

MMLLEN submission to RMCG into the social and economic impact of the MDBA Guidelines

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Submission Number: 631.1
Date Received: 30/03/2011

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Introduction

In a global world, we need to be economically competitive. We need to balance that with the need to build social capital for all, and to manage and live in a sustainable environment. Governments are challenged to balance these imperatives and the jostling agendas that they bring with them.

MMLLEN Regional Profile

Swan Hill Rural City is located in north-western Victoria, about 344 kilometres from Melbourne. Swan Hill Rural City is bounded by the Murray River and the New South Wales border in the north and east. Swan Hill Rural City's boundaries are Balranald Shire in the north, Wakool Shire in the east, Gannawarra and Buloke Shires in the south, and Mildura Rural City in the west.

The Region is principally an agricultural area, which includes both dry land farming areas in the west and irrigated areas along the Murray River. The Swan Hill township services a vast area, including parts of New South Wales. Chiefly because of the River and associated wetlands and lakes the region is a popular tourist destination. The Region's economic base is primarily agriculture, with increasing concentrations of manufacturing and, transport and storage facilities. Agricultural activities include dairying, cropping, livestock grazing, horticulture and viticulture. Tourism is also an important industry.

Swan Hill Rural City is predominantly a rural area, but has substantial residential areas, particularly in the city of Swan Hill. The largest centres are Swan Hill and Robinvale, with smaller townships at Lake Boga, Manangatang, Nyah, Nyah West, Piangil, Ultima and Woorinen South. The City encompasses a total

land area of 6,100 square kilometers. Much of the rural area is used for agricultural and horticultural purposes, including wool, wheat, beef and fat lamb production, citrus fruits, grapes, wine and dairy products. In Robinvale, rural land is used mainly for farming, including citrus fruits, dried fruits, vegetables, almonds, pistachios, wheat and olives, and viticulture.

Gannawarra Shire is located in the Loddon Murray region of Victoria, about 250 kilometres north-west of Melbourne. Gannawarra Shire is bounded by Swan Hill Rural City in the north, the Murray River and the New South Wales border in the east, the Shire of Campaspe and Loddon Shire in the south, and Buloke Shire in the west.

Gannawarra Shire is also a predominantly rural area. The main towns are Cohuna, Kerang, Koodrook, Leitchville and Quambatook. The Shire encompasses a total land area of over 3,700 square kilometers. Land is used mainly for agriculture, particularly dairy farming, grain and crop farming, grazing, horticulture and viticulture. There is also some timber production. The western part of the Shire is predominantly used for cereal grain production, while the northern and eastern parts are used for dairy farming and milk processing. Manufacturing is a growing sector, with a diverse range of businesses operating in the region. Much of the Gannawarra LGA is serviced by the Goulburn-Murray Irrigation District (GMID). Cohuna is home to major irrigation services businesses AWMA and Archards.

Dairy has been a long established industry worth around \$105M annually and provided a large range of value added employment opportunities. Total amount of water used for irrigation in Gannawarra in 2006 was 330,271 ML producing a gross value of production of \$179 million dollars.

The closure of Murray Goulburn's Leitchville cheese manufacturing plant has had a significant impact on the local economy.

Tourists flock to the river region of Kerang and Cohuna with the attraction of water sports, fishing and camping.

Buloke Shire covers an area of 8,004 square kilometres. Its major centres include Donald, Charlton, Birchip (NCLLEN) Sea Lake (MMLLEN) and Wycheproof (NCLLEN). Agriculture, especially grain and sheep production, is the major industry.

Selected socio-economic characteristics

SEIFA: Swan Hill Rural City (including Robinvale) ranked 10th highest, out of all regional Victorian local government areas, in the 2006 SEIFA index of relative disadvantage (1=most disadvantaged). Buloke Shire was ranked 17th and Gannawarra Shire 19th

Disadvantage: Nyah, Nyah West and Lake Boga were identified by Tony Vinson in “Dropping off the Edge” as among Victoria’s 40 most socially disadvantaged postcodes.

Post secondary qualifications: The Murray Mallee LLEN region, overall, had a comparatively low proportion of population aged 15 years or over with tertiary qualifications. The proportion of population holding a post graduate degree, graduate diploma, graduate certificate, bachelor degree, advanced diploma or diploma was less than the Victorian average. Within the region, Gannawarra Shire had the lowest proportion of these qualifications and Swan Hill Rural City, excluding Robinvale UCL, had the highest.

