



THIRTEENTH NATIONAL
CONFERENCE

KALGOORLIE-BOULDER WA

27-29 OCTOBER

*Regional Australia:
exploring new frontiers*

Background

The *Sustainable Economic Growth for Regional Australia, SEGRA*, conference was established in 1997 in response to growing concern about the absence of a single forum in which practitioners, business, government and researchers with a deep commitment to regional Australia could discuss issues and advance options and solutions for the future.

SEGRA is committed to providing challenging, thought provoking keynote addresses by Australia's leading social, political, economic and environmental thinkers; exemplars of some of Australia's outstanding regional development success stories and; providing a mechanism for drawing together and advancing knowledge and issues. It is focused on practical and applied presentations.

Context of *SEGRA* 2009

- The sudden and severe downturn in the economy and consequent impacts in a wide range of existing land use and economic activities including minerals and energy, agricultural and manufacturing industries;
- Changing climatic conditions and associated impacts on energy availability and usage, agricultural practices, and government mitigation strategies;
- Social impacts associated with effects on employment availability, location and population mobility.

Emerging Themes

1. Ensuring a voice for regional Australia - including appropriate legislative, planning and implementation mechanisms to maximise potential for growth and benefits in the resource sector to stay in regional communities
2. Planned decentralisation as a response to over urbanisation, peak oil, and the negative social and economic impacts of fly in and fly out (or drive in and drive out)
3. Industry, government and communities working together in whole of life planning
4. Growing Indigenous role and capacity for economic development
5. Provision of infrastructure in a strategic and coordinated way that creates connectivity for regional Australia not corridors through regional Australia.
6. Northern Australia - remoteness, population distribution, and the challenge of governance
7. Climate Change Responses - especially carbon trading emissions, regional mitigation strategies, food and water security and the need to seize the opportunities of the 'Green Industrial Revolution'
8. Professional development opportunities for practitioners

Some proposals raised at *SEGRA* *2009*

Regional Australia has specific and unique characteristics and qualities that need to be considered outside the policies frameworks that are commonly and usefully applied to densely populated areas typically regional agendas are focused on sectoral interests and economic and business considerations. It is harder for these frameworks for government business relations to address issues which are less amenable to market-based instruments.

Much of the discussion focused around the need to focus on and confront some of the fundamental ways in which regional development, policy frameworks, approaches and implementation instruments are developed and practiced.

Six themes

1. Governance
2. Economic
3. Infrastructure
4. Population and Social Proposals
5. Cultural and Land Rights
6. Natural Resource Use Management

Governance proposals

- Acknowledge the need for a common alliance throughout regional Australia and mechanisms to martial their commonalities - 'giving recognition to the voice of regional Australia';
- Establish mechanisms for managing the increasingly difficult choices between environment, community and industry - inherent contradictions eg Kimberly LNG Precinct;
- Identify regional stakeholders in order to act as advocates with the Commonwealth, State, Territory and local governments for: viable regional communities; decentralisation of functions and operations of governments, a commitment to resourcing regional development; clarity of funding and transparency;
- Recognise the need for strong, interrelated and sustainable frameworks that work within regions and articulate across regions;
- Assist industries and communities to work in collaboration with all spheres of Government to develop a shared vision and strategy to achieve specific outcomes

Economic proposals

- Initiate appropriate and enabling policy and institutional settings to facilitate regional development - political commitment;
- Foster returning 'royalties to the regions' as a targeted regional development funding mechanism;
- Encourage commercial entities in the resource sector to invest in the regions where they operate;
- Initiate 'whole of mine-life planning' to encompass cyclic impacts of large mineral resources development projects; reducing long infrastructure and approval times, sudden closures and or downsizing, amenity, location of workforce accommodation;
- Recognise that typically, large initial expenditures are made on non-relocatable assets with efficient capacity utilisation taking years or decades;
- Recognise that many of the properties of infrastructure are contrary to those often assumed in economic and finance systems;
- Argue that it is time for the full nature of infrastructure investment to be recognised and accommodated in funding and taxation regimes;

Economic proposals (cont'd)

- Foster greater application of research and development in areas including regional Australian monetary policy;
- Support an immediate review of the current system of Commonwealth Grants Commission that emphasises the importance of horizontal equity whilst not addressing disparities in access to services between regions within States;
- Seek that the Australian government urgently addresses the current fringe Benefit Tax settings which reward Fly in and Fly out and penalise the provision of housing for resident workers and their families;
- Encourage greater development of mine services in regions by way of education, housing, retail industry so as to be active disincentives for Fly in Fly out and Drive in and Drive out;
- Support and endorse development of accredited ecotourism initiatives and enterprises;
- Encourage funding research and development for value adding industry especially in mining and agriculture.

