



REGIONAL AUSTRALIA INSTITUTE

Regional Dialogue Day

An RAI Membership Initiative

Parliament House Canberra
Tuesday 7 October 2025





Acknowledgement of Country

The Regional Australia Institute (RAI) acknowledges the Traditional Owners and Custodians of Country throughout Australia. The RAI recognises the strength and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and acknowledges and respects the continuing connections to Country, rivers, land and sea. We recognise that sovereignty was never ceded. We also pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging and extend that respect to all Traditional Custodians of this land.

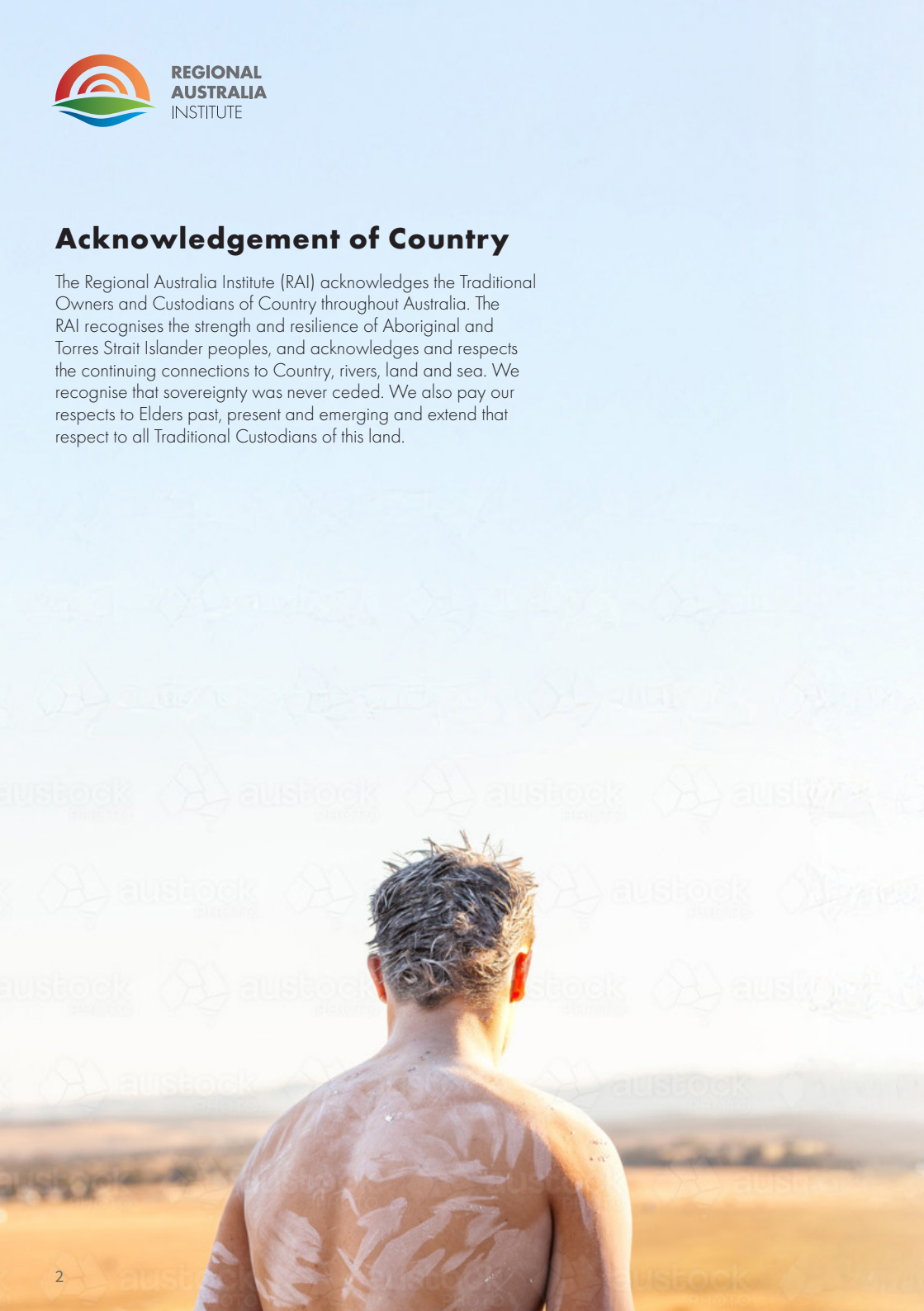


Table of contents

About the Regional Australia Institute	4
Welcome – From Liz Ritchie CEO	6
Our Members	7
Showcasing Members Bold Projects and Ideas	8
Central Highlands Workforce Development and Accommodation Strategy	10
Better Health for the Bush: Glen Innes Health Hub	12
Wimmera Housing Innovations Pty Ltd (WHIP)	14
Fraser Coast Work Transition Initiative	16
LGA Digital Academy	18
The South Australian Regional Leadership Development Program	20
Think Regional	22
Temora Deferred Payment Policy	24
Mudgee Key Worker Housing Project	26
Ballarat Energy Network (BEN)	28
Redleaf Place	30
Dubbo Solar Circular Initiative	32
Bathurst Spatial Digital Twin	34
The Stay Solution	36
The Vacant Homes Project	38
Mildura Civic Nexus	40
Australian Renewable Energy Education Centre	42
Goldfields Grant Readiness Support Service	44
Health Industry Workforce Development Plan	46
Migrant Workers Support Network	48
Streaky Bay Childcare Centre	50
Regional Projects Atlas	52
Membership Organisations	54
Participant List	55

About Regional Australia Institute (RAI)

The RAI is the nation's first and only independent think-tank dedicated to empowering Australia's regions. We are a not-for-profit organisation that undertakes research to inform, educate and activate our rural and regional communities.

The RAI celebrates 14 years in 2025. We are proud of the vast array of research, data, and detailed insights the RAI has provided into many of the significant issues and challenges facing regional Australia. The work of the Institute is made possible through research partnerships with federal and state governments, the national Regions Rising event series, regional consultancy projects, membership, and philanthropic funding.

In 2022, the RAI launched the Regionalisation Ambition 2032 - A Framework to Rebalance the Nation. The Ambition is a 10-year plan for regional Australia that seeks balanced growth across our nation's regional towns and cities. It outlines key targets, actions and benefits that will contribute to building prosperous regional communities, and a stronger Australia.

The RAI exists so that decision-makers at all levels of government, not-for-profits, industry, and community have the information they need to ensure the best outcomes for regional Australia. By replacing myths and stereotypes with facts and knowledge, the RAI seek to build a more inclusive, unified and prosperous future for all Australians.

Our Vision

Empowered regions where people enjoy the opportunity and quality of life equal to all Australians.

