



26 Sept 2017

**Questions on Notice for the Select Committee on Regional Development and Decentralisation, following RDA Central West appearance at the inquiry 18 Sept 2017.**

*Question – Cathy McGowan MP requested further information regarding how the Commonwealth – and state and local government - could be more collaborative in regional development. Ms McGowan asked about how capacity building in regions might be formalised and knowledge be passed on. Ms McGowan also requested some “blue sky thinking” in relation to long term regional development on a national scale.*

**Answer, from Julia Andrews, Executive officer, RDA Central West –**

Continuity of government leadership is a key issue and barrier to growth facing RDAs. Even if better channels for collaboration are established, it is difficult for them to be meaningful and achieve outcomes in the long term if goalposts in terms of RDA funding and government support keep changing. At best, RDAs can only possibly achieve short term goals and outcomes when funding is on a six monthly or yearly basis.

In a positive move to address this, last month the Minister for Regional Development, Fiona Nash, announced that the Federal Government would commit to funding RDAs for the next three years through to 2020. This is a very welcome announcement which provides us with the ability to plan and develop meaningful projects in our region and employ our small team for the next three years.

Additionally, the Commonwealth has agreed to help facilitate better communication and engagement between government departments and RDAs. This is a very practical and meaningful step. Many government departments are not aware of the powerful resource they have at their disposal with RDAs. RDAs can facilitate deep stakeholder engagement between government and regional communities, and can help promote and roll out policies, projects and funding opportunities.

RDA Central West has forged its own collaboration with the NSW Department of Primary Industries International Engagement Unit this year – working together on a significant skills-based project to develop pathways to E-Commerce in China for regional agribusinesses. Government assistance to facilitate more collaborations like this would be of great value.

On a State level, the situation is quite different, with the NSW State government non-committal about providing any financial support to RDAs in the future. Yet RDAs continue to support the promotion of State programs in order to ensure the community is not disadvantaged. In previous years, the State funded RDA Central West \$50,000/year to help with operational expenses, and \$100,000/year for projects such as the highly regarded Value Adding to Agriculture in Central West NSW report (provided to the panel at the inquiry in Orange

<http://www.rdacentralwest.org.au/initiatives/value-adding-to-agriculture-in-central-west-nsw/>)

The \$150,000 hole in RDA Central West's budget has had profound effects, with staff number and project work decreasing. It is not unreasonable to suggest that \$150,000 is a relatively small amount of money considering it provides direct employment in the region and significant outcomes in regional development.

Therefore, collaboration between the Federal and State government to support RDAs is essential to the ongoing viability of our organisations and our work on the ground in the regions.

Collaboration must also exist at the local government level. Although it is not the case in other regions, in Central West NSW, RDA and Centroc (Central NSW Councils) have signed an MOU and enjoy an excellent, productive collaborative relationship. RDA Central West and Centroc attend each other's General meetings and provide regular reports on activities to ensure the two organisations do not replicate work and are one voice in regional advocacy. Recent examples of collaboration between RDA Central West and Centroc include;

- Working together to develop a priority infrastructure matrix for the region. RDA took responsibility for the telecommunications part of this project.
- Data Co-design project – working together and with State and Federal government agencies to find ways to improve data access
- Economic Development Managers' Forum – this is a regular forum which enables Economic Development Managers from all Centroc/ RDA CW region councils to come together to share information and ideas. RDA CW facilitates this forum in collaboration with Centroc.

The RDA CW/Centroc relationship may be a good model for other regions to replicate.

Blue Sky thinking...it still comes down to transport infrastructure!

It is essential to better link Central West NSW to Sydney. Build a tunnel through the Blue Mountains (!) – or at least put a long-term strategy into the Bells Line of Road. Develop more direct train routes from CW NSW into Sydney – from Dubbo, from Orange and from Bathurst. Currently, we cannot move people or product effectively in and out of the region, and until that happens growth will be forever restricted (see our recent SME logistics report <http://www.rdacentralwest.org.au/initiatives/agricultural-sme-logistics/>). So many industries are affected by this - agriculture most obviously, but tourism also. The reality is only self-drive tourists can realistically visit most of regional NSW. No domestic or international tourists can get out to the regions and get themselves around without a car. Therefore, the tourism industry will also be forever restricted.

The Inland Rail will be a huge benefit to the region, the state and the nation, especially in regards to moving commodities and the development of supporting industries. However, transport and logistics for SME agricultural producers, communities and tourists will remain a burning issue.

World class transport links would have inestimable advantages to regional growth and development and take significant pressure off population growth in Sydney. They would also facilitate better decentralisation. If our transport infrastructure is not world class, we cannot expect to compete on a world stage.

*Question – The panel requested additional information on the newly launched GATE precinct in Orange – a collaboration with industry and the NSW DPI to see innovative agricultural ideas move through from research and development to commercialisation.*

*Answer – GATE now has a website <http://www.thegate.org.au/>*