

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES SELECT COMMITTEE ON  
REGIONAL AUSTRALIA

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**Questions on Notice**

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**Addressed to Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications**

**Hearings held Thursday 7 May 2020.**

- 1. Has the Department begun considering or planning for an infrastructure program that will partner with local government on capital/infrastructure projects that go beyond the scope of the current exercise in relation to roads/transport?**

On 4 March 2020, the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Development, and the Minister for Population, Cities and Urban Infrastructure wrote to their state counterparts calling for additional projects to be fast-tracked given the difficulties facing the economy in the wake of COVID-19.

The Deputy Prime Minister also wrote to all Councils on 6 March 2020 seeking identification of potential projects that could be fast-tracked within six months to ensure the needs of regional and remote communities, including Indigenous communities, are considered as part of any infrastructure stimulus package.

Responses from States, Territories and Local governments have included activities that are beyond traditional land transport infrastructure. The Government will consider these proposals, and any outcomes from this process will build on the Government's existing \$100 billion infrastructure pipeline, and complement existing programs such as Roads to Recovery, Bridges Renewal, and Heavy Vehicle Safety and Productivity Programs.

On 22 May 2020 the Government announced a \$500 million Local Roads and Community Infrastructure Program to deliver priority local road and community infrastructure across Australia. Local governments and state and territory governments that provide local infrastructure, including in unincorporated areas, will be able to access funding under the program (see [Attachment A](#) for further details).

The Government is also supporting local communities by extending some existing transport infrastructure programs to take into account the impact of natural disasters, such as bushfire and floods. This includes the most recent rounds of the Bridges Renewal Program and the Heavy Vehicle Safety and Productivity Program, which will provide up to \$300 million across both Programs. These programs have been adapted to allow more flexibility in providing for those communities which have been affected by bushfire and flood.

- 2. Is it possible for any such planning process to also consider the importance of supporting regional and remote Indigenous communities, some of which have infrastructure administered by land councils or Indigenous corporation structures rather than local governments?**
  - a. Is the Department prepared to consider supporting community health infrastructure like bathrooms, laundries, hand-washing facilities, and the like, which would respond to community needs, represent permanent improvements to amenity, and function as preventative measures in relation to COVID-19?**
  - b. How would such proposals be best presented?**

Through the Infrastructure Investment Program the department is supporting employment and supplier-use outcomes for Indigenous communities. The Indigenous Employment and Supplier-Use Infrastructure Framework aims to increase Indigenous employment and supplier-use in the delivery of land transport infrastructure projects funded or co-funded by the Australian Government. The Framework applies to projects receiving \$7.5 million or more in Australian Government contributions (and in some circumstances for projects below \$7.5 million with strong potential to support Indigenous Participation).

Questions in relation to the Commonwealth's support for Indigenous communities should be directed to the National Indigenous Australians Agency.

- 3. There has been something of a rule of thumb in the past that sees Commonwealth motoring taxes (principally fuel excise) returned to fund state road/transport projects at around 50 cents in the dollar, yet in Western Australia a 2018 report commissioned by RAC WA showed that over the preceding 12 years WA has averaged a return of just 28c even though it is the largest and most remote state, with the highest road fatality rate. At the time of the RAC WA the rate of return was projected to fall to 12c per dollar collected by 2020-21. Has that rate of return lifted since that time, and can we receive a table of comparative Commonwealth motoring revenue and transport contributions in relation to all states and territories?**

The Australian Government's total commitment to transport infrastructure projects in Western Australia is over \$13.6 billion from 2013-14 onwards, including grants and other infrastructure related commitments. This amount is not linked to Commonwealth fuel excise revenue or other motoring-related taxes. Questions seeking further detail on Commonwealth fuel excise revenue should be directed to the Treasury portfolio.

**4. Can the Department supply information received from NBN Co in relation to broadband data usage in non-metropolitan areas since the outbreak of COVID-19, separated by technology type (e.g. Sky Muster, fixed wireless, FTTN, etc)?**

NBN Co does not provide the Department with disaggregated information in the form requested by the Committee.

NBN Co provides monthly updates of key metrics on its website: [www.nbnco.com.au/corporate-information/about-nbn-co/updates/dashboard-april-2020](http://www.nbnco.com.au/corporate-information/about-nbn-co/updates/dashboard-april-2020). This webpage now also provides data on network usage during the COVID-19 pandemic and shows the increase in traffic across the network since social distancing measures were implemented to stop the spread of COVID-19.

NBN Co's network monitoring has demonstrated throughout this time that its network has substantial latent capacity left to cope with an increased number of people working and studying at home during the day. NBN Co has continually monitored demand and augmented the network to meet potential demand surges.

The Department discusses network performance with NBN Co on an ongoing basis and requested/supported the provision of additional information specific to COVID-19 on the company's website.

**5. Has the Department asked NBN Co to consider making the current extended satellite data allowances permanent?**

The Department has not asked NBN Co to consider making the extended satellite data allowances implemented during COVID-19 permanent.

**a. As those data limits clearly can be expanded, on what basis would they be reduced again to previous levels?**

NBN Co implemented the additional 45 Gigabytes (GB) of download data for each standard Sky Muster plan until July 2020. This was done in response to COVID- specific capacity needs to address the expected increase usage during the day time and not to support increase capacity during the typical peak night time period.