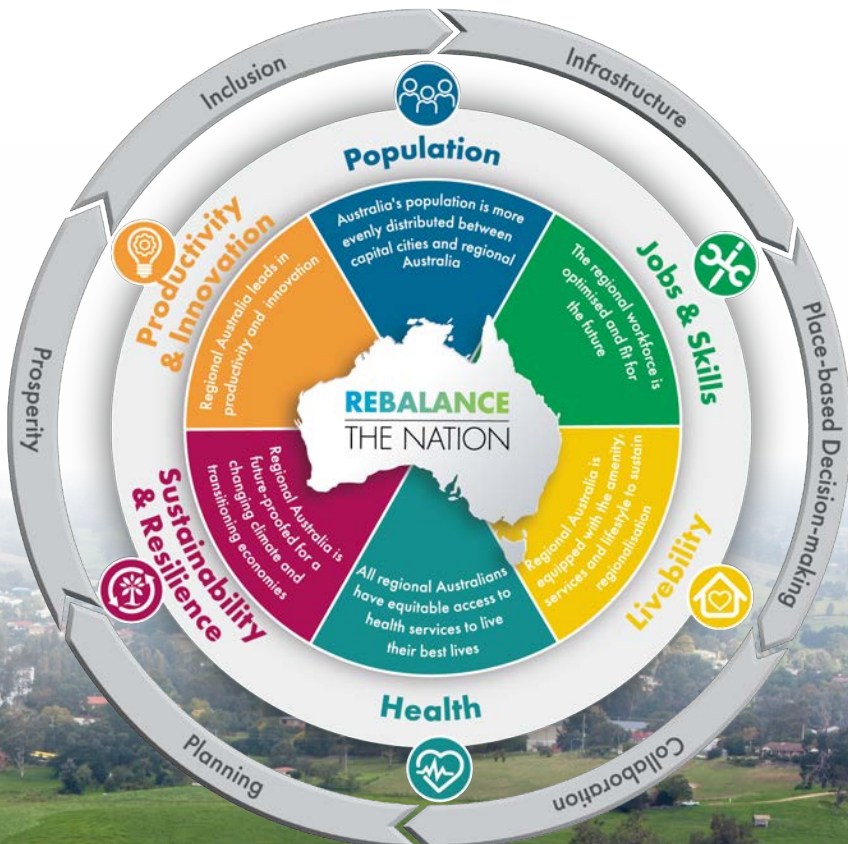
While acknowledging and celebrating the on-going success of regional Australia, we know regional Australia has not reached its potential, or that current approaches can be relied upon for the future. We know, as a country, we can and will do better.

At the RAI, we are seeking new policy approaches, different thinking amongst government and industry leaders, and the empowerment and engagement of regional communities so they can better shape their own future. Our Regionalisation Ambition 2032 helps guide the process of regionalisation – that will benefit all Australians and contribute significantly to national prosperity.

Our Market

Home to 9.91 million people (and growing) and responsible for one-third of national output and jobs, regional Australia plays an increasingly important role in securing the nation's growth and prosperity.

With a network of approximately 27,000 influencers, activators, interested observers and commentators of our work, the RAI is the leader on new knowledge, policy development and practical skills for regional economic development.



Welcome – From Liz Ritchie CEO

Uniting Changemakers for Regional Australia’s Future

Welcome, Members of Parliament, members of the Regional Australia Institute – Regional Australia Council (RAC), Regional Australia Council Associate (RACA) and Regional Activators Alliance (RAA) – and RAI Board members, to the inaugural Regional Dialogue Day. Today is a milestone event in our shared journey to a more balanced and prosperous nation.

This event is more than a gathering; it’s a catalyst for progress. The Regional Dialogue Day has been designed to showcase the boldest changemaking programs and ideas from regions, to turn the dial on the ambitious targets set out in our Regionalisation Ambition.

At the RAI, we recognise that the best solutions for enhancing regional Australia come from those who know it best - our regional leaders. Their innovation, determination, and local knowledge are driving change where it matters most. But turning great ideas into action requires more than vision alone. It needs the right people around the table: government to provide frameworks and investment; industry to fuel innovation and scale solutions; and communities to ensure every initiative is grounded in real regional needs.

The programs and projects showcased today are genuine gamechangers. They are transforming lives and local economies and with the right support, they can be scaled to benefit regions across Australia. We invite all present government, industry and regional champions to listen, learn, and consider how these successes might be delivered nationally. Let’s not reinvent the wheel when it’s not needed, but rather share what works, adapt it, and amplify its impact.

Today, at the Regional Dialogue Day, we have an unprecedented opportunity: to connect insight with influence, and bold ideas with action. By working together - listening, learning, and acting - we can help rebalance the nation and secure a vibrant future for all Australians.

Thank you for joining us. Let’s make today the start of something remarkable.



Liz Ritchie
CEO
Regional Australia Institute

Our members

The work of the RAI is shaped by our members the Regional Australia Council, Regional Australia Council Associate and the Regional Activators Alliance. The Alliance is at the forefront of a movement that is helping to change the public perception of the value of living, working, and investing in regional Australia.



REGIONAL AUSTRALIA COUNCIL

Regional Australia Council

The Regional Australia Council (RAC) is a collective of some of the most influential organisations and leaders dedicated to advancing regional Australia. The Council offers corporate Australia a platform to support the growth, investment and prosperity of the regions through collaborative efforts that aim to improve the lives of the 9.91 million. This forum consists of organisations with a deep passion for and meaningful impact on regional Australia. The Council is solutions-driven, working to support the RAI's initiatives and ultimately to benefit regional communities across the country.



REGIONAL AUSTRALIA COUNCIL ASSOCIATE

Regional Australia Council Associate

The Regional Australia Council Associate (RACA) membership tier is designed for organisations based in one or two states, including state government bodies, medium-sized corporations, universities, industry groups, infrastructure providers, consultancies, and other similar organisations. By becoming a RACA member, you will join a distinguished network of some of Australia's most influential organisations and leaders who are dedicated to advancing regional Australia and improving the lives of the one-third of the population living in regional communities. As part of the RAI's membership collective, RACA members have the opportunity to collaborate and contribute to initiatives that promote the growth and prosperity of regional communities and industries.



REGIONAL ACTIVATORS ALLIANCE

Regional Activators Alliance

The Regional Activators Alliance (RAA) is a coalition of Australia's most forward-thinking businesses, associations, local and state government agencies, community organisations and academic institutions. RAA members are leading a dynamic national movement that is reshaping the narrative around the value of regional Australia. The primary goal of the RAA is to drive positive change across regional communities, regions and businesses through networking and advocacy. The group meets four times a year, both virtually and in person. Through the RAI's research, RAA helps to provide the critical data needed to guide development and initiatives in regional areas.