Infrastructure proposals

- Support strategic placement and access to soft infrastructure and services including establishing multi-user infrastructure
- Initiate serious strategies to secure water reform, State-wide demand for water in the minerals and energy sector was projected to grow at a Cumulative Annual Growth Rate of ~5% for 2008-2014 (Chamber of Minerals and Energy, WA);
- Install Information Technology and Communication platforms, communication and transport for global connectedness and competitiveness;
- Encourage patient capital and long term finance across several business cycles are needed - these have been discouraged by current arrangements.

Population and Social proposals

- Develop and implement policies and engagement activities for Indigenous people that: support positive and proactive leadership; ensure frameworks act to enable benefits to arise equally; address anticipated growth issues in communities; foster the provision and housing a skilled work force; provide social and financial infrastructure; and account for the often cyclical shifts in the economies of rural and remote regions;
- Evaluate benchmarks for equitable and accessible service delivery to all members of regional communities;
- Initiate appropriate labour force planning regarding education, training and flexible life long skills development in communities including articulating life skills and industry;
- Ensure that all communities have equal opportunities to benefit from economic growth now and in the future;
- Identify and develop sustainable, diverse business and employment opportunities for people in remote communities;
- Foster entrepreneurship and leadership; facilitate community engagement and encourage regional pride.
- Collaboratively develop a vision for growth and advocate for regions and communities of space and interests.

Population and social (cont'd)

- Establish relationships with Head Office level policy-makers of the community based organisations and peak body organisations;
- Support the establishment of a regional peak body to coordinate and assist not for profit organisations in satisfying multi-agency funding applications and compliance standards;
- Liaise with community-based organisations to mobilise existing and new residents within the 25-64 years age ranges;
- Foster greater development of mining services in regions - education, housing and retail industry;
- Initiate and support further research and development into early research indicators that there is substantial support for flexible, highly mobile accommodation solutions for mine workers and their families.

Cultural and land rights proposals

- Foster the development and implementation of mechanisms to appropriately incorporate Indigenous society into the mainstream global economy:
- Recognise that for many Indigenous Australians, their economic development is limited by access to credit and/or capital and that this can often be compounded by low levels of literacy and numeracy or by living in a remote location.
- Acknowledge that many of the big infrastructure projects are occurring in locations where there is are relatively large Indigenous population, that are characterised by low Indigenous employment.
- Optimise the opportunity for Indigenous groups and individuals to participate in major projects as sub-contractors, suppliers and as business owners.

Natural resource use management proposals

- Support policy development and foster institutional arrangements to effectively address natural resource management issues including water security and biodiversity conservation
- Foster the self-sustaining management of renewable and non renewable resources
- Foster the better management of the environmental footprint of all land users
- Support one-stop -shop approval processes
- Encourage research and development investment in water efficiency as an increasingly important area of societal concern .
- Increase research and development into renewable energies and reduce energy uses;
- Lower the footprint and impact of agricultural practices at different scales;
- Foster drought tolerant cropping;
- Encourage more forward planning and collaboration in catchment management i.e. industry to industry and between industry and government will be valuable.

Synthesising the proposed actions

- Capitalize on growth in 'green industries' ;
- Plan for decentralisation, particularly in regard to shifts from oil dependence;
- Localise development of human resource capacities, goods and services in response to food and water security;
- Address Indigenous legal rights and land claims
- Grow Indigenous role and capacities in land and sea management, and recognition of Indigenous economic and natural resource knowledge
- Ensure appropriate legislative, planning and implementation mechanisms to maximize potential for growth and benefits in the resource sector to stay in regional communities;
- Create flexible, lifelong skilled human resources; and
- Plan responses to the shifts in agricultural patterns as a result of climate change.

Where to next?

- Assessing options – criteria
- Ranking Options
- Advocacy
- Strategic approaches
- National, regional and local opportunities

How can you be involved

Please contact *SEGRA* Secretariat if you or your organization would like to participate in :

- an online discussion of the Communiqué;
- be part of the working party;
- contribute your ideas; or
- lead or be part of a research project.



SEGRA2009

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