This was done in an effort to support the higher volumes of traffic due to people working from home and conducting schooling remotely.

NBN Co continually seeks to improve its services through developing new products that better meet consumer and business needs. Recent changes to the NBN Sky Muster Plus product are an example. This is an ongoing product that will be available to enable premises using a satellite service to download larger data volumes.

Launched in August 2019, Sky Muster Plus originally offered unmetered usage for selected internet essentials including web browsing, emails, internet banking and operating system updates.

From April 1 2020, unmetered activities have been significantly expanded to cover all online content and applications, with only two exclusions – video streaming and VPN traffic – which continue to be metered.

Other enhancements include the introduction of a new 25 Gigabyte (GB) plan offering 25GB of peak data and 25GB of off-peak data for households with lower data needs that still require the flexibility of unmetered data, and the option of 'top up' data should they exhaust their monthly metered data allowance.

- 6. Are you able to comment and provide data on the impact the summer bushfires and COVID-19 have had on:**
- a. the employment opportunities for Regional Australians?**
  - b. Regional Australia's major industries?**
  - c. Regional arts communities?**

#### **Employment opportunities for Regional Australia**

Measurement of employment opportunities is difficult to calculate spatially. However, the Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE) constructs an Internet Vacancy Index (IVI), which provides an indication of job advertisements in a labour market.

Nationally, DESE states that the COVID-19 pandemic had a significantly negative impact on recruitment activity in March 2020. Over the month, new job advertisements fell by 5.3 per cent (7600) in trend terms or 22.3 (35,300) in seasonally adjusted terms.

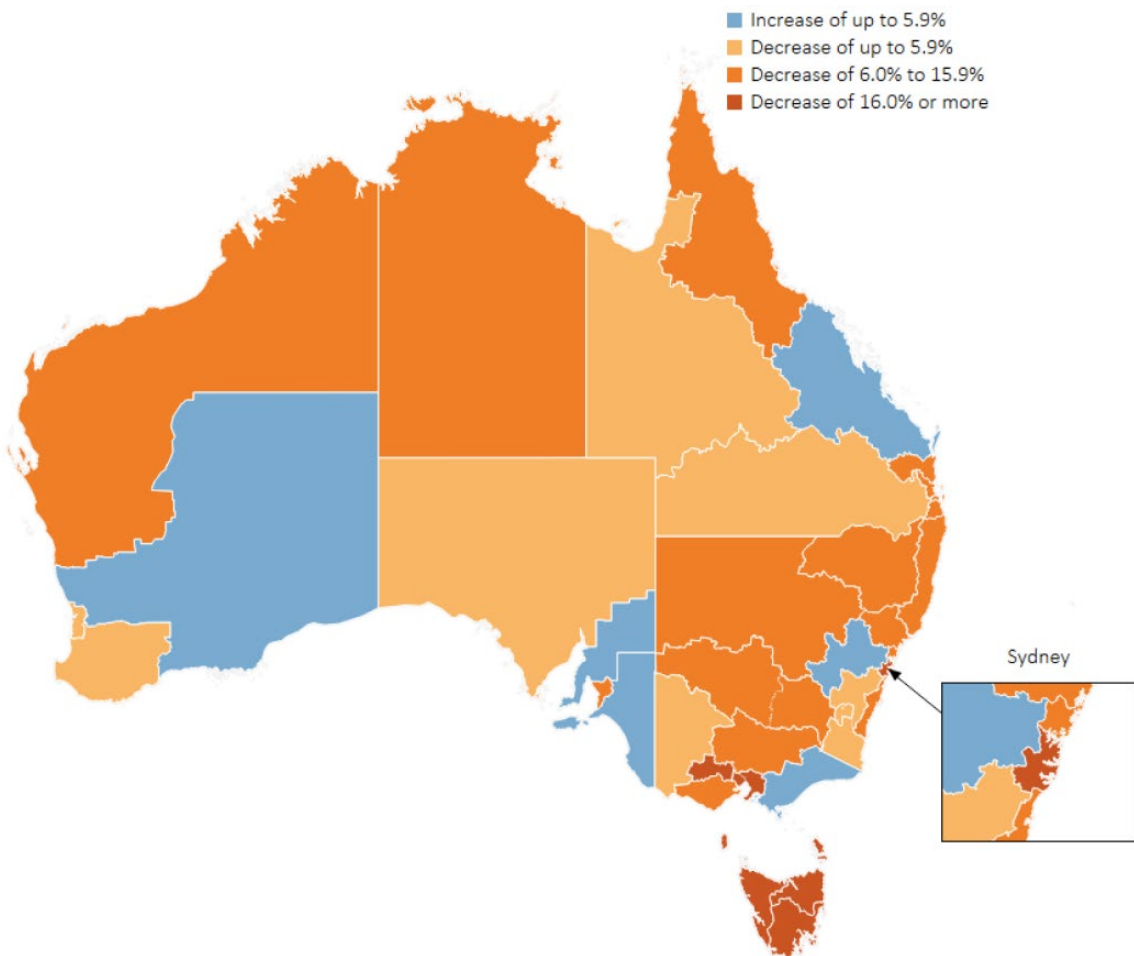
Regionally, over the year to March 2020, in three month moving average terms, job advertisements increased in five of the 37 IVI regions and remained steady in one (see Map 1). Increases were reported in Gippsland (Vic) (up by 1.2 per cent), followed by Goldfields & Southern (WA) (1.1 per cent), Central Queensland and Fleurieu Peninsula & Murray Mallee SA (both up by 0.6 per cent), and Blue Mountains, Bathurst & Central West (NSW) (0.2 per cent). Job advertisements were unchanged in Yorke Peninsula & Clare Valley (SA) over the year to March 2020.