Showcasing Members Bold Projects and Ideas

At the RAI, our Regional Activator Alliance members represent more than 900 regional towns and cities across the country - from Cairns (QLD) to Campbell Town (TAS), Coffs Harbour (NSW) to Northam (WA).

Regional Australia is changing at a rapid pace. It is on the precipice of enormous societal transformation - not seen in the last 100 years. Population is growing rapidly, with more who want to make the move. RAI commissioned market research for Move to More in 2024, revealed 2-in-5 metropolitan Australians are keen to make a life for themselves in the country, up from 1-in-5 just 18 months earlier.

The regional economy is evolving, and for those who venture to it, it will offer enormous potential. Regional leaders across the country are stepping up to deliver real change in their communities – addressing the challenges and opportunities presented with this societal shift underway.

Today's Regional Dialogue Day showcases some of the boldest programs and ideas transforming the regions.

We hope you leave inspired!



Central Highlands Workforce Development and Accommodation Strategy

Inspired by the RAI's Regionalisation Ambition, this team is igniting a talent revolution in the Central Highlands (QLD) through visionary, all-encompassing planning that is reshaping the region's future!

Launched in May 2024, the Central Highlands Workforce Development and Accommodation Strategy (WDAS) is a region-wide action plan to address challenges around workforce attraction and retention, housing shortages, childcare access, and liveability.

While Emerald's population has been growing by 1.9 per cent each year, a 7 per cent annual increase in Fly-In-Fly-Out (FIFO) workers has put further pressure on housing demand. Rental vacancies are very low (0.5–1.2 per cent), and construction costs for new homes are high (\$2,200–\$2,600 per square metre).

Only 29 per cent of children aged 0-5 years can access childcare, with staff shortages limiting centre capacity. Low unemployment, regional location and high travel and construction costs add further challenges to workforce and accommodation growth.



By identifying and simultaneously addressing the critical factors diminishing the region's ability to attract and retain skilled professionals and their families, the strategy sets a clear pathway forward.

Developed by Infitum Partners in partnership with the Central Highlands Development Corporation (CHDC), Central Highlands Resources Roundtable (CHRR), and Central Highlands Regional Council (CHRC), the strategy draws on insights from more than 30 stakeholders.

The WDAS, which is being progressively rolled out until 2026, sets out 16 priority areas across four interconnected pillars – workforce, accommodation, childcare, and lifestyle – reflecting the RAI Regionalisation Ambition.

One of the initiatives within the holistic strategy is the Build 12 in 12 campaign, which led to nine developer EOIs, a modular display home viewed by over 200 people, and policy updates including CHRC's revised Economic Stimulus Framework. These efforts supported development approvals, new housing projects, and discussions on construction innovation.

A region-wide property review, led to the release of surplus Council land, redevelopment opportunities, and funding to upgrade 15 Council dwellings by 2026.



Notes:

Delivering the Smart Move campaign in October 2024, and partnering with the RAI's Move to More campaign, this region is shining the spotlight on workforce opportunities.

A Fairer Airfares position paper, also developed under the WDAS, has become a pivotal centrepiece of CHDC's advocacy talks with government and airlines to make air travel more affordable and reliable.

A plan for a stronger local early childhood workforce is being developed through local consultation and engagement, providing insights guiding the next phases of the project.

With solid foundations laid and more work to come, the WDAS is poised to drive meaningful change in workforce attraction, retention, and liveability across the Central Highlands.



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Better Health for the Bush: Glen Innes Health Hub

A town transforming rural health care delivery, incorporating digital solutions and community ownership in NSW, offering a scalable blueprint for other regional centres.

The Glen Innes Health Hub brings essential services — including GP Service Provision, a practice nurse and allied health services — directly into the community, reducing reliance on distant providers.

Part of the Better Health for the Bush initiative, this four-year pilot is transforming rural healthcare access in regional NSW.

Developed by the Hunter New England and Central Coast Primary Health Network (HNECC PHN), the Health Hub offers multidisciplinary services, digital health solutions, and a Service Navigator.

Health Hub Operator, Rural Fit, has been commissioned by the PHN to deliver the services through a multidisciplinary team that assists patients to navigate the health system effectively.

Rural Fit partnered with a local property owner to secure a suitable building. This collaboration sparked a shared commitment to the town's wellbeing and led to the transformation of the space into a modern, purpose-built facility.

By leveraging digital health solutions to extend reach and capacity, video conference appointments can be undertaken in the Glen Innes Health Hub with the support of the Service Navigator.

Having a secure NBN link into the Health Hub has enabled high speed access, with high-definition video conferencing. The Health Hub operator uses a cloud-based system to manage patient and clinical platforms.

By collaborating with universities, the initiative also creates pathways for student training and placements. This not only develops a skilled local workforce but also deepens the long-term commitment to advancing rural health in the region.



Notes:

Since launching in May 2025, the Glen Innes Health Hub has served over 969 patients, and the service navigator has coordinated care across 148 appointments. Diabetes was present in 50 per cent of the patient cohort seen by the GP.

The locally governed co-operative model, fosters community ownership and enhances infrastructure to deliver sustainable, place-based health care for the Glen Innes region.

With strong partnerships and measurable impact, the initiative provides a scalable blueprint for rural health reform across Australia – and Western Australia Primary Health Alliance is already reviewing the model.



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Wimmera Housing Innovations Pty Ltd (WHIP)

An innovative housing solution for small towns, bringing together private investors, community leadership, governance and expertise in a framework to deliver homes for key workers.

Housing is a major barrier to growth, liveability, and economic conditions in the Wimmera Southern Mallee region, as in many rural areas. The current housing stock is not the right mix, and much of it is not fit for purpose. Rental dwellings make up about 11 – 13 per cent of occupied dwellings in audited towns, while the Victorian average is 28 per cent.

The Wimmera Housing and Innovations Pty Ltd (WHIP) model helps communities deliver projects by co-investing with local Progress Associations (PA). Each PA completes a feasibility study with WHIP before fundraising to assess demand, costs, risks, rents, investor returns, and the balance of equity and loans for financial viability.

Fundraising starts only after the PA confirms project viability and acceptable returns. WHIP ensures compliance with ASIC regulations by providing corporate law expertise, overseeing offer structures, shareholder registries, and governance. Each town and WHIP form a joint-venture Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) to hold the asset, set local priorities, and contract WHIP for feasibility, procurement, project management, and property management if needed.

Councils can offer serviced land or enabling works, while employers may pre-commit to leases. Major banks, community banks and other lenders provide standard debt terms. Projects typically deliver serviced lots and minimum 7-star, all-electric modular homes for faster occupancy and lower costs. Bundling small-town projects increases cost efficiency and state co-investment eligibility, while preserving local decision-making.