Population decline: The population of the Murray Mallee LLEN region is declining and is forecast to continue to decline in most small towns and rural areas. Certain health and wellbeing related problems may become more prevalent, due to this decline, particularly withdrawal/shrinking of some local services in the health and community services sector.

Unemployment: The December 2010 quarter unemployment rate was much higher in the Swan Hill - Central Statistical Local Area (SLA) compared to the Regional Victoria and Victorian average. Youth unemployment in the MMLEN has increased over the last 12 months.

Industries and Employment

A workforce of approximately 14,000 people exists in the region, with a substantial number of individuals being employed in the agriculture, forestry and fishing industry. Retail trade is another major sector, as well as health and community services and manufacturing. A large proportion of workers are involved in management and administrative roles. Labourers are also common, followed by those working in clerical, sales and services roles, professionals and tradespersons.

Skill Shortages: There are skill shortages across regional Victoria in many of the trades (e.g. boilermaker, motor mechanics, plasterers, bricklayers and carpenters), and for various health industry professionals and regional planners. There are additional skill shortages in the Murray Mallee LLEN region in the areas of nursery and production horticulture. Some of the most difficult occupations to fill in the Murray Mallee LLEN region are: motor mechanics, welders, auto electricians, electricians, accountants, accounting clerks, nurses, welfare & associated professionals, civil engineers, bar attendants, receptionists, special care workers. Requirements for both labourers, and semi-skilled management in horticulture have been accelerated by the rapid expansion in land zoned for irrigation between Robinvale and Swan Hill.

Education and Training Delivery

The MMLLEN region has 7 secondary schools – Kerang Technical High School, Manangatang P-12, MacKillop College, Payika (College of Koori Education) Swan Hill College, Tyrrell College (Sea Lake) Swan Hill Specialist School . Glenvale (Exclusive Brethren – school data unavailable).

Registered Training Organisations & Training Providers – Swan Hill College, Murray Mallee Training Company, National Training Solutions, SMGT, MADEC. Employment Works, Kerang Learning Centre (ACE), Murray ACE, BRIT, Sunraysia TAFE, Deakin University, Ballarat University.

Student enrolment

In 2010, 2132 students were enrolled in Yrs 7-12 in the Murray Mallee LLEN region. 628 students in Years 11 & 12, with 85% studying for their VCE and 15% studying VCAL. There are 651 enrolments in 17 VET courses, 3 new courses being introduced in 2010. 69% of VET enrolments and 78% of SBATs are represented in identified regional skill shortages including: automotive, agriculture, building & construction, community services, electrotechnology, engineering, financial services, ICT, hospitality.

Potential Risk Summary

We know from social research theory that those most at risk often have multiple issues to do with family background, cultural aspirations, health and welfare, emotional and mental health factors and that these all impact on the potential to learn.

We understand that the long-term productivity and sustainability of the Murray-Darling Basin is under threat from over-allocated water resources, salinity and climate change, and that tensions exist between production-orientated activities and environmental needs.

Multiplier effects

The multiplier effects resulting from reduced farm production on factory employment, the transport industry, local businesses and the community in general will be significant. Job losses result in family stress and mental health issues.

The dairy industry for example has a 1.4 multiplier effect in the local economy. This implies that for every \$100 of output produced by dairy cattle an additional \$41 is induced into the local economy. Similarly, for every 100 jobs in the dairy industry sector supports approximately 29 dairy workers. (RMCG, 2010). Irrigated Horticulture has a multiplier effect of 1.46 and an employment multiplier of 1.23.

It is estimated that the impact of the MDB Plan (a 702 GL reduction in Victorian water availability) would be a 0.25% reduction in the Gross Regional Product (GRP) of Victorian MDB regions by 2030. Within the Swan Hill and Gannawarra LGAs, it is estimated that the greatest impacts would occur in the areas of Robinvale (1.5% decline in GRP) and Gannawarra (1.1% decline). The two major drivers of decline across these two LGAs are an 8.6% reduction in dairy production (concentrated in Gannawarra LGA) and a 6.5% reduction in viticulture (concentrated around Robinvale). Substantial shifts from irrigated to dryland cereal and livestock production are also predicted.

While agricultural communities within these LGAs have demonstrated resilience in the face of drought, increased uncertainty around water security and challenging economic conditions including reduced terms of trade and increasingly high input prices, these factors have impacted considerably upon local communities.