The strongest decreases in job advertisements were recorded in Launceston and Northeast (TAS) (down by 33.4 per cent), followed by Hobart & Southeast (TAS) (27.0 per cent), Sydney (23.4 per cent), Ballarat & Central Highlands (VIC) (21.0 per cent), and Melbourne (VIC) (20.4 per cent).

It should be noted that some of these strong increases account for relatively small numbers of job advertisements. For example, the strongest increase of 1.2 per cent, recorded for Gippsland VIC, is equivalent to an increase of 16 job advertisements.

In addition, the IVI does not reflect the total number of job advertisements in the labour market as it does not include jobs advertised through other online job boards, employer websites, or in newspapers. Nor does it take account of vacancies filled using informal methods such as word of mouth.

Map 1: Internet Vacancy Index Annual Change by Region, March 2020



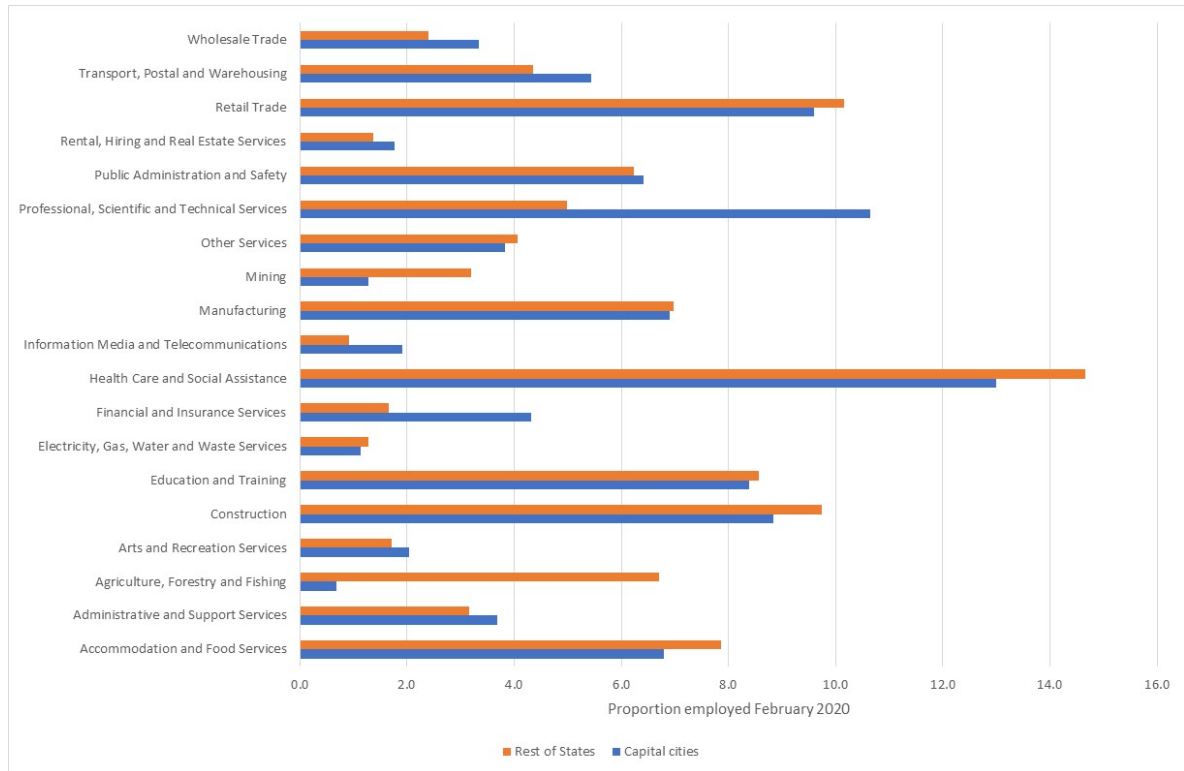
Source: DESE 2020 link - <https://lmip.gov.au/default.aspx?LMIP/GainInsights/VacancyReport>

### Regional Australia's Major Industries

The most current estimates for industries impacted by COVID-19 and Bushfires spatially is from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) for February 2020. Unfortunately, these estimates do not cover the full impact of COVID-19 implemented over the following month. In addition, Major bushfires resulted in disruption to ABS data collection operations in some regions in New South Wales and Victoria during January 2020, and to a lesser extent in February 2020.

As of February 2020, the largest employing industry for both capital cities and rest of states was Health Care & Social Assistance at 13.0 and 14.6 per cent respectively, followed by Retail Trade for regional Australia at 10.2 per cent (capital cities at 9.6 per cent is the third highest). Two important industries located in regional Australia and are substantially higher than in capital cities are Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing at 6.7 per cent (capital cities is at 0.7 per cent) and Mining at 3.2 (capital cities 1.3 per cent). Alternatively, industries strongly represented in capital cities are Professional, Scientific & technical Services (10.6 per cent compared to 5.0 per cent), and Finance and Insurance Services (4.3 per cent compared to 1.7 percent).

