

MSEAT Regional Leadership Meeting Notes 4pm Thursday 29 April 2021

Agenda

- Update from RDA Murray
- Infrastructure Australia Priority List 2021 Consultation Workshop – 10 May 2021
- Member Updates – including non-identified evidence of skills shortages.

RDA Murray Update

Edwina Hayes – RDA Murray:

- Individual employers are reluctant to be identified as "desperate for labour" at the risk of triggering a rise in labour costs.
- RDA Murray wants to be able to provide real examples of businesses who are struggling to take to the standing committee and national media.
- RDA Murray would like to suggest the government relax the caps on international arrivals. This will make it easier for employers to bring people in and allow people who already have visas but are stuck overseas to come in Australia.
- Noted that CFMEU have given a disposition stating that there are no skilled labour shortages in their industry, therefore the Labour party are not supporting recommendations into the report.
- Riverina Murray region currently advertising 1745 job vacancies. This figure is up 10% month on month for professional online vacancies.
- RDA Murray completed a desktop analysis with Mark Horton of RAI of a snapshot in Walla Walla. RAI were unable to identify any vacancies in the region, but RDA Murray identified 55 vacancies. This is highlighting that many businesses do not advertise online and that the regional job vacancy rate is potentially much higher than quoted.
- Rice Vesting review – RDA Murray encourages MSEAT members to contribute to this review.
- Operationally for RDA Murray, the last month has mostly been focussed on workforce and housing issues.

Member Updates

Glen Stewart – Robinvale:

- Mineral Sands project in Swan Hill will create 500 jobs for setting up the plant and 300 full time jobs predicted. This is the potential for 300-500 skilled positions in the Shire.
- Recently met with the VIC Regional Development Minister. The Government needs advice and information about the number of jobs that are about to come into the region and the issues that the region will face. Glen feels that the government do not necessarily understand the unique situation for the border.
- Strong concern that in 18 months' time employers will be unable to find the workforce to match the growth in the region. Concerns also about support being there for labour. The region is facing a unique situation where they have so much activity but so little skill in the region.

Steve Donaghey – Master Builders:

- CFMEU are pushing the line that there is no labour shortage. This may be partially true because in the metro commercial sector there has been a slight downturn. Domestic housing industry is the opposite - builders cannot get contractors or materials. Domestic and Commercial sectors are very different from each other and the impacts are very different.
- Housing - concerned about the mental health in this industry after COVID-19 border shutdowns and then massive increase in turnover in the region. Seeing price increases in domestic construction e.g., trusses up 50%, Steel and concrete prices going up. These increases highlight how overactive the industry is now.

Dan Brear – NSW Farmers:

- Skilled labour shortage issues impact the mindset of deliverability. There is potential for Business Australia to amplify the issues around this this.
- Worthwhile supporting the Rice Vesting Review to ensure quality control and value of the Australian brand.
- 2016 submission excerpt from NFF: Under the Rice Marketing Act 1983, all rice produced in NSW is vested in the Rice Marketing Board of NSW. The current vesting period established by government proclamation will expire on 30 June 2017. The NFF supports a continuation of the current rice vesting arrangement. Vesting has proven to be in the best interests of rice farmers, continuously leading to higher-than-average prices for NSW-grown rice sold overseas. Rice vesting places no additional cost on domestic consumers since the domestic market for rice is deregulated and Australian producers face significant competition from imports.
- The NSW rice export industry has a relatively small size compared to international competitors. Through vesting, however, the NSW rice industry has been able to provide the business scale required to continuously invest in SunRice's product range, its' clean and green marketing, lower milling costs, and operational efficiencies. Moreover, the freight advantage through exporting rice.
- https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0004/1292836/Rice-Vesting-TOR-and-Information-Paper.pdf

Oliver McNulty – Balranald Shire Council:

- Major issues in their region are housing and skills shortage. There is a huge amount of potential in the region, but we will not reap any reward from that potential without available labour and housing.
- There are currently 5 vacancies at manager level in council. They have interviewed 27 people in the last month but not filled one position. Instead, they are now advertising in NZ to find engineers. Aged care hostels in the region cannot get staff.
- Council have advised Sussan Ley, MP about issues and she informed they are discussing this at the federal level to try and streamline the process.
- Regional population will decline if we cannot provide skills and housing.
- Housing values have dropped \$100,000 in 2 years.

