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BELMONT

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Blow for businesses

By **MICHAEL FERRANTE**

THE Belmont Small Business Centre may be forced to close down after a decision by the State Government-run Small Business Development Corporation (SBDC) to redirect funding to WA regional centres.

The corporation announced on Wednesday last week that it would no longer fund the Belmont centre because others in WA were more deserving of financial support.

The decision leaves questions over its future, according to CEO Carol Hanlon.

"I am shocked by the decision. We were singled out... it's ludicrous they're putting at risk what we've achieved in Belmont to

prop up centres under (financial) stress.

"They are penalising us for our success."

The Belmont SBC is part of a statewide network that offers support services, advice, referrals and programs to help fledgling businesses get off the ground, and established businesses to grow.

The Belmont centre runs about 200 workshops a year, as well as programs to support the textile, clothing and footwear industry throughout WA.

Funding for their program is administered through the SBDC. Its three-year, \$96,000-a-year deal with Belmont SBC was supposed to run until June, 2010.

The centre also receives \$250,000 a year

from the Federal Government under a separate funding agreement. But Ms Hanlon said this agreement was conditional on continued support from the State Government, so it was now in danger of being terminated.

In a statement last Wednesday, the SBDC said a review of operations had concluded that the corporation could more efficiently provide services directly to small businesses in the City of Belmont, given its close proximity to the corporation's central business district office.

SBDC managing director Stephen Moir said the decision to reallocate the money to regional centres was the "best value-for-money option".

"In this current environment we have to look at funding priorities," Mr Moir said. "We want to ensure all small businesses in WA have access to a consistent level of small business advisory services, especially in this economic environment."

The City of Belmont said it needed time to consider the fallout from the decision, and would help to ensure businesses under its wing were not disadvantaged.

Belmont MLA Eric Ripper said the centre was a key part of Belmont's vibrant business culture. He was disturbed that existing funds would be spent elsewhere despite Belmont SBC being one of the most active and effective in the State.