

MSEAT Regional Leadership Meeting Notes

4pm Thursday 29 July 2021

Agenda

Resolving constraints to regionalisation– What can we do? What are you doing?

- COVID restriction impacts
- Workforce attraction and housing (<https://www.deese.gov.au/national-priority-fund>)
- Matching people to jobs - where are our biggest pressure points?
- Attract investment in the region, government grants, private equity,
- Digital Connectivity, (Regional Connectivity Program – NBNC Co-Investment Fund)
- What else should be on this list?

RDA Murray Update

Edwina Hayes – RDA Murray:

- Welcomed and introduced the new RDA Murray Board members
- DESE Local Jobs Program – Federal Government program for employment. EOIs are open for taskforce members. All are encouraged to put themselves forward
- National priority fund program - attached to the local jobs program - funding to address structural issues with employment in regions
- 6th August – RDA Murray will hold a webinar with DESE on National Priority Fund for interested parties.
- NSW tourism activations – RDA Murray and South West Arts to hold a discussion on 4th August to refresh a look at the concept of a Murray River walking trail.
- RDA Murray is working with NBNC on the Regional Connectivity Program.

Member Updates

Norm Brennan – Edward River Council

- Edward River Council are joining a COVID-19 meeting on 30 July of 5 councils along the border to find discussion points for Govt.
- Move of election date across the state is affecting the Western side of the state. Why can't those councils go ahead with elections?
- Digital connectivity – the level of connectivity away from main areas is very ordinary. Businesses outside of main areas need to pay tens of thousands of dollars to get connectivity. Deniliquin Mayor has cited they are only able to get one bar of mobile reception in the centre of town.

Andrew Cottrill – NBN Co 2

- 2021 NBNCo plan has 3 major components, including pushing fibre further into the network and a Regional Co-investment fund.
- Regional co-investment fund is \$300m for regional and rural areas to invest with state and local governments to upgrade regions. NBNCo are seeing opportunities to upgrade satellite areas to fixed wireless and upgrade from fixed wireless to FTTP.
- The steps towards this fund are:
 - Assess a community or region to see if viable
 - NBN provides an estimate to upgrade and commits an amount of funding towards it and remainder of the required funding is sought through government programs
- Sean O'Reilly, NBNCo, is an expert on telecomms tech and will focus on business opportunities to get the best technology at the most cost-effective price.
- In relation to lifting our regions Digital Inclusion Index, nbn has released a self-assessment tool we would like to have distributed broadly across the region. This tool allows individuals to learn more about their own digital capability, while showing them how to improve their skills. The survey results will be anonymized and shared with local councils and RDA's which will assist in building some education programs to support and enhance Digital Inclusion in our region. This link is specific to our region and will enable the sharing of the data with our regional stakeholders.
<https://surveyv8.humanlistening.com/survey/08578e09-5cc0-44ff-915d-72fad9e2b848?ambassador=RiverinaMurrayRegion>
- If this link can be shared across our networks, we can gather an important regional picture of where we are, and where we need to focus to lift our digital capability

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Glenn Stewart - Robinvale

- Matching jobs with people – the region is experiencing thin market issues. VIC govt is about announce relaunch of specialist skills strategy. Is there scope for NSW govt to join in with this?

John Elgin - BEC

- Businesses are hurting in the region. BEC are being inundated with requests for assistance.

- Connectivity is the major equaliser – there is a large gap in digital literacy in the region. All major providers need to step up and provide services as equally in the regions as they do in the city.
- Black summer bushfires recovery grants – BEC would like to help businesses access these grants. Please reach out to John if interested

Dan Brear – NSW Farmers

- Attended the Roundtable on Water in Griffith today
- NSW Farmers are about to release their paper on regionalisation.
- COVID-19 restrictions and impacts - the language coming out of Victoria is creating worry for NSW residents and how they will manage their business should further restrictions be imposed on the border.
- Grain Harvest Labour shortages a real concern. Bumper cropping across the eastern states. Agricultural movements from SEQLD all the way to Western Vic for contractors. Spoke to a contractor who will prioritise work in northern NSW on bigger jobs. Less risk if there are restrictions.

Marg O'Dwyer – Regions NSW

- Current worry about the VIC decisions on boarder regional classifications.
- Regional Jobs Creation Fund has just closed, and applications being reviewed
- Stronger Country Communities Round 5 has just been launched and will be announced in September. Includes tourism funding for events and infrastructure as well as infrastructure grants for larger, more iconic events.

