



## SEGRA 2019 Communique

### Speaking up for regional Australia

Each year following the **SEGRA (Sustainable Economic Growth for Regional Australia)** Conference, the National Steering Committee release a communique “Speaking up for Regional Australia”. This Communique considers the conference theme and responds to key action agendas including identifying potential policy and practice actions. It is a summary of discussions at **SEGRA** and does not purport to represent a shared view by **SEGRA** National Steering Committee or delegates.

### About **SEGRA**

**SEGRA** is Australia's premier conference on regional issues. It is recognised as Australia's most credible independent voice on issues affecting regional Australia. Its strategic goal is to assist regional, rural and remote Australia to source and identify the knowledge, techniques and skills regions require to achieve successful economic growth and development.

**SEGRA** is committed to ensuring that regional Australia is fully considered as part of the framing of the national agenda.

The **SEGRA** conference, established in 1997, provides a unique opportunity for all sections of the Australian community, rural and urban, to explore the key issues affecting regional, rural and remote Australia and be part of providing positive sustainable outcomes to ensure future prosperity.

**SEGRA** has led the way in being cross-sectoral and multi-disciplinary, bringing together practitioners, policy makers, researchers, business, community, health, social services and the not for profit sector.

**SEGRA** is a practice community of over 8,000 people representing economic, community, health, social services and sustainability practitioners, all levels of government, researchers, elected representatives and business.



As such, it is the upholder of extraordinary collective expertise across regional, rural and remote Australia and is widely respected by governments, universities and regional development practitioners.

**SEGRA** is unique in that it is grass roots and practitioner driven. It has particular expertise in the area of implementation of government policy and projects.

Copies of all the PowerPoint presentations presented at the conference are available at: <https://segra.com.au/2019/conference-proceedings/>

## About the **SEGRA** 2019 Conference Theme – Rivers of Opportunity: activating your potential

At **SEGRA 2019**, speakers addressed some of the big questions around key issues facing regional Australia:

- what are the roles of government and business in regional development;
- where and how does regional Australia fit on the national agenda;
- how best to fund development in regional Australia;
- how can we enhance lifelong learning in the regions;
- what are the benchmarks or thresholds for service delivery; and
- how to ensure dynamic, vibrant healthy economies and communities?

As always, **SEGRA 2019** actively profiles some of the real success stories of regional Australia and considers how these case examples can provide transferable learnings to other regions.

## Action agendas for **SEGRA** 2019

**SEGRA** 2019 focused on six action agendas:

- Forming dynamic and vibrant healthy communities.
- Integrated lifelong learning and employment in the regions.
- Delivering quality freight and logistics and distribution services and connectivity networks.
- Implementing best practice landscape scale planning and management.
- Delivering place-based regional development.
- Regional Australia and the national agenda.



## About the conference destination

The **SEGRA** 2019 conference was held in Barooga, Berrigan Shire NSW, a cross river region shared with Cobram, Moira Shire Council. Cobram/Barooga is one of the most productive and innovative agricultural regions in Australia, renowned for high-quality dairy and canola, wheat, citrus and summer stone fruit that are all largely grown for the export market. Value-adding is also big business with dairy manufacturers Saputo and Bega calling the region home along with others such as MON Natural Foods and Sun Valley Australia Pty. Ltd. Like most regional areas, it faces challenges in providing career paths for those seeking a country lifestyle, but these larger industries can open opportunities.

The Murray River, which flows through this region, is the third longest navigable river in the world. It provides vital irrigation water for agriculture, but it is also a key visitor drawcard, providing a water-sport playground for swimmers, skiers, kayakers, jet ski enthusiasts and fishermen. The Murray River region is regarded as the number one golfing destination in Australia.