Geoff Lowe – RDA Murray:

- Local employment agency told him that there were working with an organisation who had identified executives who were willing to move from metro to our region but could

not get accommodation. As a result, that organisation have contracted builders themselves to building housing for those executives.

- To make the change work, we must solve the all the problems at the same time.

Ray Davy – Balranald Shire Council:

- Almond farming industry are still desperate for a location for more processing capability but cannot get commitment for funding until they find labour.

Chris Stern – Justin Clancy MP:

- Noted that there are some discussions in both houses of parliament in the coming 2 weeks for NSW regarding skilled labour shortage and housing.
- Dine and discover vouchers - "discover" uptake is slow and they e more vendors.
- 2021 community building grants programs open until end May. More info at - www.nsw.gov.au/cbp

Michael Pisasale - MIL:

- MIL has 2 worries:
 - 1. Government fee likely to increase soon by 10%. This increase will be passed on to irrigators.
 - 2. Likely to be less water for production at the start of the season.
- Constructive solutions to these problems
 - 1. Need a proactive solution in the basin plan guidelines to give huge relief to the community.
 - 2. Working on getting water past the "choke". MIL is providing solutions for this.

Gary Rodda - MLLS:

- Agrees with what everyone has said about labour shortage. The sort of issues that others are seeing are also across professional NRM sector. More pressure is added on to that market each time a government recovery package comes out. The recovery packages work for the short-term but robs the industry of labour and skills in the long term as they move onto new recovery operations. Biosecurity officers and admin roles going unfilled at present.

Alex Anthony – MDBA and RDA Murray:

- MDBA are recruiting into regions quite successfully but have been taking people away from other organisations rather than bringing new people into the region.
- It is difficult to recruit into the Goondiwindi region - possibly because of drought.
- Current activities
 - Meeting with Murray River Strategy Group to talk about water issues in the southern NSW area.
 - Sir Angus Houston Listening tours to Sunraysia in May.
 - MDBA is hosting a Regional Water conference in Griffith in June to discuss the outcomes of water reform.

John Elgin - BEC:

- Notes there is increasing underemployment and casualisation in the workplace.
- Many clients, particularly women, are requesting assistance for start-ups due to job insecurity.

Yvette Myhill – Destination Riverina Murray:

- Currently focussed on reviewing the Destination Management Plan. The big focus of this plan is jobs.
- Experiencing issues with skilled position on hospitality sector. Dine and Discover has had an amazing response, but many venues do not have the staffing levels that they used to enable them to reap the benefits.
- Lack of chefs in the region. Bonuses of up to \$5000 are being offers for chefs to come and work in the region.
- Working holiday visa – would it be possible to extend this to jobs in the hospitality sector?
- Lack of housing for employees coming into the region means that companies are utilising tourism accommodation to fill that demand. This has a flow on effect that accommodation for visitors into the region is unavailable.

Phil Clements – Softwoods Working Group:

- The bushfires had impact on resource availability, particularly for home building timber.
- Hyne and AKD are looking at significant raw material reductions in the coming months yet there is huge demand.
- Longer term, the timber industry is keen to point out that it has not been destroyed but it will take some time to recover. The skilled labour required now will continue to be required into the future.
- Snowy 2 – there will be a general draw on skills of all sorts in the region once this commences. It will not be too long before they start looking for skilled plant operators and truck drivers.

ACTIONABLE COLLECTIVE PRIORITIES

- Raise the leadership bar by discussing the changes required in problem solving to address our melee of constraints. Historically, economic constraints have been prosecuted as linear and sequential. Currently we are witnessing multifaceted, interrelated constraints impacting our region eg
 - Master Builders finding it difficult to recruit Trades to build residential houses because there are limited residential houses.
 - Fabrication and manufacturers being able to discuss workforce shortages without provoking panic in their staff and wage increases

Next Meeting Thursday 27th May 4pm via zoom

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