

# Labor



**Julie Collins MP**  
Federal Member for Franklin

Dear Auditor-General,

Thank you for your correspondence dated 30 March 2021 regarding the range of work the Australian National Audit Office (ANOA) undertakes within the Agriculture, Water, and the Environment (AWE) portfolio specifically in relation to strategic risk.

Having reflected on the information provided to me in your correspondence I wish to raise some points of concern around some grants that have been approved in the AWE portfolio which you may consider worthy of audit.

Firstly, there were grants approved in the AWE portfolio for the period 22 September 2020 to 1 March 2021 under the Biodiversity Conservation Division's program 1.1 Sustainable Management of Natural Resources and the Environment. The list of successful recipients and the approver were tabled in the Senate on 10 March 2021.

Having analysed the tabled list there appear to be an over representation of successful grant recipients in Liberal held and marginal electorates. For example, the Biodiversity Conservation Division Grants show the Minister for Agriculture, Drought and Emergency Management approved a total of 86 grants – of these 50 were located in Liberal National held electorates, 19 in marginal held electorates and 4 located in ALP held electorates. In terms of funding, Liberal National Party and Marginal electorates received \$5,804,430 while in Labor held seats the funding was \$324,225. Within these grants it is also difficult to establish if there were any guidelines used for decision making and if funding decisions were documented and in accordance with the guidelines.

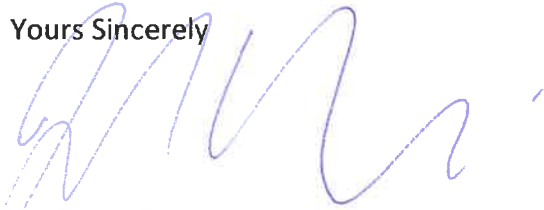
Secondly, the Regional Agricultural Show Development grants completed in May 2020 have similarities to those identified above. For example, the electorate of Maranoa received \$3,311,808 or approximately 46% of all Queensland funding. Further analysis shows the electorate in Maranoa received more funding than each of the states of Victoria, Western Australia, South Australia, Tasmania and approximately 77% of all New South Wales funding. Grants in the electorate of Maranoa also averaged \$236,557 in funding which is approximately \$82,037 or 53% more funding than the other 108 projects across Australia which on the face of it seem disproportionately applied and may warrant closer examination.

Notwithstanding that regional seats have tended to be Liberal Coalition held seats the disproportionate allocation of funding within a regional program such as the Regional Agricultural Show Development grants as listed above appears cause for deeper analysis.

I believe there is a strong case for further work that would complement the ANAO's previous audit undertakings in ensuring that *'decision making is consistent with policy and legislative frameworks, documented and appropriate quality assurance frameworks are applied'* and if appropriate assessment criteria were in place and adhered to in order to best support value for money grants.

I thank you for identifying the strategic risks in grants administration within the AWE portfolio through the audit focus of the ANOA and ask you to consider the above programs for audit as part of this continuing work.

Yours Sincerely



**Julie Collins MP**  
Shadow Minister for Agriculture  
Federal Member for Franklin

20 April 2021