Stage one has commenced and schedules 13 new dwellings and 32 bedrooms across Murtoa, Donald, Minyip and Apsley in 2026. The outcome is more homes for workers, a modest return to local investors and more vibrant towns.

PAs that wish to proceed can set up an SPV with WHIP and move through a clear decision gate to fundraising only when the case stacks up.

The model is repeatable across communities and enables participation by governments or corporate investors.



WIMMERA SOUTHERN MALLEE DEVELOPMENT



Notes:

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Fraser Coast Work Transition Initiative

A placed-based program empowering Fraser Coast youth and revolutionising the transition from classroom to career, strengthening the regions workforce pipeline.

The Fraser Coast Career Pathways Program (FCCPP) supports the region's school students to make informed decisions about their future, by equipping them with insights into local career and education pathway opportunities in the manufacturing, engineering, health, and construction sectors.

Established in 2023, the FCCPP is a place-based initiative designed to help secondary students secure employment or transition into further education and training before they leave school.

The program seeks to address youth disengagement and unemployment early, while students are still in the education system, and to strengthen the region's future workforce pipeline. FCCPP supports all students, with a particular focus on vulnerable young people who are at risk of disengaging, or who have already disengaged from school.

Already more than 200 students have participated in the program, with 180 work experience and industry immersion placements. More than 60 students have been supported to secure school-based apprenticeships and traineeships, with 20 now gaining fulltime work after Year 12.

The program worked across 14 secondary schools in the region, including a range of Distance Education (DE) students enrolled in various public and private DE schools and two special education secondary schools

The FCCPP was funded by the Queensland Government through a one-off funding program. Recently, continued funding for the initiative has been announced, and RDAWBB intends to apply to ensure that FCCPP remains a key part of the Fraser Coast's local career education network.





Notes:

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LGA Digital Academy

A nation-first project in Tasmania aimed at boosting digital maturity, AI-readiness, and inclusion across regional councils, enabling smarter, citizen-focused services and assisting in community digital literacy.

Tasmania's regional councils, especially in rural areas generally lack ICT resources and expertise, making it difficult to keep up with digital transformation, cyber security, data governance, and service delivery requirements, let alone using all things digital and AI for improving council capability and productivity.

The increasing digital gap between metropolitan and regional councils results in differences in areas such as governance approaches, varying levels of disaster response capabilities, differing access to shared services and cost efficiencies through improved workflow and automation.

In an attempt to address this issue, Regional Development Australia (RDA) Tasmania has teamed up with Telstra to pilot the creation and rollout of a Local Government Digital Academy to rapidly improve the digital capabilities of local councils.

RDA Tasmania says there are several examples nationally of local governments implementing AI and digital transformation - achieving remarkable measurable outcomes that directly benefit their communities and operations. Newcastle, Lake Macquarie, and Brisbane have demonstrated cost savings of 25-50 per cent through automation, with Newcastle City Council achieving one million dollars in savings and 97.5 per cent faster processing times after consolidating more than 100 systems.

Brisbane's AI traffic management system reduced peak-hour congestion by 18 per cent, while Newcastle's AI-powered stormwater sensors prevented \$4 million in flood damage.

The LGA Digital Academy Pilot aims to boost digital engagement and skills in regional councils and share sector-wide benefits by benchmarking digital maturity, developing future-state digital plans, and upskilling staff in AI-readiness.

The training will be customised to the context of small regional councils, ensuring participants gain confidence to adopt and manage new digital tools. The Academy will serve as a professional network and support mechanism where participating councils (and in future, other councils) continuously share experiences, case studies and resources on digital transformation.

By achieving these objectives, the project will strengthen council digital capabilities, build the local government workforce's AI readiness and promote community digital and social inclusion – delivering sustained value well beyond the councils alone.

As a pilot program in Tasmania, this will provide a template for a potential national rollout.





Notes:

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The South Australian Regional Leadership Development Program

A dynamic placed-based program shaping the next generation of visionary leaders, enabling them to influence their regions' future with bold, innovative strategies and a passion for lasting change.

In 2019, a group of local leaders initiated efforts to address the departure of working-age residents - relocating for educational and employment opportunities outside the region - resulting in a shortage of emerging leaders within its local communities and businesses.

A pilot project was developed locally, backed by the Local Government Association, to deliver community leadership skills in the region. Following the pilot's success and through strong advocacy, the South Australian Government provided funding for each of the seven regional RDAs in South Australia to design and deliver place-based leadership offerings.

To date, the South Australian Leadership Development Program has delivered more than 15,000 hours of training, to more than 2,000 participants, in 72 regional towns over the past five years.

Participants in the Limestone Coast program have taken positions on boards and committees, driving community change. Two graduates have been instrumental in building a new 70 place childcare centre in their community. Two graduates have joined the RDA Limestone Coast Board, with a number elected to Local Government, and one appointed as Deputy Mayor.

On the business front, participants have progressed into leadership roles in larger organisations, grown family businesses to over 100 staff and started their own businesses. Many participants express that increased confidence and skills have unlocked opportunities in the region. By connecting with inspiring leaders from across the region, participants can see a future for themselves in a regional area.

The program provides opportunities for regional leaders to gain experience, complete training and build networks in their own region. The place-based approach ensured that topics were tailored for each area, as well as maximising participation by reducing travel costs and other barriers to engagement.



An Australian Government Initiative



LIMESTONE COAST



Notes:

Across the state, training ranges from intensive six-month programs to short course offerings, with opportunities for all leaders at every level. Participants also gain skills to assist with wellbeing and resilience, empowering leadership, harnessing diversity and inclusion, and cross-sector collaboration.

In the Limestone Coast, the program has evolved to include Emerging Leaders, Existing Leaders, Executive Leaders and a Leaders' Network. In 2025, it included the delivery of the Australian Institute of Company Directors' full five-day Company Directors' Course in Mount Gambier (500km from the nearest offering).

The place-based model reduces barriers and is scalable to other regions seeking local leadership development.



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Think Regional

A game-changing employment marketing solution designed to address skilled workforce shortages in regional Australia.

Just as a regional tourism brand brings visitors and stimulates economic growth, the Think Regional employment branding strategy promotes the employment value proposition of a region, its local industries and the employers within it, attracting and retaining skilled workers in ways not seen before. Piloted on the South Coast NSW, Think Regional has worked with 14 employer partners across diverse industries, including advanced manufacturing, hospitality, education and health.

In just 18 months of delivery for employers on the South Coast, Think Regional has reduced the average seven-month candidate journey, to just seven weeks. Employers in the South Coast region of NSW are now successfully attracting skilled professionals who were previously out of reach, drawing hundreds of applicants and significantly improving recruitment outcomes.

What makes Think Regional unique is its collaborative model – it builds regional employment brands, brings visibility to career pathways not seen before, and connects skilled workers to local employers through authentic storytelling and a dedicated, place-based careers platform.

