

Nexia Australia is providing ongoing probity advisory services to the Department of Regional NSW (DRNSW) in respect to the Bushfire Local Economic Recovery (BLER) Fund. This summary of our Interim Probity Report provides an outline of our observations and findings in respect to the assessment of the BLER Fund Open Round (Stage 2).

Objective

The involvement of an independent probity advisor assists in ensuring that the assessment process was conducted in accordance with the probity principals of:

- fairness and integrity
- identification and management of conflicts of interest
- consistency and transparency of process
- appropriate security and confidentiality arrangements

The BLER Fund Probity Plan provides that the Probity Advisor's responsibilities are to:

- provide advice to resolve any probity issues that arise at any stage of the BLER Fund
- approve key BLER Fund program documents
- provide advice to any Assessment Panel meetings
- provide advice in relation to probity risks and risk management strategies
- support the implementation of the BLER Fund Probity Plan
- review and provide guidance on the delivery of the BLER Fund

Observations and Findings

- Program Documentation

We reviewed all program documentation and found that they were prepared and approved in accordance with appropriate probity principals and were consistent with the Program Guidelines. All suggested amendments and queries raised from our review of the documentation were appropriately actioned by DRNSW.

- Probity Advice

DRNSW have consulted with us to resolve various probity matters and all probity advice provided was appropriately actioned.

- Managing Conflicts of Interest

The BLER Fund Probity Plan requires all individuals involved in the assessment or approval of BLER Fund projects in any capacity to make a full declaration of their pecuniary interest or any other association, either real or perceived, which may impinge on their capacity to conduct their duties. We are satisfied that an appropriate process for the identification and management of conflicts of interest has been implemented and adhered to in accordance with the Probity Plan.

- Assessment Process

The assessment process was outlined in the Program Guidelines and detailed in the Assessment Framework. The assessment process was supported by formally documented Principals for Assessment. Assessment Panel meetings were held on 12, 13 and 14 May 2021, and were attended by the Probity Advisor. We are satisfied that the assessment process was conducted in accordance with the requirements of the Program Guidelines, Assessment Framework, and Principals for Assessment, and all applications were dealt with fairly and consistently.

Conclusion

Based on our observations and findings, we are satisfied that the Probity Plan has been effectively implemented and the assessment process conducted in accordance with the BLER Fund Probity Principals, Program Guidelines and Assessment Framework. No departures from the BLER Fund Probity Plan were noted.

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