Figure 1: Industry structure by employment, February 2020

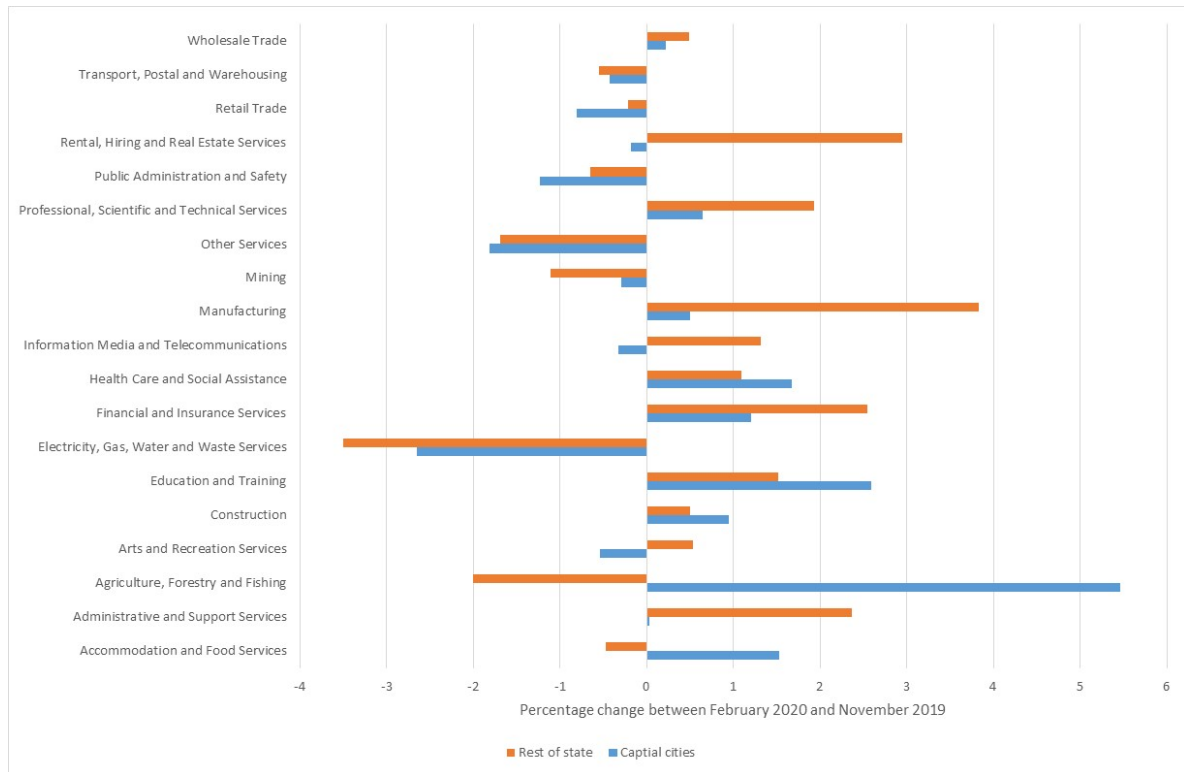


Source: ABS 2020 Labour Force Survey Cat. No. 6291.0.55.003

Figure 2 presents the percentage in employment by industry for capital cities and rest of states between November 2019 and February 2020. These changes do not currently fully reflect the impact of COVID-19 and only partially the impact of the Bushfires. It should be noted that an update of the industry employment estimates spatially will be released on 25 June 2020.



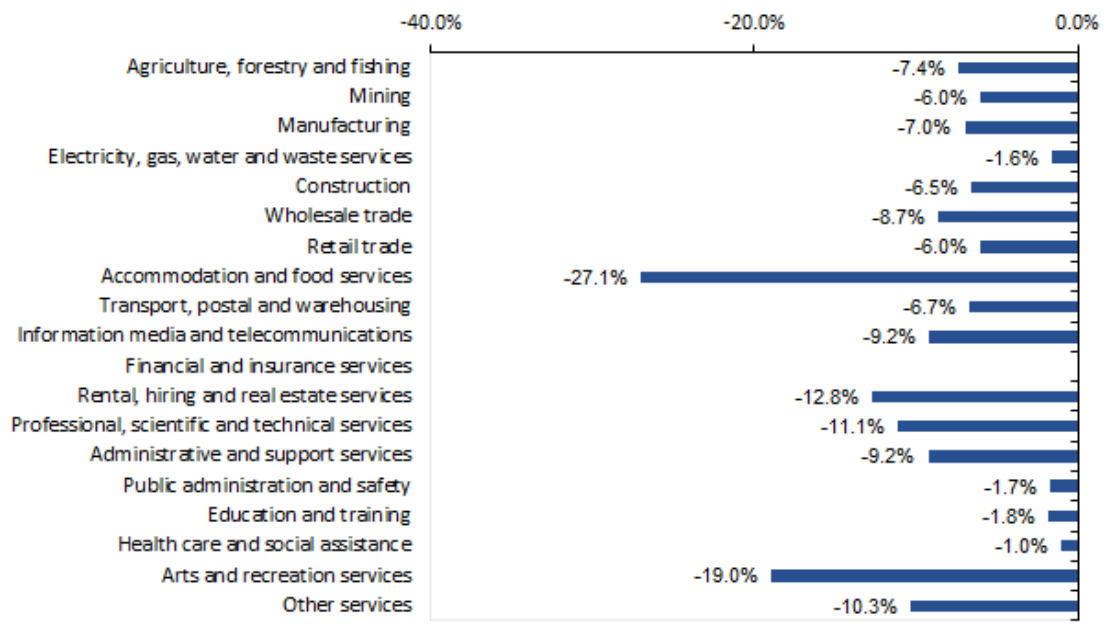
Figure 2: Percentage change in employment by Industry, between November 2019 and February 2020



