



OUR REGIONS RISING – POLICY HACK SUMMARY 2019

**A CALL FOR A NEW APPROACH TO
REGIONAL POLICY IN AUSTRALIA**



**REGIONAL
AUSTRALIA
INSTITUTE**

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INTRODUCTION

In April 2019, the Regional Australia Institute (RAI) convened the historic Regions Rising National Summit in Canberra. This summit brought together business, all levels of government and community leaders from across rural, regional and remote Australia to discuss the future of regional development.

As part of the agenda delegates were invited to participate in facilitated discussions called 'Policy Hacks'. At each policy hack session, participants workshopped solutions to one of four specific problems:

- **Regional Jobs:** What policy changes would encourage people to take up employment opportunities in regional Australia?
- **Population Strategy:** For regional Australia to play a stronger role in our national population strategy, what changes need to be made?
- **Regional Health:** What policy changes are needed to help regions capitalise on growth in the health industry?
- **Place-based Programs:** What needs to change for place-based policies to be implemented in regional Australia?

As a result of the hacks, the RAI is pleased to present this summary of outcomes of those sessions. The recommendations and policy solutions that follow come from a valuable source of collective-knowhow and expertise.

Throughout each session several common broad themes emerged which represent a call to government to build a new approach to regional development policy in Australia. Not surprisingly, they also resonated through the National Summit itself.

These themes include an acknowledgement of a need to shift the narrative about regional Australia so that regions are no longer framed as either areas of deficit or in opposition to the nation's capital cities, and a strong call for locally-led strategies to address regional challenges 'from the ground up'. Additionally, there were strong calls for policy makers to better connect to regions and for policy processes to better involve communities who have substantial influence on their own prosperity.

The key themes that emerged through the policy hack sessions include:

1. **Investing in 'soft' infrastructure – human capital and liveability;**
2. **Governments and regions working together;**
3. **Empowering regions through flexibility and place-based policy;** and
4. **Shifting the narrative.**

1. INVESTING IN 'SOFT' INFRASTRUCTURE – HUMAN CAPITAL AND LIVEABILITY

Regional leaders are calling for regional policy development to be more than the implementation of large infrastructure projects such as road and rail. Instead leaders want education and skills development of regional residents to be a priority. Regional Australia has jobs and the challenge ahead is filling these with trained skilled workers.

While people choose regional areas for economic and employment related reasons, other factors also influence these mobility decisions such as the 'liveability' of the location. Quality child-care, employment opportunities for spouses, and education for children, were all noted as central to ensuring those with the right skills to stay or move to the regions.

2. GOVERNMENTS AND REGIONS WORKING TOGETHER

Regions want to 'work with' governments - they don't want things 'done to' them. Local knowledge and expertise should be integrated into the policy-making cycle and locally-led solutions should be supported, especially in regards to employment, population programs and the delivery of healthcare.

Forging such a connection would mean that government would better understand how regions work, what their issues are, and why they need different policy approaches to our capital cities. Regional policy is starting to experiment with regional city and regional deals - which recognise and validate the priorities of regional leaders.

3. EMPOWERING REGIONS THROUGH FLEXIBILITY AND PLACE-BASED POLICY

Allowing flexibility in the way that policies are delivered would bring about better results across diverse regional and remote areas of the country. This requires a rebalancing away from the current emphasis on programs that seek to maximise economies of scale, towards recognising the importance in smaller regional communities of the value of economies of scope – where different services can be bundled together for more effective local impact. This reflects a shift in focus away from the blanket policies that often seek to ease the burden of administrative functions, towards the place itself, and towards the intended outcomes of the intervention.

Some specific ways to help shift this focus include establishing cross-border commissioners and extending regional deals. Regions need different approaches, especially where policies are designed to work in areas with large populations, while effective delivery is difficult to achieve where populations are small and dispersed.