It showcases the potential of regional Australia, attracting prospective employees through real stories and genuine opportunities - demonstrating that pursuing a rewarding career and enjoying an exceptional lifestyle are both attainable in regional communities.

Its Regional Career Builder Network boasts more than 500 skilled workers actively seeking a career in the region.

Even for the highest in demand skilled workers, such as Occupational Therapists and Veterinarians, under Think Regional's collaborative approach, local employers are filling jobs.

Building on its successful pilot in the South Coast, Think Regional is now actively exploring national expansion. The initiative is collaborating with Temora Shire Council, Bland Shire Council, and employers in the Northern Territory to understand their unique workforce attraction needs and identify opportunities to replicate its proven employment marketing model in new regions.





Notes:

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Temora Deferred Payment Policy

A local government initiative stimulating the local construction sector, increasing apprenticeship numbers, and attracting new builders.

Temora Shire Council's Development Infrastructure Deferred Payment Policy is a locally designed initiative that helps developers progress approved subdivisions by deferring the need to finance upfront infrastructure works.

Instead of requiring developers to fund all eligible subdivision infrastructure before construction, the policy allows them to enter into a legal agreement with the Council. Under this arrangement, the Council pays the upfront costs of the enabling infrastructure, and developers repay the funds in instalments as individual lots are sold.

Adopted in July 2021, it has supported four major developments— two residential subdivisions, one industrial project, and one mixed-use airpark development —delivering 192 new lots and unlocking 134 more for future growth.

More than 80 per cent of the lots were sold to non-local buyers, boosting regional migration and investment. The policy has stimulated the local construction sector, increased apprenticeships, and attracted external builders.

Historically, Temora Shire Council says developers in regional areas often struggle to secure finance under traditional models. By aligning payments with sales milestones, the policy reduces risk and improves financial feasibility—especially for smaller developers or first-time entrants. Without the policy, these developments would not have proceeded due to a lack of available finance.

The steady rollout of new development sites has helped maintain construction activity and related jobs in the local economy. Temora has seen both an increase in trade apprenticeships offered locally, as well as a significant increase in the number of non-local building firms constructing homes in Temora to help meet demand, many of whom are building spec homes.

Key lessons include the importance of cashflow flexibility, legal clarity, and strategic infrastructure staging. The model is replicable for other regional councils facing housing supply and development challenges.

This place-based approach is already delivering results in southern NSW and has strong potential for application in other rural and regional communities facing housing supply and infrastructure delivery challenges.





Notes:

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Mudgee Key Worker Housing Project

A housing initiative delivering 47 affordable rental homes for essential workers at 30 per cent below market rate, boosting liveability and workforce retention.

Mid-Western Regional Council, situated in central New South Wales, is spearheading a significant initiative to deliver 47 newly constructed affordable rental homes within Mudgee.

These residences will be designated for essential workers—including healthcare professionals, educators, emergency services personnel, and law enforcement officers—and offered at rental rates set 30 per cent below prevailing market levels.

The Mid-Western Region, including Mudgee, Gulgong, Kandos, Rylstone, and their surrounding villages, is currently experiencing significant housing pressure spurred by the development of the Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone (REZ). During the peak construction phase, projections indicate the region will see an increase of approximately 9,906 residents—a 38.2 per cent rise—driven by an influx of workers supporting renewable energy initiatives and other state significant development projects.

As a result, essential workers are increasingly forced to compete with industry employees and the existing population for scarce housing options, heightening the strain on available accommodation.

Currently, the region's general practitioner-to-resident ratio stands at 1:1954, which is more than double the national average of 1:877. Such a disparity underscores the mounting challenges faced by healthcare providers as they work to meet the needs of a rapidly growing population.

By ensuring affordable housing for essential workers, the Mudgee Key Worker Housing Project aims to support workforce retention and help address these critical service gaps, ultimately strengthening liveability across the Mid-Western Region.

This project represents a coordinated, whole-of-government approach, with the Council contributing land, approvals, and management expertise. The NSW Government is providing funding for the enabling infrastructure, preparing the site, and constructing the first five rental properties.

To facilitate the completion of the remaining homes, additional investment is being sought from the Commonwealth Government.





Notes:

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Ballarat Energy Network (BEN)

A community owned energy network, powering a regional city of more than 100,000 people with 100 per cent locally generated renewable energy.

The Ballarat Energy Network (BEN) has a vision where locally generated renewable energy is harnessed, shared and used within its local community – connecting homes, business and industry – exporting excess energy to the nation.

The BEN is a multi-stakeholder regional collaboration, led by the Committee for Ballarat in partnership with industry, business, government, the community and aims to:

- Aggregate and manage distributed energy resources (DER) at scale
- Optimise the capability of the regional distribution network
- Lower energy costs for residents, businesses and the community
- De-carbonise and power a clean energy industrial precinct, including the Ballarat West Employment Zone
- Trade surplus energy on the National Energy Market (NEM)
- Build social licence, community trust and agency through local governance, investment and industry partnerships.

BEN is a first of its kind project for Australian regional cities and could be a blueprint to be replicated in others around the county with the potential to create a seismic shift in how regional communities engage with and benefit from local energy generation and consumption.

The BEN model proposes a unique local community-governed commercial structure in partnership with industry, capable of retaining and returning the value of local energy generation to the regional community and its stakeholders.

With the creation of a clean energy powered industry precinct at the Ballarat West Employment Zone (BWEZ), local businesses would see lower operating costs, optimise and manage their energy consumption and supply and trade through the BEN on the NEM.

The initial feasibility work completed at the BWEZ industrial precinct, indicates that commercial and industrial consumers can reduce their electricity imports from the grid by up to 47 per cent, through the aggregation and storage of existing and new DER infrastructure. The reductions will be even more significant for greenfield estates and new developments.

This project is already receiving interest globally and featured at the 2024 World Congress in Barcelona.





Notes:

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Redleaf Place

A bold housing initiative set to deliver 300 new homes to a regional NSW city, redefining its future for generations to come.

Orange City Council, in collaboration with Landcom, plans to develop Redleaf, a residential precinct aimed at expanding housing choices for the city.

This partnership will unlock 25 hectares of Council owned land at Orange's eastern entrance, to deliver more than 300 homes across a mix of housing types including single dwellings, duplexes, town houses and residential flats – providing people with greater choice and affordability.

Redleaf will cater to various household sizes and incomes, with at least 20 per cent of homes (66 dwellings) to be set aside as affordable housing for low to moderate income workers.

Research shows that more than 1,400 households in Orange are currently living under housing stress, spending over 30 per cent of their income on rent. Almost three-quarters of these households are better suited to affordable housing rather than social housing. However, until now, only a small number of affordable housing projects were in the pipeline, reflecting a reluctance from the private sector to deliver this type of product.