Low water allocations and concerns about security of irrigation water supplies have affected population and development of towns such as Lake Boga, Koondrook and Cohuna.

Consolidation of farming properties to achieve economies of scale to offset escalation in input prices has also impacted upon local communities, resulting in a loss of farmers from local communities.

In assessing community ability to adapt to proposed cuts, the Murray Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) has engaged Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics (ABARE) to assess Basin level vulnerability. This research has highlighted areas in the Swan Hill and Gannawarra LGAs as having very high levels of vulnerability.

As one of the key drivers underpinning local economies irrigated agriculture (particularly horticulture) provides significant employment through on-farm jobs and associated food processing or other service-related industries. On this basis, communities heavily reliant upon irrigated agriculture are likely to be particularly vulnerable, as they are already suffering from prolonged drought, reduced water security, increasing fuel prices and the lingering effects of the global economic downturn.

In Gannawarra LGA, the towns of Cohuna (horticulture and manufacturing) and Kerang (cropping) are particularly vulnerable. Irrigated horticulture in Swan Hill LGA is also particularly vulnerable. This will have both on-farm and off-farm impacts.

A recent study conducted by RMCG Consulting showed modeling a 71 GL reduction in water use for irrigated agriculture in the Gannawarra LGA would produce a loss of 358 (FTE) jobs and cause a population decline of 888 people in the shire by 2030.

It is critical to consider the human impact of any proposed changes to water allocations in the short, medium and long term, because any changes will have a domino effect across the whole community, particularly in regard to:

- Viability of current farming and production practices that may lead to economic and social issues compounding for rural families
- Mental health of rural families and their communities who will be considering their future aspirations, opportunities, financial situation and capabilities and the way forward in general

- Challenges for smaller towns and communities typified by an ageing workforce and changes in rural demographics, including declining populations exacerbated by youth migration to the larger centres, reducing local services, and loss of history.
- Viability of small schools in rural areas with potentially reduced enrolments and community contribution and reduced school spirit and general health and wellbeing
- Impact on employment opportunities in rural production areas including: apprenticeships and traineeships, and unskilled and skilled labour market placements
- Impact on rural business and industry, both directly with potentially reduced capability using current practices, and indirectly through reduced cash flow and spending capability in retail, services, tourism, and general consumer goods including farming equipment, supplies and services.
- Impact on employment opportunities for migrant and refugee, indigenous and low SES groups, groups that traditionally have higher employment in farming and factory work.
- Increased unemployment and increased numbers of people on benefits
- Educational aspirations of young people in rural and regional areas influenced by intergenerational experiences and perceptions, hardships caused by long term drought and floods, locust plagues, access and equity issues regarding availability of training and transport options
- Potential for those young people at risk to become more at risk, and for their life aspirations to become reduced, influenced by increased family hardship.

Summary of key socio economic factors that stand out in the North Western Victoria area include:

- A heavy reliance on employment in Agriculture, Manufacturing and Retail Trade.
- A high proportion of the population of North Western Victoria is in receipt of Centrelink benefits.
- Low median income across the region.
- Low levels of educational attainment and aspiration.

Planning for change

The Board of the MMLLEN argues that the proposed changes to water allocation (the life force of the region's primary producers) could work against the COAG social inclusion and educational attainment goals if not managed very carefully.

Full consideration must be given to the short, medium and long term projected impacts of any water reduction to producers who have been contending with a range of rural issues including drought, locust plagues, industry realignments, sustainability of water in the region, stranded agricultural assets due to water policy, and more recently, widespread floods. Parts of the region have experienced drought conditions for over 10 years, hail or frost damage to horticulture crops, while the entire region, in common with other parts of Victoria, is dealing with climate change, land care, biodiversity and water management issues.

There is no doubt the drought and the floods have had a huge impact upon industry, enterprise and community throughout the whole of Victoria and indeed also across the country. It is farmers who feel the initial affects of the natural disasters as their stock and crops decrease significantly. Their income is severely reduced, and in turn this affects their spending ability in the local communities. Any additional reductions in water allocations are likely to pose great psychological and physical challenges to a sector already highly stressed.

Social Health implications of the discussion around water and climate change

The evidence is quite clear that there is a significant need to ensure all communications to the community in relation to the redistribution of water or any natural resource must be done in a process that is as conciliatory as possible.