4. SHIFTING THE NARRATIVE

When Australia's regions are strong and thriving, our nation is strong and thriving. Regional thought and community leaders are optimistic about life in regions, and about their future. The tired 'country/city' binary simply does not reflect the reality. Australia's regions are diverse, innovative and closely linked to urban and global marketplaces.

Regional leaders have called for a shift in the narrative of regional Australia in mainstream media and in places of centralised decision making. The successful development of regional Australia is tied to its story, and that is one where are our towns and regional cities represent places where new innovations, healthy families and successful careers are built.

POLICY HACK 2019 PARTICIPANTS

All 250 Policy Hack participants have been provided with a full copy of the results. To obtain a full copy of the 18 page document, please contact the RAI by emailing info@regionalaustralia.org.au or calling 02 6260 3733.

The RAI would like to acknowledge the contributions of attendees from the following organisations:

AARNet	Department of State Development,
ABC	Manufacturing, Infrastructure and Planning
Advance Cairns	Department of State Growth
Albury City Council	Department of the Chief Minister
Australia Post	Developing East Arnhem Ltd
Australian Broadcasting Corporation	Elton Consulting
Australian Farm Institute	Expert Advisory Panel on Regional, Rural and
Australian Local Government Association	Remote Education
Australian Rural Leadership Foundation	Federation Council
BDCU Alliance Bank	FRRR
Bendigo and Adelaide Bank	Future Directions International Pty
Boyce Chartered Accountants	G21
C2Hills Consultancy	Gulf Horizons Foundation Limited
Central Highlands Development Corporation	Hawker Britton
Charles Sturt University	Hilltops Council
Christopher Orchard	Infrastructure Skills Advisory Pty Ltd
City of Palmerston	Institute for Sustainable Futures, University of
City of Whyalla - Upper Spencer Gulf	Technology Sydney
Committee for Greater Shepparton	integratedDESIGNgroup
Community Colleges Australia	International Centre for Balanced Land Use
Community Industry Group Inc.	John Mitchell Consulting
Council of Rural RDCs	KA Rural Enterprises
Council of Small Business	Kinross Wolaroi School
Deakin University	Korean Consulate
Department of Communications and the Arts	Kurrumbene Projects & Advocacy
Department of Education and Training	Latrobe Valley Authority
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade	Leonie Burrows
Department of Industry, Innovation and Science	Limestone Coast Local Government Association
Department of Infrastructure, Regional	Lismore City Council
Development & Cities	Minerals Council of Australia
Department of Jobs and Small Business	Molonglo Financial Services Limited
Department of Premier and Cabinet	Murray-Darling Basin Authority
Department of Primary Industries and Regional	My Pathway
Development	NCSEHE, Curtin University
Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet	NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet
Department of Social Services	NSW Government Offices

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 Port Pirie Regional Council - Upper Spencer Gulf
 Primary Industries and Regions SA
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 RDA Adelaide Hills, Fleurieu & Kangaroo Island
 RDA Barwon South West
 RDA central west
 RDA Darling Downs and South West
 RDA Far North Queensland & Torres Strait
 RDA Far South Coast
 RDA Fitzroy and Central West
 RDA Great Southern Western Australia
 RDA Mackay Isaac Whitsunday
 RDA Murray
 RDA Murraylands & Riverland
 RDA Orana
 RDA Riverina
 RDA SA
 RDA Southern Inland
 RDA Tasmania
 RDA Whyalla and Eyre Peninsula
 RDA Yorke and Mid North
 Red Cross
 Regional Arts Australia
 Regional Arts NSW

Regional Development Victoria
 Regional Health Alliance
 Regional Insights Australia
 Regional Universities Network
 Rockhampton Regional Council
 Royal Flying Doctors Service
 RRMH
 Rural Bank
 Rural City Of Wangaratta
 Service One Alliance Bank
 Settlement Services International
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 Snowy Valleys Council
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 Tamworth Regional Council
 The Chamber of Minerals & Energy
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