Redleaf was the first proposal approved under the NSW Government's Social and Affordable Housing Rezoning Pathway, a program designed to fast-track rezoning in communities experiencing housing need.

By prioritising local suppliers and contractors where possible, Landcom will help up-skill local workers, supporting the delivery of more diverse housing choices well beyond the life of the Redleaf project.

Land registration is expected to be completed by June 2027, with residents anticipated to move into the affordable housing by June 2029.

The project has also received statewide recognition, winning a Planning Institute of Australia NSW Award and being named a finalist at the National Awards in Darwin.





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Dubbo Solar Circular Initiative

A vision to transform the heart of Central West (NSW) into a centre of green innovation through solar recycling, boosting clean tech jobs in the region.

Located in the heart of the Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone (CWO REZ), the Dubbo region is at the forefront of Australia's clean energy transition. Currently, the region is experiencing a surge in large-scale solar farm construction.

An estimated 1–5 per cent of solar panels are damaged during construction due to transport, handling, or installation errors. Dubbo Regional Council projects that up to 500,000 panels could be affected in ongoing or approved builds.

Dubbo Regional Council's Solar Circular initiative aims to establish a regional solar panel recycling and innovation hub - focussing on bifacial and domestic panels.

Recycling is most powerful when it's part of a truly circular system, one that proves recovered materials can be used in new products with an environmental footprint lower than starting from virgin resources. The Dubbo Solar Circular initiative may champion this standard by developing strong, verified end-markets and local remanufacturing opportunities, backed by life-cycle assessment. This approach ensures every panel or material diverted from landfill creates lasting environmental and economic value for the region.

Currently, there are no formal contracts in place between renewable energy companies with access rights to the new REZ transmission lines and recycling operators. Nor is there legislation mandating solar panel recycling.

Furthermore, Dubbo's location from metropolitan recycling facilities increases the cost and complexity of transporting damaged or end-of-life panels to appropriate processing sites, leading to a higher risk of panels being stockpiled or landfilled locally.

As solar farms increasingly adopt bifacial panels, this project will invest in specialised recycling equipment, collaborate with manufacturers and researchers, to develop protocols for dual-glass and high-efficiency modules, positioning Dubbo as a national leader in future-ready recycling, capable of adapting to evolving solar technologies.

The Dubbo Solar Circular project aims to divert 10,000 tonnes per year of solar panel waste from landfill, whilst recovering valuable materials such as aluminium, glass, copper, and silver. This initiative will create 50 new jobs and skills pathways in clean tech and circular economy industries, while also supporting First Nations participation through collaboration with Indigenous-led initiatives such as Yurruga.

The regional accelerator will not be a single facility, but a collaborative network of recycling options tailored to meet the diverse needs of the community and industry.



Notes:

The initiative aims to develop local end-markets and co-locate downstream manufacturers to remanufacture recovered materials regionally, while also testing and repurposing serviceable panels for community energy, off-grid, educational, or First Nations micro-grid projects extending their life before recycling.

Dubbo Regional Council suggests the model could be replicated in other REZ across Australia, particularly in regions facing similar challenges of solar waste volume, geographic challenges, and skills shortages.

Dubbo Regional Council's leadership in this space will serve as a blueprint for regional circular economy innovation. The project is scheduled to begin in 2026, with operations expected to commence by 2028 or 2029, coinciding with the peak construction period of the Central West Orana Renewable Energy Zone (CWO REZ).



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Bathurst Spatial Digital Twin

Cutting edge 3D technology, built in Bathurst, enabling towns to protect their heritage while reimagining their future.

Bathurst has proudly emerged as the first major regional centre in NSW to be integrated into the NSW Spatial Digital Twin, a groundbreaking initiative that captures entire cities in immersive 3D models.

The digital replica of Bathurst's urban landscape allows planners, councils, and community members to visualise infrastructure, simulate development impacts, and make data-informed decisions with unprecedented clarity. From the shadows cast by future buildings to projected traffic flows, the model brings planning scenarios to life before a single brick is laid.

The Bathurst Spatial Digital Twin is a strategic tool for future-proofing regional development. By plugging into a statewide digital grid, Bathurst gains access to real-time data and predictive modelling that supports smarter infrastructure planning, including schools, hospitals, and roads.

It's also a powerful asset for community engagement, enabling residents to explore proposed changes and understand their implications in a visually intuitive way. For Bathurst, this means preserving its historic charm while embracing modern tools to guide its evolution.

The initiative is expected to deliver significant economic benefits, including faster development approvals and long-term cost savings across infrastructure lifecycles. It's a compelling example of how regional cities can lead the way in digital transformation—anchored in place, but looking boldly ahead.

Bathurst Spatial Digital Twin is a joint collaboration between NSW Spatial Services and Bathurst Regional Council. This technology was used in the preliminary assessment of an Integrated Medical Centre proposal in the CBD - involving the construction of a six-storey medical centre and a five-storey carpark. Modifications to the design of the building were made in the Digital Twin to alleviate some of the issues that were identified by Council and Councils' Government architect.

Bathurst has recently expanded the Digital Twin to one of Bathurst oldest suburbs (South Bathurst) to assist in the assessment of two medium density housing proposals of a scale that has not been seen before.

Bathurst Regional Council says this technology is easily transferrable to any regional centre throughout Australia.





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The Stay Solution

A national solution delivering regional communities gold-standard migrant ‘welcoming’ practices, reducing the costly productivity loss of high employee turnover.

The STAY Solution is a national initiative supporting regional employers in their efforts to attract and retain skilled workers, particularly migrants, through tailored relocation and settlement services.

Developed by national not-for-profit Settlement Services International (SSI) and delivered by social enterprise, Work + Stay, the STAY Solution is flexible and able to be scaled to meet the needs of any regional employer in any location across regional Australia. The main objective is to invest in local communities to adopt gold-standard ‘welcoming’ practices and cut productivity loss from high staff turnover.

Operating across more than 25 LGAs across the country already, it offers pre-arrival pathway planning, trained local ambassadors, partner employment support, and ongoing wellbeing check-ins for up to 24 months.

In addition to its core offerings, the STAY Solution collaborates with local governments, employers, and community groups to ensure newcomers are seamlessly integrated. Through workshops, mentorship programs, and ongoing engagement, the initiative promotes not just economic growth, but a sense of belonging, encouraging vibrant, resilient regional communities.

Since 2022, over 90 skilled migrants and families have been supported to move to a regional centre, with a 90 per cent retention rate.

With a pool of more than 10,000 candidates and partnerships nationwide, STAY provides a scalable, data-driven model for boosting jobs, skills, and liveability in regional Australia.