Source: ABS 2020 Labour Force Survey Cat. No. 6291.0.55.003

That said, at the national level the most recent data reflecting changes in industry employment has been made available by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). Figure 3 presents the changes in employee jobs by industry from 14 March to 18 April 2020. The two largest industry employee falls were: Accommodation & Food Services decrease by -27.1 per cent and Arts & Recreation Services decreased by -19.0 per cent.

Figure 3: Changes in employee jobs by industry from 14 March to 2 May 2020



Source: ABS 2020 Weekly Payroll Jobs and Wages in Australia Cat. No. 6160.0.55.001

### Regional Arts Community

The proportion of employment in the Arts & Recreation Services sector in capital cities and the rest of states as of February 2020 were 2.0 per cent and 1.7 per cent respectively. This industry grew over the past year by 12.9 per cent outside capital cities but declined in capital cities by 1.8 per cent.

However, utilising the ABS Payroll data, since the week ending 14 March 2020 (the week Australia recorded its 100th confirmed COVID-19 case) the largest changes were in Accommodation & Food Services decreasing by 27.1 per cent and Arts & Recreation Services decreasing by 19.0 per cent (see Figure 3). That said, over the same period, total wages from payroll for the Arts and Recreation Services sector increased by 5.0 per cent.

## **7. What does the Department see as the current challenges for Regional Australia?**

The submission from the then Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Cities and Regional Development (sub 64) to this inquiry set out a number of challenges for Regional Australia, many of which reflect global trends. These include population movement into cities and larger regional centres, leading to declining and/or ageing populations in smaller regional and rural communities; technological advancements that has implications for employment opportunities; less diversified economies; and the impacts of climate events such as drought and bushfires.

These existing challenges will be compounded by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, although the full extent of those impacts won't be known for some time. Early restrictions on travel had an immediate effect on some sectors, including aviation and tourism, as well as the regions reliant on those sectors for connectivity and economic activity. Other sectors such as mining have not been so severely impacted. Understanding the impacts and what challenges they hold for regional Australia will be key to long-term recovery from COVID-19.

**8. What does the Department see as the strengths of Regional Australia?**

**a. Does the Department see a way to harness these strengths to respond to the challenges of 2020?**

As set out in the submission from the then Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Cities and Regional Development (sub 64) to this inquiry, the Department sees great economic and social strengths in Regional Australia. The submission explores the challenges and opportunities faced by regional Australia and the investment made by the Infrastructure portfolio in our regions to support the Government's objectives, and provides case studies around regions that are capitalising on their strengths and that are working with government to strengthen their communities.

The Department is responsible for leading and developing the Government's regional policy through Budget Program 3.1, Regional Development. The aim of this Program, and its related measures, is to strengthen the sustainability, capacity and diversity of our cities and regional economies, including through facilitating local partnerships between all levels of government and local communities; through reforms that stimulate economic growth; and providing grants and financial assistance.

The Department is implementing the Government's agenda to build on these strengths by investing in the drivers of growth to help our regions through the COVID-19 crisis and into the recovery phase. The Department's opening statement to the Committee on 7 May 2020 describes specific commitments being implemented to invest in these themes (Hansard, pages 1-3).

**9. OECD research highlights the importance of responding to the different needs of regions (sub 64, p. 20).**

**a. Apart from Regional Deals, have any other place-based policies been implemented?**

The Australian Government has long been a member of the OECD and is actively represented on the OECD's Regional Development Policy Committee. In March 2019, OECD member states, including Australia, adopted the OECD Principles on Rural Policy (<http://www.oecd.org/cfe/regional-policy/oecd-principles-rural-policies.htm>). This document recommends that member states apply 11 Principles to assist in targeting policy actions for all types of rural/regional areas, to help develop integrated and effective strategies to build smart, sustainable and inclusive rural areas fit for the future and to engage stakeholders in policies for rural areas. The concept of place-based policy – that governments should create interventions and solutions appropriate to the requirements and needs of the particular communities and localities which are intended to benefit from them – is embedded within all the Principles, as a guide to how they should be implemented. While these Principles have the status of recommendations only, Australian Government policy approaches and program interventions are consistent with them. For example, targeted program interventions such as the Stronger Communities Program, Community Development Grants, Building Better Regions Fund, the Drought Communities Program, Empowered Communities and the new Regional Communications Program have all been designed and are delivered using principles of inclusive engagement of communities, and co-operation between multiple levels of government, and are all intended to respond to communities' identified needs in order to maximize the potential of rural and regional areas.

**b. What international examples of regional development can be, or have been, adopted by Australia?**

Australia's membership of the OECD's Regional Development Policy Committee assists in ensuring that international experience is able to be embedded in Australian practice and also that Australian experience is able to be shared with other member states.

For example, OECD-wide surveys and reports – such as the biannual Regional Outlook <http://www.oecd.org/publications/oecd-regional-outlook-2019-9789264312838-en.htm> – cover examples and data from Australia and indicate that Australia's approaches and interventions are fully consistent with the approaches of other member states, including in tackling the impact on regional areas of global megatrends such as technological, demographic and environmental challenges.

