

MSEAT Regional Leadership Meeting Notes 4pm Thursday 25 March 2021

Agenda

- RDA Murray Update
 - Building Better Regions Fund
 - Regions Rising RAI Summit
 - Dine & Discover.
- Member updates – please come prepared to discuss:
 - Housing (see attached image for reference)
 - Job Keeper /Job movement
 - External investment into the region
 - Jobs

RDA Murray Update

Edwina Hayes – RDA Murray:

- Welcomed the newcomers to MSEAT. Thank you from the Chair and Deputy Chair of RDA Murray, acknowledging the time and energy of those joining MSEAT. Noted that a range of federal government departments have commented on the quality of the regional intelligence briefings coming from our region and that this is due to the engagement of MSEAT members.
- BBRF5 – RDA Murray received 20 requests for letters of support, 18 of which were provided. The remaining 2 are being provided ongoing support to further develop their applications.
- RDA Murray attended the Regions Rising National Summit in Canberra. Noted that there is incredible energy from the government around regionalisation. This is a golden opportunity to capitalise on this and target Melbourne people who want to move to the Murray region. Credit was given to the Murray region regarding our leadership in inviting people to move to the region in the face of border closures. Hot topic at the summit was regional housing issues.
- Dine and Discover vouchers – more businesses are needed to register. E Hayes requested that members promote registrations to local businesses.
- Housing issues – Refer to attached map. RDA Murray notes that the data on the map appears to not be 100% accurate. There is an opportunity for the Murray region to ramp up residential housing approvals to match what is happening in VIC to take advantage of the movement of people from the Melbourne Metro region.
- End of Job Keeper payments – there is local anxiety around the scheme ending. RDA Murray will be meeting with local accountancy agencies to discuss what impacts they are seeing after the conclusion of the payments.
- Jobs – there are currently 1500+ online jobs advertisements in the Murray-Riverina Region. There is a push to bring workforce to the regions. Softwoods industry are short at least 150 FTE. Many industries are finding it difficult to fill positions.

Member Updates

Dan Brear – NSW Farmers:

- Working with the Softwood industry to ensure there are solid exclusions zones and protections in place so to we do not see a return to current conditions in 15 years' time.
- Some questions over Harvest labour. NSW is behind the 8-ball compared to others.
- Significant rate rises in Snowy Valleys Council region is of concern to members.
- In Coleambally, locals are feeling positive. There is little evidence of mice in that region. Looking to start seeding early.
- Further west, harvest is beginning, and the region is positive.
- Dine and Discover – noted that some businesses struggling to get their systems up and running.

John Elgin - BEC:

- Seeing a tonne of building activity and considerable interest into the region.
- Job Keeper is concern with several clients. Hearing rumours and some truth that people are not working right now because there is no incentive.
- Mental health - people do not know what is happening and this is causing problems.
- A lot of start-ups in the region, possibly due to digital democratisation. May be a good thing that will have benefit for our community.
- Hosted a Lucy Bloom event. It was very well received. Girls are becoming increasingly interested in starting their own business.
- Noted a few hiccups with Dine and Discover registrations.

Norm Brennan – Edward River Council:

- Agrees that the data on the housing map appears to be incorrect. Region has had minimal activity in development approvals for the last 2-3 years until last 6 months, with 3 new subdivisions approved. One of 9 lots and another with 21 lots, including 6 disabled homes. Seniors living project of 30+ houses.

Ray Davy – Balranald Shire Council:

- Jobs - farming services - in the next 12-18 months they need to place another 60-80 white collar staff. There is a requirement for housing for these staff. Working actively with them around the potential for increasing processing capacity in the shire. People are the biggest problem, so it is difficult to get \$80 mil of funding for production facilities.
- Significant demand in the social services sector. There is demand to build at least 100 houses in Balranald. How to incentivise private owners who are not motivated to develop their land? There is a lack of higher end housing and the cost of building is higher than market value.
- Mineral sands is ramping up and they are now significantly into construction phase. Iluka have moved into Euston exploration phase.
- Table Grape sector Euston - at risk of losing crop as result of not being able to get workforce in to maximise output. Need more people for everything, not enough beds to house them.