In addition to its core offerings, the STAY Solution collaborates with local governments, employers, and community groups to ensure newcomers are seamlessly integrated. Through workshops, mentorship programs, and ongoing engagement, the initiative promotes not just economic growth, but a sense of belonging, encouraging vibrant, resilient regional communities.

Additionally, SSI operates not-for-profit immigration legal firm SSI Legal through the STAY solution, providing affordable support from qualified lawyers for visa processing.



work  stay



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The Vacant Homes Project

A transformative housing project identifying and reactivating underused housing to ease shortages, and support workforce attraction, ushering in a dynamic new era for regional living.

The Vacant Homes Project, is a joint initiative between Temora Shire and Bland Shire Councils, aimed to unlock underutilised housing to address severe shortages and support workforce attraction.

Spanning both LGAs, the project involved a comprehensive data analysis of local government rates and Goldenfields Water usage data to identify properties with low or no occupancy.

A total of 257 properties were identified as targets (142 in Temora and 115 in Bland) and subsequently contacted by mail. Surveys and follow-up calls were managed by a designated project coordinator.

Property owners were requested to provide reasons for the continued vacancy of their homes and to identify types of support that would facilitate returning these properties to active use.

Among the most significant obstacles identified through the project were persistent repair and maintenance issues, owner reluctance due to uncertainty or lack of information, and a preference for retaining properties for seasonal or occasional use.

Detailed survey results and conversations with property owners highlighted that, while many were hesitant to re-enter the rental market or commit to selling, a substantial number expressed genuine interest in bringing their vacant homes back into use—provided they received appropriate guidance and support.

This feedback demonstrated that targeted assistance, such as grants for repairs, information about tenancy, or help navigating regulatory requirements, could shift owner attitudes and unlock new housing opportunities.

The Vacant Homes Project offers a replicable, low-cost model for other regions, providing actionable insights for housing policy and workforce planning.

The initiative will inform future housing strategies in both councils.



TEMORA
The Friendly Shire



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Mildura Civic Nexus

A masterplan to centralise public services delivery in the heart of Mildura's CBD, unlocking key buildings for housing and mix-use development.

Mildura Rural City Council's vision of a Mildura Gov-Industry Hub (Mildura Civic Nexus) is to create a meeting point for community, industry and public services in the region, designed to meet future demand and address changing needs.

The Mildura Civic Nexus aims to create a purpose-built precinct that integrates public services, industry collaboration, and community access in one of Victoria's most isolated and disadvantaged regions.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021 Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) highlighted Mildura as the fifth most disadvantaged local government area (from 78 LGA's) in Victoria. While the influx of transient workers from various Pacific Islander nations has contributed to Mildura's evolution into a vibrant, diverse community, the Council has highlighted the need to address migrant support services in the town.

Through shared infrastructure, services, and strategic land use, Mildura Rural City Council says this new precinct will reduce service delivery costs, improve accessibility, and unlock key CBD sites for housing and mixed-use development.

The project is expected to deliver positive environmental benefits by reducing emissions, energy, and water usage through efficient infrastructure and shared fleet arrangements. Additional green rooftop spaces could also help lower the heat island effect, manage stormwater, and support biodiversity by creating habitats.

By implementing advanced technologies such as solar panels, energy-efficient lighting, and smart water conservation systems, the infrastructure will further minimise resource consumption and carbon footprint.

Shared fleet arrangements would reduce the number of vehicles on the road, cutting both traffic congestion and exhaust emissions. Council states that green rooftops not only provide aesthetic value but also act as natural insulators, lowering building energy needs for heating and cooling. They can absorb rainfall, decrease runoff and lessen the risk of flooding during heavy storms.

Council says this project will serve as a replicable model for other regional service precincts. However, more detailed measurable project outcomes will be determined during the planning phase of this project.



Mildura Rural City Council





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Australian Renewable Energy Education Centre

A proposed interactive education and tourism hub designed to showcase renewable energy technology and foster STEM learning in the Central West (NSW).

The Australian Renewable Energy Education Centre (AREEC) aspires to be a dedicated interactive, visitor-focused renewable energy education facility, located in Mudgee, at the heart of NSW's pilot Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone (REZ).

It presents a bold step forward in positioning NSW as a national leader in renewable energy education, innovation and community engagement.

A proposal of Mid-Western Regional Council, AREEC would showcase cutting-edge renewable technologies, including solar, wind, bioenergy, hydro, hydrogen, and energy storage systems, through interactive exhibits, hands-on STEM experiences, and guided tours of operational energy sites.

The design would cater to school groups, families, industry professionals, and tourists, providing educational programs aligned with the Australian curriculum and fostering the next generation of renewable energy talent.

The Centre would serve as a hands-on science and technology hub, inspiring curiosity and innovation in renewable energy through interactive exhibits and real-world demonstrations.

AREEC will also serve as a conference and research venue, with seminar rooms, exhibition spaces, and a 200-seat theatre, attracting industry events, workshops, and knowledge-sharing forums. The facility's design will model sustainability – an off-grid building incorporating best practice green tourism standards, electric vehicle charging, and sustainable transport links via walking and cycling paths.

Mid-Western Regional Council says without AREEC, renewable projects will advance without fully engaging the communities they impact, leaving regions behind rather than bringing them along in the transition.





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Goldfields Grant Readiness Support Service

A local service born in Western Australia, building regional grant capability through mentoring, training and tools, unlocking funding for remote local organisations.

Since 2023, RDA Goldfields Esperance has played a vital role in supporting regional stakeholders, particularly local governments and not-for-profit organisations, in navigating complex funding programs and aligning applications with strategic regional priorities. These include the Growing Regions Program, Precincts and Partnerships Program and the Safer Local Roads and Infrastructure Program.

However, until now, the work has been undertaken by the RDA Director. Now, the RDA is investing in a new 12- month pilot program to expand its services – introducing the Grant Readiness Support Service.

The new service offers a series of workshops, engaging the local expertise of the regions only resident grant writer, Quippe Consulting. At present, RDA Goldfields Esperance is working to expand the programs capabilities, seeking expertise outside the region.

The program draws from desktop knowledge, including resources from the Institute of Company Directors and the RDA has purchased a grant discovery tool, Grant Guru.

A new part-time Grant Officer is being engaged and will utilise the services of a consultant to provide specialist input for up to 10 projects per year. This new project will also deliver a Grant Readiness Toolkit.

RDA Goldfields Esperance says this new model will deliver a scalable, cost-effective system where education, mentoring and local knowledge will enhance the capability of more than 450 community organisations within the region.





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Health Industry Workforce Development Plan

A new way forward to supercharge Toowoomba's health workforce: transforming education, enhancing industry collaboration and igniting a Grow Your Own strategy.

Driven by a genuine belief in the power of collaboration, Toowoomba and Surat Basin Enterprise (TSBE) and Jobs Queensland (JQ) have joined forces to tackle the region's labour market challenges and persistent skills shortages. Together, they are determined to unleash new opportunities, empower the local workforce, and spark transformative change for the future of Toowoomba.

