



SEGRA

SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH
FOR REGIONAL AUSTRALIA

20-22 October 2015, Bathurst NSW

***SEGRA 2015* Communiqué**
Regional Australia
Raise Your Voice

National Conversation on Regional Policy

Key Issues, Observations, Messages and Steps towards Strategic Policy Actions

About *SEGRA*

Sustainable Economic Growth for Regional Australia (***SEGRA***) was established in 1997.

SEGRA's vision is to promote regions and regional issues and to help empower people in regions to define and control their own futures. ***SEGRA*** advocates that we can secure a sustainable future for rural, remote and regional Australia through collaborative multi-layered and interconnected responses to issues, challenges and opportunities.



The material in this paper was prepared by Adjunct Associate Professor Peter Waterman and Kate Charters, ***SEGRA*** National Steering Committee.

SEGRA at Charles Sturt University in Bathurst NSW, 20 - 22 October 2015



With a theme of '*Leading and Growing Sustainable Regions*,' ***SEGRA 2015*** encompassed action agendas for regional environments, productive landscapes, attracting investment, emerging industries, human capital, export and trade - and the policy settings needed to ensure a continuing role for regions in the national agenda. Delegates embraced this opportunity to meet with others who shared a commitment to the advancement and sustainability of regional Australia by participating in ***SEGRA***.

SEGRA 2015 began with overviews of: first, Australia's economic outlook; and second, the regional landscape through the 'Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists' blueprint for a healthy environment and a productive economy. Together, these stimulating presentations set the scene for a 'National Conversation on Regional Policy' that encompassed a range of perspectives from natural asset maintenance and conservation, banking and investment, regional leadership, and fostering and operating business enterprises. In turn, this led into an in-depth examination of leadership and localism through focusing questions such as: what does it mean and how is it evidenced? And what do we really need?

Interactive participation was maximised at **SEGRA 2015** through a combination of: pre conference workshops; spotlight and challenge sessions; and post conference workshops and round tables. Of particular importance was using this structure to build up focused themes (e.g. the Murray Darling Basin and collaborative investment) from initial discussions to commitment and to commercial arrangements. Theming also incorporated **SEGRA** challenge issues for 2015-2016.



Collectively, these program elements established an atmosphere conducive to in-depth discussion and evaluation that highlighted issues and identified opportunities to be taken forward for action. This has included demonstrating how to align the design and delivery of viable projects that are needed to meet policy intent, with investor projections and community needs and expectations. Most importantly, this approach has enabled an 'action framework' to be developed that will be reported on at **SEGRA 2016**.

The hypothetical, *Optimising the Natural and Human Resources through the Lens of the Murray Darling Basin*, provided a wide range of practical insights into the scope of issues that need to be addressed by public and private sector interests in furthering the Northern Australia development agenda. The clear take home message was: *Learn from analogues and practical experience with similar project scenarios encompassing land use planning and equivalent natural and human resources management situations.*

Applying the lessons of physical and human geography, history, economics and social demography of space and place from the Murray Darling Basin to other basin and catchment scale regions is a worthwhile challenge. Understanding the way in which these variables can affect the viability of industries and communities is an essential ingredient for assessing the delivery of sustainable regional development. Opportunities abound in Northern Australia but they need careful analysis in the context of projected expectations and outcomes that have been honed by real world experience.

The Murray Darling Basin has particular characteristics but it can be used as a lens through which to view development dreams and intentions for other parts of regional Australia.

Regional best practice was highlighted through presentations and interactive sessions covering: success stories; building resilience; sustainability projects and technologies; infrastructure planning and provision; developing and delivering programs and fundable projects; regional production and conservation landscapes; building capacity; analysing the successes of regional businesses; regional education and employment opportunities; and working with small to medium sized enterprises (SMEs).

Innovation and SME performance provided an opportunity to focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander entrepreneurial leadership and ways of determining the factors influencing the success of private and community owned Indigenous business across rural and remote regions and urban and peri-urban Australia.

There was a strong sense of urgency around the need to transition regional Australia into the new economy. Across the conference there were a number of presentations and discussions around the opportunities for collaborative investment strategies in catalyst public infrastructure at the 'place' level. This involved consideration of the scale and footprint of catalyst infrastructure (and related supply chain issues) as well as the mechanisms for involving social investors - in ways that were compliant and transparent. The importance of independent third parties in managing collaborative investment emerged as a critical element.

Regionally relevant education and employment opportunities had a specific focus on the vocational education and training (VET) sector with a resultant strident call to deliver programs that address identified regional needs. And this included looking to how to anticipate education and training needs for jobs in innovative industries and businesses that are still to be defined.