Oliver McNulty – Balranald Shire Council and RDA Murray Board

- The current round of border controls is having the largest impact on the region yet since the beginning of COVID-19.
- No digital connectivity outside of towns in the Balrandald region
- Skills - starting a project based around Robinvale Euston to encourage industry to come to the region.

Anthony McFarlane – Business NSW

- The last few weeks BNSW have been supporting business through difficult times. JobSaver was expanded up to \$100,000 weekly cap for business with a revenue of up to \$250 mil.
- Seeing COVID-19 impact across members. Service NSW do allow for discretion around that test for 30% reduction in turnover test and comparison periods. BNSW are encouraging businesses to apply even if they are unsure if eligible. Book in a call with BNSW business concierge if they need help.
- BNSW Business Awards are going ahead in October.
- Cross border commissioner working with them on border bubble concept.
- Energy Connect - big infrastructure projects on their horizon.

Digby Jacobs - MDBA

- Catchments are looking healthy. Healthy rainfall outlooks.
- Next Monday MDBA and BoM are conducting a briefing session with councils and business on high flows and up and coming season.

Murray Scholz – Scholz Farming and RDA Murray Board

- There is ag industry concern around what will happen with freight with COVID-19 restrictions in place - particularly worry about fertiliser shipments being stopped.
- Impact of VIC border restrictions on health, with specialists unable to come up to the border region.
- HSC/education struggling.
- NBNCO - everyone he knows who are on satellite are dissatisfied. Most load on the system is in the evenings and causing lag. This causes issues in the administration of farming and ag business, which is primarily done in the evenings.

Jo Hewitt – Albury City Council

- Seeing strong investment leads, with high volumes of investment attraction in the region
- Shifting the focus in marketing campaigns to skills attraction.
- Upcoming activation of CBD promotion to promote longer dwell times and Shop Local Campaign is continuing.

Brett Millington – Mildura Regional Development

- Strong messaging around vaccinations is important.
- Workforce attraction and housing - every area is a priority area. The region is short of people and access to housing is exacerbating that issue. Builders have 2 year waiting lists.
- Matching People to Jobs – they are finding pressure points in Ag.
- Digital connectivity - challenges in NSW side to get connectivity.

John Harvie – Murray River Council

- Council is taking a lead in what's happening to our businesses. Working with MRT, they have identified that 10,000 jobs and \$1bil have been taken out of economy by COVID-19.
- Feedback from businesses is that they have gone through all their savings.
- Appointed Randall Killop (media) to put together an advocacy program to work closer with VIC and NSW govts to show where in the 294 days of restrictions the region has had (twice as much as Melbourne) that it wasn't required for regional areas.
- Strategies to try and rebuild and assess risk for further lockdowns.
- Campaign released today to let people know the plight of those in our region who have been impacted twice as much.
- Workforce and housing - lack of rental properties. 800 lots have been approved for building.
- Matching people to jobs - pressure points are there and tend to match country wide shortage of skills.
- Energy Connect - proposals going to state govt include windfarm projects worth \$2b.

Lynnette O'Reilly – Greater Hume Shire Council nd RDA Murray Board

- Key issues are housing affordability and availability, particularly for aged and social housing.

- Training opportunities in support of job attractions for ECE. Critical for our communities.
- Need more opportunities for people to upskill in grant writing.

Ben Foley – Hume Bank and RDA Murray Board

- Regional deal - keen to find out what is happening there.
- Just employed CFO after a year of trying to recruit.
- Noted that the list of issues discussed in MSEAT hasn't changed in his 10 years in the region.

Geoff Lowe – Ikon Suspension and RDA Murray Board

- Hearing a lot of issues that are consistent across the region.
- Cities do not understand the impact on our region.
- Growing inflation bubble that is lurking underneath in everything. Petrol, materials etc – the risk there globally.

Mary Hoodless - RDA Murray Board

- There will be no demerge of SVC or Gundagai Cootamundra. This decision will lead to more collaboration across the regions.
- Bushfire social healing and recovery across the region has been impacted by COVID-19 restrictions – postponement and cancellation of events
- COVID-19 is confusing for elderly and disabled – border restrictions are causing issues with access to medical and health and church services.
- Matching people to jobs is difficult in Ag. Will have an impact on the amazing season ahead.
- Digital connectivity - major issue in the eastern region is phone connection, tower replacements mean parts of the community have lost connectivity due to how they have been faced.

ACTIONABLE COLLECTIVE PRIORITIES

- Nil

Next Meeting Thursday 26 August 2021 4pm via zoom.

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