**Dr Martin, La Trobe**

From working in regional and rural research in Victoria over the last decade I believe there are a number of axioms that should inform regional policy.

They are:

1. **Regions are diverse.** Universal Statewide prescriptions are hit and miss. Work with regions to define their employment needs.
2. **Regional employment is a function of the success of state and national economies.** These economies are highly variable at any point in time and over time. Encourage a broad-based diverse regional economy.
3. **Skills enhancement must be demand-side driven.** Training for the sake of it is a waste of time for all involved. Enhance knowledge and skills through industries with education and training providers in partnership.
4. **Regional employment is influenced by many factors not always related to economic success.** Business owners make employment choices based on a range of factors, for example employment rules and regulations. Work with business owners to understand their aspirations and needs.
5. **Regional growth and employment are not always correlated**. Regional GDP can be strong in a region with relatively high unemployment. Develop employment initiatives that engage long-term unemployed in community development endeavours.
6. **Investors from outside of a region make choices much like investors in capital cities.** If local owners sell don’t be surprised if external investors do a slash and burn. Encourage local investment options (for example, community banks).
7. **Government’s role in export development is questionable.** Regional businesses have shown themselves to be adept at finding their niche. Showcase local export development initiatives.
8. **Businesses learn from each other.** Show off those who succeed to those who aspire to succeed. Celebrate success. via regional events such as annual shows etc.
9. **Serendipity is a major catalyst for change.** Create the context for this to happen. Infrastructure matters: transport, health, education and training, communications should be top priorities.
10. **Strategic planning processes should be focused on the conversation**. Plans will change. Develop strategic thinking processes across communities.

The current grants-based approach has become too comfortable for both conservative and Labor governments. Same pork, just different barrels. We need a radical change.

Grant funding is important but not in isolation from the ten strategies I have suggested above.

If the State Government is to make a difference across regional communities it needs to be more engaged with people in these places. The current RDV ‘post office’ approach for managing grant applications is selling our very competent officials short. They need to be more involved.