Professional development in the field of sustainable regional development also drew considerable attention. Specifically, concerns were raised over the decline in the number of programs and courses being offered by tertiary institutions and the impact that this was having on capacity and capability of the new generation of practitioners to respond to the emerging challenges being faced in regional Australia. A call was made for a collaborative inter-institutional response to meet this professional development need.



As guest speaker at the Conference Dinner, the Hon. Warren Truss MP, Deputy Prime Minister of Australia, strongly positioned the role of **SEGRA** when he said:

“Apart from being one of the most important regional conferences on the annual calendar, I have been continually impressed with the wide-ranging dialogue and the ‘can-do’ attitude that comes through in the presentations. This year’s agenda contains some regional issues that aren’t so often addressed—such as skills shortages, regional migration and local industrial performance. Of course, water and the Murray Darling Basin is a central issue as it should be.”

*In thinking about this year's theme — Leading and Growing Sustainable Regions — **SEGRA**'s goals and the Coalition Government's goals are the same. We are both intent on creating economically, socially and environmentally sustainable Australian regions."*

The Deputy Prime Minister illustrated this position by amplifying the government's policy commitments and actions with regard to: building sustainable regions; revised arrangements for RDAs; implementing the *National Stronger Regions Fund* and alignment with the advisory role of RDAs; regional infrastructure; and Northern Australia.



In concluding, the Deputy Prime Minister said:

"Let me wrap up by saying there are enormous demands on the horizon for our national infrastructure in the 21st century. And that these demands will put the spotlight on regional Australia, meaning there is both an exciting future and many challenges ahead.

The Coalition Government understands its leadership role — that is to put in place the integrated policies and programmes that will create sustainable regions for that future. Leadership also requires the capacity to listen.

SEGRA has a strong voice.

The Government is listening."

Key Messages from **SEGRA** 2015 that need to be heard

SEGRA 2015 yielded a suite of key issues, observations and messages that can be synthesised under three themes.

1. Regions as places for people:

- The importance of 'place' in the perceptions and, realities of regional Australia
- Planning for regional landscapes as sites of the interplay of biophysical, social, economic, and cultural attributes of the environment and the need to integrate them adaptively
- Maximising the opportunities of the Murray Darling Basin Plan
- Facilitating network activation and local leadership as change agents

2. Regions as places for peoples' endeavours:

- Ensuring governance alignment, compliance and collaboration within and between jurisdictions as key stones of sustainable regional development
- Developing regional collaborative investment platforms to identify, assess and finance commercially viable projects in peri-urban, rural and remote regions
- Adopting and ensuring access to technologies for the future: from personal devices and how they might provide transformative opportunities for regional health care to disinfecting water in rural and remote regions
- Providing education, training and professional development that is tailored for regional purposes

3. Regions as places for resource optimisation and commercial opportunities:

- Seeing carbon as the supporter of all life forms and the driver of a new generation of regional industrial and infrastructure innovation
- Ensuring secure and safe domestic water for rural and remote Australia as an essential part of the infrastructure for rural and remote regions
- Using the Murray Darling Basin (MDB) as a lens through which to view sustainable regional development in Northern Australia at basin and catchment region scales
- Northern Australia's land, water, ecosystem, renewable energy and mineral resources as catalysts for integrating and adapting new commercial enterprises to regional biophysical and socio-economic realities.
- Seizing the new funding opportunities for place-based catalyst public infrastructure in regional Australia keeping in mind that these will need independent models of management

Suggested steps towards priority strategic policy actions for:

1. Regions as places for people:

- Embedding 'place' in the perceptions, realities and importance of regional Australia
- Implementing regionally appropriate land use planning systems that emphasise 'place' and the inherent landscape and natural and human resources values

- Promoting and actioning a collaborative client-focused and needs-driven research, engagement, and communications agenda that is based on sustainable relationships between customers, investors and providers to support the implementation of the 'Basin Plan' from the 'bottom up'
- Capitalising on what leadership means and how it is evidenced and advocated for regional betterment
- Supporting the maintenance of a practitioner communications and information dissemination network focused on sustainable regional development
- Encouraging younger people from regional Australia to participate in the sustainable regional development conversation through scholarships to national conferences and local workshops or similar activities
- Augmenting gains from emerging demographic change cycles through migration and other policies to attract jobs and people to regional Australia