Glen Stewart – Robinvale:

- Significant housing issues - not enough existing housing stock. Struggling to get tenders for design and construction in the region.
- Up to 80 jobs coming into the region. Table grape growers are struggling to get workforce. Feels that regional areas have gone under the radar of the govt for 15 -20 years and now things are coming home to roost. Govt has announced \$55-60 mill worth of social housing planned but there is no workforce to build it.

Michael Pisasale - MIL:

- Currently working on 3 core focus areas - attracting water into the region, constructive solutions for basin plan threats and attracting funding into the region

Gerard Van Emmerik – Federation Council:

- Planning approvals in 20/21 is \$19.5mill year to date. This is already \$4mill above the total for the19/20 fin year. There is almost no housing left in Corowa. There is planning for a 355-lot subdivision but it likely to take time. 400 lot subdivision in progress for Mulwala - 10-year period for development. Significant plans for Howlong also.
- Industrial land – almost sold out in Corowa, interest high in Mulwala too.
- Seeing some local businesses expanding and smaller scale (30 employee) businesses moving from VIC - plastics, vertical farming. Some coming into the region are showing commitment to social enterprise and disability employment.
- Large employers are encountering issues with housing for workers coming into the region. e.g., Staunton need to accommodate 16 workers in the next month, and another 50 -70 more before the end of the year. They are looking at investing in accommodation houses - caravan parks etc to meet the need in the short term.
- Regional Tourism - is booked solid into Easter, good for now. Operators are unsure how it will continue after Easter.

Patrick Bourke - Federation Council:

- North of the shire - mice populations are a problem. There will be a lot of broadcast poisoning prior to seeding.
- Terrific season - past season was record. Great position for sowing this year.
- Many full-time jobs available on properties. Several young families coming in, but not enough people. Housing is a problem - Lots of opportunity for rentals.

Chris Bilkey - Murray River Shire:

- Terry Dodds - new CEO of Murray River Shire.
- Housing - up 40% in DA's year on year. 1st quarter is up on the previous quarter by same percentage. They have approved DAs for 800 housing lots. Many are already sold - mostly people coming into the area.
- Murray River Shire are struggling with is internal resources to manage increased level of DA applications. Building inspectors are finding it difficult to move over the border from NSW from VIC due to accreditation issues being prolonged and complicated. Lobbying state gov in VIC and NSW to simplify. DA processing issue has been bought into focus by the fact the \$25k govt grant has a challenging expiry date. MR are making applications to extend that period.

- Echuca Moama bridge - official finish date is June next year, but the contractors are significantly ahead and predicting completion by December 2021.
- Echuca has run out of zoned land for residential and industrial development. The Shire has purchased 30ha of land along the Cobb Highway for industrial development.
- Tourism - January was disaster but the bounce back has been phenomenal. Fully booked now.

Graeme Kruger - Rice Growers Assn:

- 450,000 tonnes forecasted for this crop. Sunrice has run out of rice to mill right now and have moved staff to other areas. Next harvest has started.
- Underuse of water - 375 gegalitres of underuse. Working with federal and state governments to address this. Some of the underuse is irrigator behaviours but some is response to the allocation system. Working with MDBA behind the scenes on their modelling.
- Vesting Review - Rice Industry is the first and last single desk in Australia. It depends on NSW Legislation and only applies in NSW. The review of this statutory requirement being maintained is regularly undertaken, most recently in 2016. RGA are engaging with independent and community stakeholders, explaining what it is, how it works and encouraging Councils, RAMJO and community to put in a submission. The more submissions received and the more the community have to say the better.