In the Toowoomba region, the health care sector is a leading economic driver and the largest industry group. Beyond generating substantial regional economic output, TSBE says high-quality health services enhance the attractiveness of the region to workers from other industries.

An initial review of the local health industry has already been undertaken, as well as extensive industry consultation to inform the tailored workforce development plan, which includes a Grow Your Own Workforce approach.



To add strength to the project, several leading health organisations have united to form the Industry Advisory Group (IAG), including Darling Downs Health, Darling Downs West Moreton Primary Health Network, Toowoomba TAFE, University of Southern Queensland, Queensland Department of Trade, Employment and Training, Southern Queensland Rural Health, the allied health sector, the general practice sector, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs).

By working together, the governance body will match training opportunities to workforce needs, keep track of progress using key indicators, and use resources more efficiently. It also offers a space for joint decision-making, allowing local input to help guide solutions and keep initiatives relevant to the local community.

The workforce plan will be underpinned by three key pillars – Grow, Attract and Retain. These pillars will identify opportunities to enhance education pathways with local universities and vocational training providers, inspire local school students to consider a career in health and deliver support to current health workers.



Notes:

The Grow Your Own Toowoomba Health Industry Workforce Plan project is nearing completion, with the final report scheduled for release by the end of October 2025.

This milestone will mark the transition from planning to action. The next phase will focus on working closely with industry, education, health and community stakeholders to implement the five-year plan. The implementation will drive practical initiatives designed to build a stronger, locally grown workforce and deliver long-term benefits to the Toowoomba region.

TSBE says maintaining a sufficient health workforce is not just in the interests of employers – but is one of the most important factors in regional liveability, and economic success.



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Migrant Workers Support Network

A new neighbourhood watch style program being developed on the Mid-North Coast to improve outcomes for migrant workers, helping them find their voice.

Three local government areas have been listed in NSW as modern slavery and human trafficking hotspots by the NSW Modern Slavery Commissioner. RDA Mid North Coast has two of these in their region: Nambucca Valley and Coffs Harbour.

Like many regional and rural communities, this region relies on migrant workers to fulfil the demands in multiple industries. However, education and resources to support these employees are not always readily available. Now, a coalition of likeminded organisations on the Mid-North Coast have joined forces, to support local employers and migrant workers in this space.

The RDA Mid North Coast, Nambucca Valley Council, the City of Coffs Harbour, the Coffs Coast Multicultural Society and Nambucca Valley Country Women's Association have announced the newly formed Migrant Worker Support Network – drawing on the Neighbourhood Watch model in NSW.

The pilot seeks to increase the access and degree of support that migrant workers can obtain locally, by equipping residents and businesses with knowledge about workers, their vulnerabilities, rights and resources.

The project will support the community with information pamphlets in translated languages, training for Network Members in the Accidental Counsellor course and deliver information sessions for Network Members with the skills to assist when someone needs support.

The project will also provide monthly meals with Network Members, as well as a Welcome Dinner for migrant workers in the Valley.

The RDA Mid North Coast Team is exploring funding a PhD with University of Newcastle's Institute for Regional Futures to support the project by providing program research and evaluation of the initiative.

RDA Mid North Coast says if successful, the pilot program can be replicated in areas of need across the country.





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Streaky Bay Childcare Centre

A collaborative childcare initiative helping rural workers re-enter the workforce in rural Australia.

The success of the 40-place childcare centre in Steaky Bay stands as a compelling case study of innovative, and place-based community development.

Several interwoven factors contributed to its effectiveness, with the transformation of an underutilised building, into a thriving hub for families, increasing workforce participation, and instilling local pride.

Streaky Bay Council prepared a business case and evaluated various models to ensure the project's viability before involving developers. This early groundwork not only reassured the developer but also strengthened their case for federal funding support, which was successfully secured. By developing the business case and securing federal funding early, the Council reduced risk for developers and inspired confidence in the project.

This financial backing enabled the centre to offer service continuity, invest in quality staff training, and maintain high standards—all while remaining accessible to families.



Rather than imposing a generic solution, the project was tailored to the unique character and needs of the local community. By retrofitting an existing home, it repurposed local infrastructure and created a service that directly addressed gaps in childcare provision.

Council took a leadership role, uniting stakeholders and advocating for practical regulatory flexibility. Through open communication and shared objectives, the project overcame bureaucratic hurdles, ensuring licensing requirements were met without compromising quality or safety.

The project didn't just create jobs; it has established a pathway for staff to be trained and upskilled locally – supporting long term sustainability and strengthens the region's human resources.

For parents, the service has provided both consistent care and respite options. For the wider community, the repurposing of an old building into a childcare facility has created a shared sense of pride and investment in local infrastructure. The initiative has demonstrated that, with strategic facilitation, early planning, and strong advocacy, regional communities can deliver services on par with metropolitan centres.

The blueprint is both scalable and adaptable, offering hope and guidance for other regions facing similar challenges.





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Regional Projects Atlas

A groundbreaking online tool showcasing major regional projects spanning housing, infrastructure, manufacturing and energy, helping users assess cumulative impacts and guide investment decisions.

The Regional Projects Atlas is a proposed geospatial web tool that maps major projects occurring across regional Australia — including housing, infrastructure, energy, manufacturing, and service developments. The tool will allow users to see individual projects in detail and, more importantly, understand the cumulative impacts of multiple projects in a region.

The platform will offer valuable insights into a range of critical areas, including current workforce requirements and skills gaps, as well as the housing and infrastructure needs associated with schools, health services, transport, and digital connectivity. Additionally, it will help identify the economic and investment opportunities that arise from new developments in regional Australia.

The development of the Regional Project Atlas would have three main benefits:

- Enable governments at all levels to plan infrastructure and services proactively.
- Help communities understand and prepare for change in their regions.
- Attract investment by clearly presenting opportunities in growth sectors.



An Australian Government Initiative



Regional communities are grappling with a range of challenges as development accelerates, including local workforce shortages, increased housing pressure, and infrastructure struggling to keep pace. Access to reliable, consolidated project information is limited, making it difficult for communities, councils, and investors to plan effectively. As a result, the benefits of new projects are often unevenly distributed, with some regions bearing the strain without seeing the full economic or social advantages.

RDA Southern NSW and ACT say this project could be developed in three stages over an 18-month period, including scoping and data collection, platform development and delivery of a pilot for potential national roll-out.

Long-term, the project could strengthen regional resilience, reduce the risks of project “boom and bust,” and ensure communities benefit equitably from Australia’s major project pipeline.





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Event participants

Scan the QR code to view the full list of attendees from today's Regional Dialogue Day event.





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