2. Regions as places for peoples endeavours:

- Fostering and enhancing greater professional and practitioner knowledge and practices of governance in the public and private sectors
- Raising professional and practitioner knowledge of inter and intra-governmental relations and constitutional complexity, impediments challenges being confronted in regional Australia
- Raising awareness of the transformative opportunities and socio-economic gains to be made through the adoption of personal devices and sustainability technologies
- Optimising strategically assessed place-based investable business cases to benefit regional enterprises and communities
- Funding the pre-feasibility and feasibility assessments of collaborative innovative development initiatives where statutory regional bodies, Local Governments and communities are unable to undertake these activities
- Demonstrating best practice management and the effectiveness of place-based collaborative investment in catalyst public infrastructure
- Enhancing regional infrastructure, particularly relating to freight and logistics by air and rail from regional hubs
- Furthering development of cultural and business connections with Asia through Free Trade Agreements (FTAs)
- Developing and implementing innovative and cost effective strategies to encourage younger people in regional Australia to participate in vocational education programs that are tailored to identified jobs and local needs
- Enriching needs driven regional education and training through a focus on vocational sector programs for new jobs in innovative industries and businesses
- Fostering professional development in the field of sustainable regional development through collaboratively delivered graduate and post graduate programs

3. Regions as places for resource optimisation and commercial opportunities:

- Appreciating the critical role of water on and in the landscape and how integrated water resources management can deliver productivity gains for wet and dry land production in regional Australia
- Establishing geotrails and fostering geotourism in rural and remote regions
- Acknowledging that the provision of adequate and safe domestic water supplies is a crucial issue in regional Australia that needs to be addressed through simplified national trans-jurisdictional public and private governance arrangements and innovative sustainability technologies
- Optimising Australia's inherent solar advantages by using graphite batteries in heat storage systems for the 24/7 generation of electricity using Concentrated Solar Power (CSP) in peri-urban, rural and remote regions
- Recognising the role carbon has in conserving and enhancing production landscapes, providing and storing renewable energy and underpinning 21st century chemical and graphite-based industries

SEGRA Challenge 2015-16

'Challenge Champions' and their supporters prepared cases and pitched for the following.



1. How might we respond to carbon in the real world?
2. How might we create diverse regional futures?
3. How might we build leadership for the future?
4. How might we deliver good governance in regional Australia by 2050?
5. How might we provide secure and safe water for rural and remote regions?
6. How might we develop startup/innovation ecosystems in regional Australia?

'How might we provide secure and safe water for rural and remote regions?' was the delegates' choice as one of the greatest challenges currently being faced in regional Australia. This pitch was championed by Etheridge Shire Council (ESC) from the Gulf-Savannah Region of Far North

Queensland.

Etheridge Shire Council based their pitch firmly on: the environment and population health risks that they are currently facing; and what they are doing to ensure that people have adequate safe domestic water. ESC contextualised their presentation on the contention, saying : *That if this challenge is not addressed as a matter of urgency, it may well become a serious impediment to*

attracting supporting the communities and populations that are essential for North Australia Development.

The judging panel chose ‘How might we develop startup/innovation ecosystems in regional Australia?’ as the **SEGRA** Challenge for 2015-16. An action format was presented by the challenge champions that had an Australia wide reach to public and private sector stakeholders alike.

Unlike previous challenges, the **SEGRA 2015-16 Challenge** will actively engage the ‘challenge teams’ for the next year up to **SEGRA 2016** in Albany, WA. All champions will report back to the 2016 conference on what they have achieved during the interim and at that time the Challenge prize will be awarded.

As structured, this builds on the successful outcomes of the challenges for 2013 and 2014. For the **SEGRA 2013** challenge, one positive measurable outcome has been the commitment to a research and communication collaboration between the Murray Darling Association, the **SEGRA** National Steering Committee and the Institute for Land Water and Society at Charles Sturt University. Initially, this initiative will focus on supporting the implementation of the ‘Basin Plan’ from the ‘bottom up.’

The pitch on remote towns, hubs and regions made by Etheridge Shire Council at **SEGRA 2014** was the delegate’s choice as the major challenge facing regional Australia. Over the period between the 2014 and 2015 conferences, Etheridge Shire Council worked rigorously to develop an integrated economic development strategy for the Shire. Secure and safe domestic water was but one of many challenges to arise out of this work. Etheridge Shire Council reported on their endeavours at **SEGRA 2015** and demonstrated what a small under-resourced local council can achieve with strong leadership, commitment and community support.

A further outcome of the 2013, 2014 and 2015 challenges is the ongoing participation of the Institute for Land, Water and Society at Charles Sturt University to addressing the identified challenges by offering to assist the challenge teams with their projects, if required.

SEGRA 2015 Conference proceedings

Conference proceedings are available at: <http://www.segra.com.au/segra15ConfProc/index.html>

Video recordings of a number of keynote and other speakers is available at:

<https://ecessprod.csu.edu.au:8443/ess/portal/section/08a1142a-549a-41e4-956b-81a2628b9484>

SEGRA 2016



SEGRA
SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH
FOR REGIONAL AUSTRALIA

**ALBANY &
GREAT SOUTHERN REGION
2016**

NATURALLY STRONGER REGIONS - REALISING THE POTENTIAL

26 - 28 October 2016

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