Robyn Ryan- Wentworth Council:

- Strategic planning for up to 1000 new housing lots in Buronga and Gol Gol. 880 are currently in progress. Minimal quality rental stock existing in the area and houses selling within 2 days of coming on the market. Lots of people from the Melbourne area buying in the region.
- Dareton Land Use Strategy is currently on public exhibition.
- Aerodrome - \$9.2 mil expansion.
- Murray Darling Association conference in May will be hosted by Wentworth council.

Marg Killalea - Greater Hume Shire:

- Lots of housing interest from metro markets and interstate industrial land demand is high. This is a great opportunity to grow.
- Greater Hume Shire is a regional activator. New community strategic plans are being developed as the new councillors arrive.
- Noted document from RAI Regions Rising Summit - "Regional Australia Inst - strengthening liability. A tool kit for rural and regional communities looking to grow".
- Industrial land – lots of interest for Jindera and Holbrook, all current stages have sold. GHS are working as hard as they can to fast-track subdivisions.
- Residential land – the region is dependent on agriculture for economic activity and output but is changing to a commuting based rural lifestyle community. Interest for subdivision around Holbrook and Culcairn.

Shane Sykes – Inland Rail:

- Assessing labour needs for southern NSW - housing shortages were a problem prior to COVID-19 movement, now even worse. Working with NSW govt to have detailed labour skills analysis completed.

- Inland Rail Conference will be held in May in Albury. A great chance to sell the region.

Chris Stern – Justin Clancy’s Office:

- Cross border issues – the Mutual Recognition Act has passed the NSW Parliament lower house today. This act will alleviate some of the cross-border issues on licencing businesses - RSA's, WWCC etc.
- Registrations for Dine and Discover – in the Albury area there are 30 food businesses registered but only 3 entertainment sites. Requested that MSEAT member promote registration.

Josh Bergamin - Helen Dalton’s office:

- A feeling of optimism in the Griffith region.
- Regional Events Acceleration grant - to attract big events \$20 mill. Encourages MSEAT members to discuss with Helen how it can help their regions.
- Labour shortages - Housing shortage makes it difficult to attract people into the region and retain them - teachers, nurses etc. How do we make it more attractive to get people to settled and stay in the region when they come?

Digby Jacobs – MDBA:

- Will be recruiting more people to Mildura and Griffith offices.
- Recent concern around Murray water quality - chemical load that hit Hume dam after fires – increased magnesium and iron in the water and dissolved O2 dropped. Meridian Energy assisted by boosting generation and will continue to partner MDBA in future.
- Season is looking ok. Hume at 47.7%. Hopefully, some relief for Menindee lakes ahead.

Mary Hoodless – RDA Murray:

- Thanked members for their feedback.
- Hearing that housing is a major challenge. Noted that it is an issue in Upper Murray too.
- Workforce issues in Upper Murray – Softwoods do not have workforce for planting.
- Childcare/ children’s services are also experiencing workforce issues.
- Seeing growth in the region but there are no services in place to support that growth.

ACTIONABLE COLLECTIVE PRIORITIES

Edwina - Provide feedback to Aus Gov on incorrect housing approvals data and opportunities and impacts from regionalisation