The OECD recognizes that member states must develop their own approaches to regional development as appropriate to their specific economic and social and environmental conditions and needs.

**10. Your submission emphasises targeted, place-based approaches to regional development. These include three pilot Regional Deals (sub 64, p. 16).**

**a. Can you provide the Committee with an update on the status of the negotiations for the Hinkler and Albury Wodonga Deals?**

Albury Wodonga Deal

Informal negotiations with the New South Wales and Victorian Governments, and the Albury and Wodonga Councils, are currently underway on a Regional Deal for Albury Wodonga.

The Albury Wodonga Regional Deal will seek to ensure that the region prospers over the next decade by supporting population growth and economic development, while also ensuring it remains a nationally-significant, liveable and prosperous region. The Albury Wodonga Regional Deal would be the first cross-border Regional Deal, which would provide an opportunity to harmonise some of the regulatory barriers faced in the region, and to drive local growth and productivity.

The Australian Government is providing an initial investment of \$3.2 million to support the development of the Deal.

The time taken to develop and agree a Regional Deal varies from location to location. There has been some disruptions to discussions and negotiations with Deal partners resulting from both the bushfires and the COVID-19 pandemic, which has contributed to the delayed signing of the Statement of Intent that will guide the negotiation of the Albury Wodonga Regional Deal. Once the Statement of Intent is signed by all governments the formal negotiation of the Regional Deal will commence.

Hinkler Regional Deal

The over \$260 million Hinkler Regional Deal Implementation Plan was signed on 30 January 2020 by the Australian Government, Fraser Coast Regional Council and Bundaberg Regional Council, with implementation of commitments across the region underway.

A range of projects, such as the Royal Flying Doctor Service Training Facility, the Fraser Coast Hospice, and the Childers Road (Isis Highway) overtaking lanes are completing detailed design work. Other projects, such as the Hervey Bay Airport redevelopment, have already commenced construction.

**i. Can the Department please confirm it is possible for the Albury Wodonga Working Groups to meet on an informal basis ahead of Victorian Government approval?**

A signed Statement of Intent is fundamental to ensuring that stakeholder engagement through the Working Groups is guided by the agreed priorities and focus areas of governments. While informal stakeholder engagement is ongoing, the intention is that Working Groups will be convened once the Statement of Intent is signed.

**b. Have any reviews been undertaken of the Barkly Regional Deal?**

The effectiveness of the Barkly Regional Deal in improving the productivity and liveability of the Barkly region by stimulating economic growth and improving social outcomes will be measured over the 10 year life of the Deal. This will include a number of reviews and an external evaluation.

As is the practice for City Deals, annual progress reports will be published from 2020 onwards to provide a succinct summary of the progress of each initiative and highlight key achievements of the Deal in the community. The first of these reports is currently in development.

In addition to annual progress reports, a formal review of the Barkly Regional Deal will be undertaken in 2022, 2025 and 2029. The reviews will assess the effectiveness of the Deal in achieving economic, social and cultural change within the Barkly region.

**11. Can you outline the steps the Government is taking to address skills shortages in regional areas (sub 64, p. 8)?**

As advised, this question has been transferred to the Department of Education, Skills and Employment for response.



**12. Have there been additional Commonwealth agencies relocated from capital cities as part of the Government's decentralisation agenda?**

Since 2013, the Government has announced over 1,700 new and relocated government jobs from Canberra, inner Sydney and inner Melbourne. More than 1,000 of these jobs are located outside our capital cities in regional Australia.

Between 2017 and 2019, the Government announced the relocation of 430 public service jobs from 13 agencies (see [Attachment B](#)).

**13. Can you provide some examples of exhibits promoted as part of the Visions of Australia Program (sub 58, p. 7)?**

The Australian Government makes available approximately \$2.5 million (GST exclusive) each year for the Visions of Australia regional exhibition touring program. Established in 1992, the objective of the program is to provide increased access to material from Australia's broad range of cultural collections, particularly to audiences in regional and remote venues. Over the past five years, the program has supported over 100 touring exhibitions of cultural material of historic, scientific, design, social and artistic significance to travel to metropolitan, regional and remote venues across every Australian state and territory.

The program provides development and touring funding to a range of eligible cultural organisations across Australia including major collecting institutions, regional museums and galleries, Indigenous arts centres and other not-for-profit arts and cultural organisations. Two funding rounds are delivered each year, usually in February and September.

Since 2017-18, the program has provided \$7.4 million (GST exclusive) for exhibitions to travel to 549 venues, including 337 regional venues and 35 remote venues. Within the examples below are references to Major City, Inner Regional, Outer Regional or Remote venues. These categories are obtained using the Australian Statistical Geography Standard. As tours are generally undertaken over a lengthy period, touring itineraries may be subject to change.

Examples of exhibitions funded under the program are described below. These include the venues currently planned or confirmed as at 22 May 2020. With the long lead times associated with touring exhibitions, planned venue dates are subject to change. Since March 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic has also affected the timing of exhibitions to some venues.

JamFactory Craft and Design (South Australia) – 'Steel: art design architecture'

Planned tour dates: February 2017 – July 2020

Funding of \$265,360 (GST exclusive) over four years was provided to JamFactory in 2015-16 to tour the STEEL: art design architecture exhibition which explores innovative and outstanding creative ways that steel is being used in Australia today by showcasing the work of 28 selected artists, designers and architects.

