




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR TOOHEY

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PRIVATE MEMBER'S STATEMENT

Community Development Grants Program

 **Mr RUSSO** (Toohey—ALP) (2.15 pm): At the last sittings in June I spoke briefly about the federal coalition's Community Development Grants Program. A whopping 75 per cent of grants provided under this program in 2019 was rolled out to coalition held or desired seats across Australia. On 15 June this year the Australian Senate agreed to an order requiring the minister for infrastructure, regional development and cities to table documents relating to this program. It took longer than the two days specified under the order, and when it was finally responded to on 26 June it was not really any surprise that in the response the minister claimed he could not provide the details requested due to public interest immunity to protect the privacy of individuals and organisations or because of commercial confidentiality.

I want to make it perfectly clear: I fully support funding our community organisations. Community organisations are the backbone of our communities. These organisations are mostly run by volunteers who give gladly of their time to help kids through sporting and other activities, or maybe by helping seniors by arranging social activities such as ballroom dancing, bridge or other activities, or maybe the community organisations are, like the wonderful Country Women's Association. The one thing that these community focused groups have in common is that they are doing the best for their communities.

The Commonwealth development grants scheme is not about community but about blatant misuse of taxpayers' money. It is also money given to what are clearly business enterprises under the guise of developing communities. How is it a fair and just process to have taxpayers' money targeted towards LNP or coalition seats at the expense of needy and deserving community organisations? Clearly, this is just another way to manipulate voters.

The coalition government's largesse towards its own held seats is at a cost. The cost is further cuts to our ABC. By the way, the ABC has been running since 1932. Who knows what the cost is under COVID-19, with such a dramatic increase in the number of people needing help? The cost is cutting public sector regional jobs and closing regional offices. The cost is the implementation of appalling programs that suit their ideological focus such as Robodebt, which we now know was illegal. The focus of this coalition federal government remains very much on business rather than workers and definitely not on Australia's most vulnerable people. This is not the Australia of the Labor Party. Whilst the Palaszczuk Labor government is delivering jobs in industries as part of Queensland's COVID-19 recovery plan, where is the federal government? It is missing in action.