## Rivers of Opportunity: activating your potential was an apt theme for the location.

In discerning ways for activating potential opportunities for growth and vitality in regional Australia, the conference was very much focused on four themes:

- Applying strategic foresight
- Understanding and applying place-based approaches
- Creating healthy and vibrant communities
- Ensuring a sustainable future, particularly in regard to water



The conference also discussed the major opportunities for regional, rural and remote Australia expected in the next 10 years in areas of employment and training, innovation and technology, geotourism, product value-adding and the growth in collaborative investment in localised catalyst infrastructure.

## Strategic Foresight

Strategic Foresight is built on an understanding of the social, economic, environmental, technological and institutional trends playing out in Australia and internationally in past decades and which affect regions and their development into the future.

Five megatrends were identified:

1. Defeating distance: increased connectivity is a key enabler and will be a major influence on regional Australia. The right infrastructure can help regions capitalise on their comparative and competitive advantages, help people access work and other community health and social services and facilitate the movement of freight between locations. Infrastructure is also important in providing the basic services and utilities that Australians require to maintain and enhance their standard of living.
2. Global Exposure: regional Australia offers significant opportunities in global markets, but inclusion demands higher educational attainment and cultural engagement. However, there are big challenges in terms of equity particularly where an individual's motivation or ability to learn is impacted by social, cultural or economic circumstances. For example, workers in low skilled jobs receive fewer opportunities and less employer support for participation in training than workers in high skilled jobs.



3. Diverging places: there are different projections for large, mid-size and small towns - both in terms of demographic profile, economic structure and location (Urban, Inner regional, outer regional, remote).
4. New economies are emerging that regional Australia is well-placed to engage with particularly the generation of value through knowledge, innovation, new services and the changing mix of energy demand and sources of energy generation.
5. Environment is long recognised in regional Australia as a source of both livelihood and risk. The declining condition of natural assets, biodiversity, global climate change, extreme events and biosecurity all arose during the conference.

#### Potential policy and practice actions

- Tailoring policies to respond to regional differences.
- Enhancing planning and foresight capability for regions for example: the capacity for people in regions to anticipate and prepare for the opportunities and risks that changing global and national economic circumstances afford is crucial in regional Australia.
- Investing in human capital and adaptive capacity of business and communities.
- Investing in connectivity and infrastructure.
- Managing risk in regional, rural and remote Australia e.g. demographics, skilled workforce, access to tertiary education.

### Prosperous Regions

Regions make a significant (some would say a disproportionate) contribution to Australia. Regions account for:

- almost a third of Australia's total workforce



- More than 60% of total exports by value
- Almost a third of national GDP

(Deloitte Access Economics paper delivered at **SEGRA** 2019

<https://segra.com.au/perch/resources/915-daniel-terrell-segra-presentation-2019-final.pdf>)

Building blocks for regional prosperity include human and natural resources and physical capacity. However, this can be boosted by social capital, innovation and entrepreneurship, leadership and contribution. These are all areas which can be developed in regional and rural Australia and to some effect collaboration, contribution, innovation and entrepreneurship were stronger in rural Australia when compared with some inner city and suburban examples.

Five key areas for economic growth were identified

1. Tourism – particularly geotourism
2. Energy
3. Agribusiness
4. International Education
5. Wealth Management

Potential policy and practice actions

- The changing global market presents regions with opportunities particularly in food and fibre markets.
- There is an increased interest in products that are ethically produced.
- Increased connectivity and emerging middle-class consumers overseas make for new and more discerning markets.



- Increase capacity and governance frameworks to encourage coordination and collaboration across levels of government and with non-governmental regional stakeholders, in particular, business.
- Greater understanding of demographic data at the place level – high demographic turnover may represent intra-regional movement rather than city/urban leakage.

## Place-Based Approaches

The conference speakers and delegates discussed various strategies and approaches they had used in delivering place-based regional development, and some key lessons to help maximise outcomes and to navigate the various hazards, risks and traps.