The exhibition is the third in a series of four materials-focused JamFactory exhibitions, with other exhibitions in the series focussing on wood (2013), glass (2015) and concrete (2018). Selected artists, designers and architects include representatives from every Australian state and territory.

This exhibition has toured to 13 venues across major cities, inner and outer regional locations in South Australia, New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and Western Australia. It is expected that the exhibition will be seen by approximately 115,000 visitors.

Further information about this exhibition is available from the exhibition website at: [www.steel-exhibition-jamfactory.com.au/](http://www.steel-exhibition-jamfactory.com.au/)

Australian War Memorial (ACT) – 'For Country, For Nation'

Planned tour dates: April 2018 – July 2020

Funding of \$92,007 (GST exclusive) was provided to the Australian War Memorial in 2017-18 to tour the exhibition *For Country, For Nation*, focussing on the experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who served in the Australian armed forces during World War One.

Cultural material in the exhibition includes objects, photographs, ephemera, and artworks by leading Indigenous artists, as well as works by emerging Indigenous Australian artists.

This exhibition has toured to six venues in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia with two further venues in New South Wales and the Northern Territory. The exhibition is expected to reach more than 250,000 visitors.

Further information about this exhibition is available from the Australian War Memorial website at: [www.awm.gov.au/visit/exhibitions/for-country-for-nation](http://www.awm.gov.au/visit/exhibitions/for-country-for-nation)

Gab Tituti Cultural Centre (Torres Strait Islands, Queensland) in partnership with the National Museum of Australia, Canberra – ‘Evolution: Torres Strait Masks’

Planned tour dates: September 2018 – August 2020

Funding of \$158,457 (GST exclusive) was provided to the Torres Strait Regional Authority (Gab Titui Cultural Centre) in 2017-18 for an exhibition of Torres Strait masks which are representational of ancestral, supernatural and totemic beings that form an important component of the traditional beliefs of Torres Strait Islanders.

The exhibition features masks made by cultural practitioners and artists from the Torres Strait with the involvement of community elders, the use of academic research and artistic interpretation. Funding was provided to tour the exhibition to major national cultural institutions in Victoria and Western Australia thereby extending the national reach of Torres Strait Islander culture.

This exhibition has toured to four venues in the Australian Capital Territory, Queensland, Victoria and Western Australia and is expected to resume touring to two further venues in Western Australia and is expected to be seen by more than 130,000 visitors.

Further information about this exhibition is available from the National Museum of Australia website at: [www.nma.gov.au/exhibitions/evolution-touring](http://www.nma.gov.au/exhibitions/evolution-touring)

Contemporary Art Tasmania (Tasmania) – ‘The Partnersshipping Project’

Planned tour dates: November 2018 – September 2020

Funding of \$93,612 (GST exclusive) was provided to Contemporary Arts Tasmania in 2017-18 to tour *The Partnersshipping Project -20 new installation works by 20 Regional Artists* exhibition.

The exhibition links multidisciplinary artists from four Australian states (Tasmania, New South Wales, Queensland and South Australia) to produce collaborative works that respond to the question ‘Does Place Matter’? *The Partnersshipping Project* is an evolving exhibition that uses a fleet of eight hand-made wooden boats (salvaged from across Tasmania) as constants throughout the exhibition journey that act as vessels for artist and community driven works. The project is based on a

partnership between four regional galleries and led by local artists working with each of those four communities to contribute new works as the tour progresses. The exhibition will return to its 'home' gallery in Burnie, Tasmania as a final tour destination.

This exhibition has toured to the four regional partner galleries: Burnie (Tasmania) Townsville (QLD), Riddoch (SA) and Lismore (NSW). It is expected this exhibition will be seen by approximately 17,145 visitors.

Further information on this exhibition is available from the exhibition website:

[www.thepartnershipproject.net.au/about-and-touring](http://www.thepartnershipproject.net.au/about-and-touring).

Tamworth Regional Gallery (New South Wales) – 'Tension(s) 2020: Tamworth Textile Triennial'

Tour dates (expected): July 2020 – August 2022

The Tamworth Textile Triennial is an internationally recognised exhibition of contemporary Australian textiles practice. Funding of \$56,700 (GST exclusive) was provided to the Tamworth Regional Gallery in 2019-20 to develop the 4th Triennial in 2020, which will include a survey of the work of 20 leading textile artists and an exhibition using augmented reality. Many of the artists have responded to their current context and the environment in which we live, some responding to drought, others floods, smoke and the recent fire devastation across the country.

The Tamworth Regional Gallery was provided further funding of \$47,465 (GST excluded) from the program, also in 2019-20, to tour the exhibition to 10 venues in New South Wales, Victoria, the Australian Capital Territory, South Australia and Queensland. It is expected that this exhibition will be seen by approximately 70,000 visitors.

