional Australia.

Today I am announcing one of the Australian Government's initiatives to help drive economic prosperity in regional Australia and deliver on our commitments in the lead-up to the election.

One of our key regional election commitments was that Area Consultative Committees (ACCs) would provide the basis for the creation of Regional Development Australia (RDA).

Consistent with this commitment, today the Government announces that ACCs will transition to become local Regional Development Australia committees. As a first step, the ACC Chairs' Reference Group will become the RDA Interim Board until 31 December 2008.

Parliamentary Secretary, Gary Gray and I will convene a meeting with the Interim Board to discuss the transition of the ACC network to RDA, including the development of a Charter for Regional Development Australia and its proposed responsibilities. We shall also want to discuss with the Interim Board ways of ensuring closer ties with the local government sector. Regional Australia's communities and economy will benefit from a closer relationship between the new RDA and the local government sector.

The ACC Network was established by the previous Labor Government in 1994 under the Employment Services Act 1994. ACCs originally provided advice and generated support for labour market programs. Over time their role has evolved and recently their primary role has been to promote, identify projects and assist in the development of applications for the Regional Partnerships program.

There are 54 ACCs across Australia, which are not-for-profit, community-based organisations. Hundreds of Australians give their time to serve their communities as members of ACCs. Only the Chairs and their Deputies are appointed by the Government. Committee members are volunteers from all walks of life: business people, farmers, retirees, local government representatives, educators. They are united by their commitment to their local communities. They are a valuable source of local knowledge and advice for the Government. Some have been more effective than others and there is a need to recognise that Regional Development requires a reform of existing advisory structures.

The new RDA network will build on the success of its predecessor, but will take on a broader role to develop strategic input into national programs to improve the coordination of regional development initiatives and ensure that there is effective engagement with local communities. The Rudd Government is committed to listening to communities and the RDAs will assist that process.

The actual roles and responsibilities of Regional Development Australia will reflect our consultations. I am confident that the Interim Board will have ideas to present to the Government. The role of individual RDAs and the network as a whole could provide advice to government on a range of issues, including:

- Advise on community infrastructure
- Advise on regional issues and opportunities
- Advise on local implementation of specific Commonwealth initiatives in the region, as requested
- Facilitate economic development planning and investment attraction
- Identify any unique local attributes that would favour the development of new and innovative industries
- Promote initiatives to retain and expand skills and local businesses and industries
- Disseminate information about Commonwealth programs
- Undertake ad hoc consultations on behalf of Federal agencies where a regional network is required
- Advise on adequacy of service delivery in regions
- Build networks and relationships with other levels of government and key stakeholders in the region
- Advise government on social inclusion issues
- Advise on ways to improve the efficiency, effectiveness and coordination of Commonwealth regional initiatives.

I am looking forward to working with Regional Development Australia and receiving valuable advice on the development needs of regional Australia.

To conclude, this Government's new vision for Regional Australia is based on building partnerships to ensure the Government is responsive to local priorities and needs, but is underpinned by major new investments in the areas of infrastructure, broadband, housing, health care, education, skills development, innovation and water.

The message to regional communities is clear – this Government will work with you to make your solutions work. We will bring fresh ideas and a new approach which will harness the potential of our regions and develop them for a better future.

Today's announcement relating to the establishment of Regional Development Australia is the first in a number of initiatives of the Rudd Labor Government.

We will strengthen and invest in the future of Regional Australia.

ENDS.