*“Place based approaches are complex policies involving different levels of government and private actors which are subject to several serious risks. Their chances of success depend on how they are implemented, how risk is reduced and what form of governance is adopted” Barca 2009*

Three key elements of a place-based policy presented were:

- a) That it is a long-term strategy aimed at tackling persistent underutilisation of potential resources and reducing persistent social exclusion in specific places through external intervention and multi-level governance.
- b) In a place-based policy - public interventions rely on local knowledge,
- c) Linkages among places are to be taken into account.

The essence of a place-based approach is that it relates to a specific but not static scale and footprint and assumes plasticity in institutional arrangements.



### Potential policy and practice actions

- Greater focus on untapped opportunities for development potential with a focus on both economic potential and social opportunity.
- Production of bundles of integrated, place-tailored public goods and services, designed and implemented by eliciting and aggregating social preferences and knowledge through participatory political institutions and by establishing linkages with other places.
- Focusing on functional regions as well as administrative regions – a distributed architecture of regional development.
- Increased emphasis on integrated development opportunities rather than sector development e.g. retail.
- Institutional enablers for development/supporting of collaboration within and beyond regions.
- Investing in inclusion and liveability outcomes.
- Engaging local business and community, health and social services driven by values rather than interests.
- Strengthening coherence at local, state and federal government levels.
- Providing adequate budgetary commitment for staff resources and other costs – it is roughly \$600,000 to develop the best investible business case.
- Governance arrangements with clearly defined outcomes and lead responsibility identified.

### Healthy and Vibrant Communities

Leadership was a strong and recurring theme of the conference. A number of leadership development programs targeting local communities were presented.

Key learnings from these programmes included developing leaders with the capacity to:





- Think strategically at a systems level
- Understand and manage complex problems and systemic thinking
- Discern the difference between values and interests
- Agile learners - know how to manage complexity and are skilled at solving problems and making decisions under fast changing conditions

Highly connected regional centres offer considerable opportunity for collaboration. However, new skillsets for business collaboration and hubs of innovation are required.

There is also the potential for growing inequality between regions and between cities and regions.

The importance of the non-government community, health and social services sector as a major source of employment in regional Australia, was a key presentation at **SEGRA**.

#### Possible policy and practice actions

- Investing in education, training and knowledge strategies will be key to meeting changing economic demands.
- Government encouragement of affordable housing and transport options, employment and educational opportunities, public safety and access to health and human services will be essential in regions experiencing disadvantage from disruption.
- Select leaders who know how to manage complexity and are skilled at solving problems and making decisions under fast-changing conditions.
- Expand access to skills in managing global business.
- Extend regional strategic skills.



- Assist regions' need to be putting renewed emphasis on breakthrough innovation.
- Leverage networks.
- Inspire engagement.
- Personal adaptability.
- Cultivate learning agility.

## Sustainability

The **SEGRA** Conference has a long-standing commitment to the provision of safe and secure water to rural communities that are not on town water supply. It also is strongly committed to addressing issues affecting the Murray Darling Basin by working strategically with regions at a catchment level. This has been achieved through numerous workshops in the Murray Darling Basin as well as a Murray Darling Basin Forum and/or Practitioners Round Table at every **SEGRA** since 2015.

For regional towns and businesses, affordability and security of energy and water were identified as critical risks.

Renewable energy boom is currently underway in the electricity sector with the number and capacity of proposed and possible wind, solar and pumped-hydro projects far outstripping the capacity of the energy network, or grid.

### Potential policy and practice actions

- Managing the Catchment Systems' holistically.
- Maximising collaborative governance to deliver integrated catchment and water cycle management and harness the socio-economic benefits of ecosystem services.



- Maximising the economic potential of production and conservation landscapes, local and regional creative and entrepreneurial forces, and innovative commercial enterprise.
- Utilising the knowledge and value systems of 'Traditional Owners' to enhance environmental management practices and the attainment of sustainability goals: interfacing traditional and safe water approaches to reduce human and environmental health risks and achieve biodiversity outcomes.
- Quality strategic planning at the landscape scale.

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