Further information about this exhibition is available from the Tamworth Regional Gallery website:

[www.tamworthregionalgallery.com.au/expressions-of-interest](http://www.tamworthregionalgallery.com.au/expressions-of-interest)

Experimenta Media Art (Queensland) – 'Experimenta Life Forms: International Triennial of Media art - national tour (2021-2023)'

Planned tour dates: late 2020 – February 2023

Funding of \$237,447 (GST exclusive) was provided to Experimenta Media Arts in 2019- 20 to support touring of the *Experimenta Life Forms: International Triennial of Media art - national tour (2021-2023)* exhibition. The exhibition presents the work of over 20 leading multimedia artists who have responded to ethical questions and the changing definition of 'life' in the age of human interventions in technological and biological adaptations.

The exhibition is planned to open in Melbourne in 2020 at the RMIT Gallery, and will tour nationally until 2023 to venues in major cities, outer regional and inner regional locations in Victoria, Queensland, New South Wales, Tasmania and South Australia. It is expected that this exhibition will be seen by approximately 62,000 visitors.

Further information about this exhibition is available from the exhibition website at:  
[experimenta.org/program/experimenta\\_life\\_forms/](http://experimenta.org/program/experimenta_life_forms/)

**14. What are some of the benefits to Regional Australia of improving access to fast and reliable digital connectivity?**

- Digital connectivity provides economic and social benefits, as well as public safety benefits for people living, working and travelling in regional and remote areas of Australia.
- Improved connectivity will enable the agricultural or horticultural sectors to use the latest applications and technologies.
- It will also help regional tourism businesses attract visitors, such as expand tourism as a secondary industry in wine and food production precincts

**a. Can you update the Committee on progress in developing a Digital Tech Hub (sub 58, p. 6)?**

- The Government expects to approach the market shortly for a provider to develop and maintain the Digital Tech Hub.
- The Digital Tech Hub is anticipated to be operational from October 2020.

**b. What are some of the more difficult challenges to overcome in the provision of digital services to Regional Australia?**

- The telecommunications market is changing and the technologies within it have become much more complex.
- Australia's large landmass and low population densities in rural and remote Australia present challenges in providing communications services.
- People in regional communities require increased support to make the most of different communications technologies and to troubleshoot issues.

**15. In relation to Mobile Black Spot Funding:**

- a. Can the Department please confirm the number of applications that were unsuccessful in Round 5?**

406 proposed solutions were received under Round 5. 182 solutions were funded.

- b. Can the Department please detail why it spent less than half of the allocated funds in Round 5A if there were substantially more applications than there were successful recipients?**

- Funding for Round 5 was awarded using a competitive assessment process.
- Applications were competitively assessed against the selection criteria in the published Round 5 guidelines.
- The Government funded all proposals that were eligible under the guidelines and offered value for money to the program.
- That is, Government only funded proposals that, consistent with the Round 5 Guidelines, will deliver real benefits to regional and remote communities.

- c. Will the Government use the full \$46 million of unspent funds from Round 5 on Round 5A? If not, why not?**

- \$10 million of the uncommitted funds from Round 5 will be used to fund backup power upgrades to mobile base stations built under Rounds 1 and 2 of the Mobile Black Spot Program.
- This forms part of the Strengthening Telecommunications Emergency Resilience package announced on 12 May 2020.
- Funding for Round 5A will be drawn from the unused portion of the funding allocated to Round 5.

- d. When will applications for Round 5A open and what is the latest date results of Round 5A will be announced?**

- On 21 April 2020, the Government released a consultation paper seeking feedback on design options for Round 5A. The consultation closes on 19 June 2020.
- A decision on the timing of Round 5A will be taken once responses to the discussion paper have been received and considered.

**16. Can the Department please advise the amount of undistributed funds in 2019-20 for the Roads to Recovery program?**

The Roads to Recovery program is \$500 million per annum. In November 2019, the Government announced \$138.9 million additional Roads to Recovery funding for the 2020 calendar year. A total of \$569 million was allocated to the Roads to Recovery program in 2019-2020, which includes half of the additional monies made available to drought affected local government areas in the 2020 calendar year.

Approximately \$379 million has been paid to Councils as at 11 March 2020, with a further \$190 million scheduled for payment in May 2020. This will expend the full \$569 million allocation.



**17. Has the Department considered using the Roads to Recovery program to stimulate economic activity as part of COVID-19 economic relief, and if so has the Department undertaken or participated in any scoping of projects or particularly communities that might benefit from such an adjustment to the program?**

See QON 1.

**18. Does the Department have any plans to use other programs to finance land transport projects as part of the COVID-19 economic response?**

See QON 1.

**19. How has the Department considered regional arts communities as part of any COVID-19 economic stimulus response, noting that many in the arts community have been ineligible for other COVID-19 stimulus measures?**

The \$27 million Arts Industry Support Package, currently being implemented by the Department, includes targeted relief to regional arts communities. Consisting of three measures, it supports critical activity to ensure productivity is maintained throughout the COVID-19 crisis. The measures are:

- An additional \$10 million for the Regional Arts Fund to help regional artists and organisations develop new work and explore new delivery models.
- An additional \$7 million for the Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Support program to aid Indigenous artists, art centres and art fairs through the crisis and beyond. Those located in regional areas have been adversely affected by social distancing and travel restrictions. Most of these centres are located in regional and remote parts of the country.
- \$10 million for the industry charity Support Act to enable it to immediately extend its important work of providing financial support and counselling to artists, crew and music workers across the nation - including in regional arts communities.

These measures were delivered through the Government's Relief and Recovery Fund and were designed in response to the specific issues being reported by regional arts communities. Funding will be administered through the arts organisations which serve regional artists and understand their issues at a ground-level.