

Attention Julie Toth

To the Productivity Commission

Issues for discussion when the Commission hears submissions in Brisbane on May 28 concerning the performance of the DDA.

1.

Bolster the Policy Unit:

HREOC has a policy unit. It comprises a staff of 5, which includes the Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner. Given that of the 5, only 3 are able to fully commit to the process of providing information on policy and developing policy on behalf of the nation, this is patently inadequate and requires proper funding.

2.

The benefits of developing DDA Standards:

There is no question that their development is beneficial to the nation. This Association supported the development of the DDA Advisory Notes on Access to Premises and then each of the Standards as they evolved. The Transport Standard for example, will have an enormous impact in giving people an independent lifestyle and allowing them to access accommodation, education, employment, recreation; access to retail, government and medical services – and the ability to connect to multiple forms of accessible transport as part of one total journey. For those unable to afford private transport, it will free them from being a prisoner in a narrow world.

However, the Federal Government has performed poorly given the Transport Standard was available in 1996 but not enacted for several years. This gives rise to cynicism on the part of the Electorate and leads to concern about whether the government will treat the Access to Premises Standard in the same way.

3.

The Education Standard RIS process:

The process for dealing with the RIS was viewed with dismay. In Queensland, consumers were given less than a week's notification to develop and to respond to the single meeting opportunity provided by the RIS roadshow. This was viewed as setting up the consultation to fail.

4.

Informing Australians about the DDA:

Australians are obliged to abide by the DDA but government, business and community at all levels is mostly unable to answer the Question: what is it that I am supposed to do? This is an issue of resources at HREOC and needs to be dealt with because the spread of quality communication will be the single most effective way to develop community perception and participation.

5.

Acknowledge the value of the Building Access Policy Committee:

This group is undertaking one of most significant processes in the history of Australia. It is a difficult job but the value of the task must be recognised and supported as they progress to develop an Access to Premises Standard for the Attorney-General to present to federal Parliament.

The result of their work will be to show Australia the reality of an environment with seamless connections. To explain. The way to maximise the performance of buildings and precincts is to create seamless connections. In this way, the community is connected to goods, services and information, and the investment in buildings, places and infrastructure is maximised.

Moreover, there is increasing evidence that accessible buildings and precincts appreciate faster, offer more secure rentals, reduce public liability and maintenance costs.

In dealing with these issues there is a fundamental tenant:

In order to maximise the community's participation in anything, first you must maximise their access to it.

An Accessible Australia offers the benefits of raising the bar for social justice and the economy, the latter because Australia will have maximised the performance of its buildings, infrastructure, precincts, assets, services, information – and as a consequence, its markets, sales and profits.

I look forward to the opportunity for discussion with the Commission.

Yours sincerely,

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