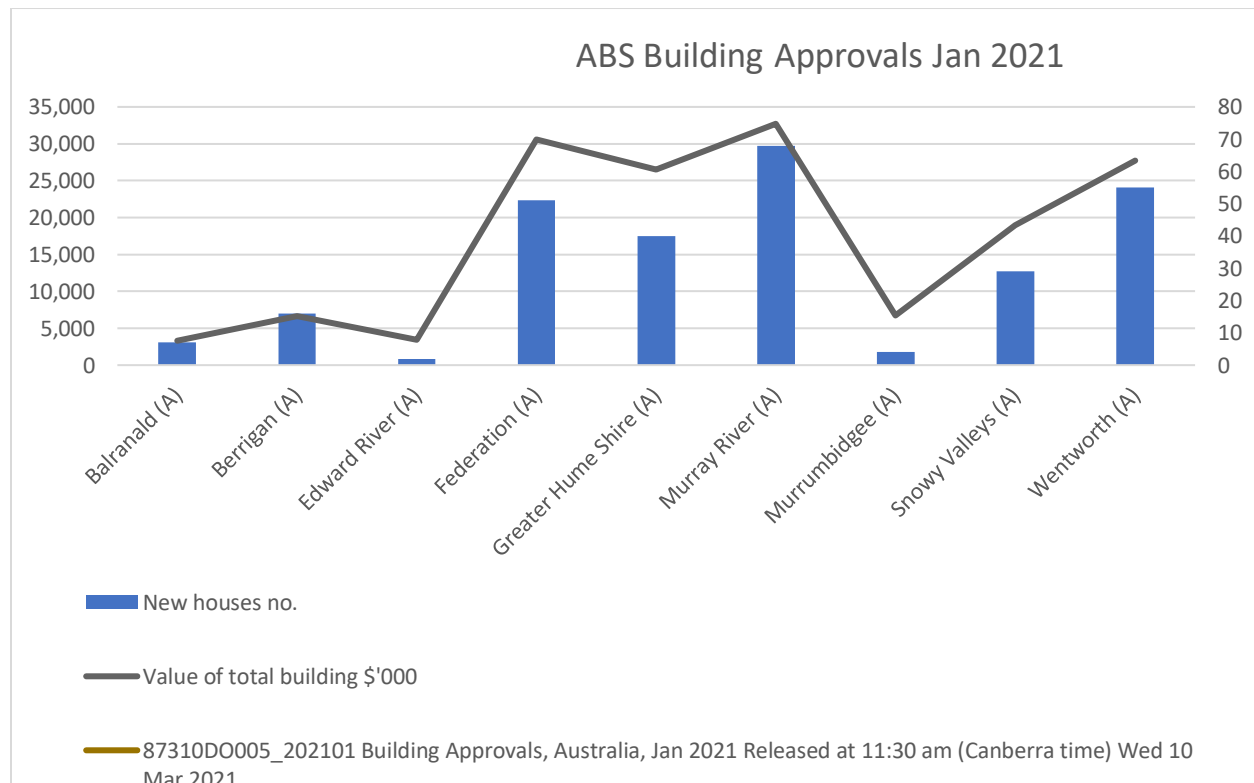
All – email Edwina as business and industrial land, housing availability and jobs vacancy patterns change.

Next Meeting Thursday 29 April 4pm via zoom

Please contact Edwina 0427267753 edwina.hayes@rdamurray.org.au for further clarification or information

Appendix 1. Information Shared from CHAT Record and follow up

Noting the discrepancies discussed about ABS Q2 2020 Housing Development Approvals data map circulated, Marg suggested using the data cube. Here is that data by LGA excluding Albury. Source in Legend/website: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/industry/building-and-construction/building-approvals-australia/latest-release>



CHAT Summary

Daniel Brear: Some questions over Harvest labour. NSW IS behind the 8 ball compared to others.

Marg Killalea: same site has data cube excel YTD NUMBERS for new dwellings, greater hume's figure is 40, which seems about right, (ie june 2020 to jan 2021)

Gerard Van Emmerik: From a Fed Council perspective, planning approvals in 20/21 is \$19.5mill year to date. This is already \$4mill above the total for the 19/20 fin year

Here are some Indices and information sources to watch over coming months

Rental Affordability

<https://www.sgsep.com.au/projects/rental-affordability-index>

Regional Internal Migration

<https://population.gov.au/data-and-forecasts/data-and-forecasts-data-release-prime-release-september-2020.html>

COVID 19 Cities to Regions Summary

<https://population.gov.au/docs/the-impacts-of-covid-on-migration-between-cities-and-regions.pdf>