The Primary Healthcare sector has seen that the extended drought conditions that the local communities have endured have made the community fragile. The need for services to be directed towards nontraditional recipients of counselling has stretched the sector well beyond its capacity. The prevalence of mental health issues has never been higher in regional communities and resourcing of services to build resilience within our communities has not matched demand.

The added burden of farming communities needing to deal with the process of changes to their access to water will/has caused a number of mental health issues to resurface in a more significant manner.

From 2005 to 2008 the Swan Hill and Gannawarra LGA's experienced a significant spike in the rate of suicide amongst its residents in excess of the average for Australian rural communities.

Any changes must be done with the consultation of the primary health sector to ensure they are prepared to assist the local community deal with the anxiety this issue causes. If changes are made to water access, funding must be allocated to assist the local primary health sector offer counselling services and community development to counter the impact.

Social Inclusion rationale

Setting the scene:

- New century = new economic and social demands
- Rapid change
- Global forces – expanding world economy
- Exponential developments in technology
- Future prosperity & well-being linked to high levels of general education = good start to lifelong learning

The Social Inclusion principles and the COAG reform agenda are priorities for Government, perhaps as never before, to broaden access and increased support for low - income earners. Strengthening the framework of opportunities for children from poorer and less educated families is essential, because we will need every one of our young people to advance our nation's economy in a global world.

We know through research that underachievement and low or no qualifications sentences a person to a lifetime of poorer outcomes and welfare dependency. This becomes an economic issue for countries as well as a cultural and ethical issue. The reality is that disadvantaged groups often have a suite of barriers to be addressed, including intergenerational unemployment, low aspirations, poorer retention rates, and lower academic achievement.

In 2009, the Swan Hill LGA has the lowest Year 12 and equivalent attainment rate in Victoria at 53.7%.

Region	Local Govt Area	Attainment Rate		
		2007	2008	2009
Loddon Mallee		73.4	71.2	70.7
	Buloke (S)	76.2	87.2	77.7
	Campaspe (S)	70.3	67.8	72.4
	C. Goldfields (S)	75.9	66.9	63.2
	Gannawarra (S)	64.7	75.0	64.3
	Gr. Bendigo (C)	67.9	64.2	68.5
	Loddon (S)	84.3	85.1	112.0
	Mac. Ranges (S)	80.1	84.4	76.5
	Mildura (RC)	65.1	63.4	63.7
	Mt Alexander (S)	74.7	71.1	69.5
	Swan Hill (RC)	73.0	62.8	53.7

Challenges of an ageing population, decline in population size, shifting industry bases and the resultant obsolete skill base of older workers is not unique to Australia. However, these challenges require an increasing reliance on young people with the appropriate skills and orientation to contribute to the nation's economy, enabling nations to be competitive players in the global marketplace. The challenge is to encourage higher levels of qualification completion in order to maintain a competitive advantage in the world markets, and also to address the poverty and poorer completion rates of the most disadvantaged groups.

With higher university deferral rates in rural and regional areas, there are many more students flooding the labour market targeting full time employment. Local employers say that the deferrers are competing for the jobs that would have gone to young people who had no intention of going to university anyway.

These "other" rural young people are often left working below their potential, in part time, temporary, casual or seasonal employment.

This only creates further unemployment and disadvantage in rural areas for the most disadvantaged groups.

Recent studies on rural students have revealed:

- A trend of increasing regional disadvantage
- A pattern of rising rates of deferral (at least 2 and a half times greater than in the city)
- Approximately three in 10 (30.1%) do not take up a place at university after one year
- Financial barriers remained prominent among the reasons given by young people for having not taken up a place in education or training
- Students working long hours while at university were more likely to have dropped out of their course

The sentence for underachievement

- We also know that underachievement and low or no qualifications sentences a person to a lifetime of poorer outcomes and welfare dependency, which becomes an economic issue for nations, as well as a cultural and ethical issue. “Across the OECD nearly one in three adults (30%) have only primary or lower secondary education – a real disadvantage in terms of employment and life chances” (OECD 2007)

Apprenticeship and Traineeship uptake in the MMLLEN region:

It should also be noted that the MMLLEN region has one of the highest uptake rates of apprenticeships and traineeships per capita in Victoria (see tables below). This pathway is now recognised by schools, parents, employers and students as an excellent career choice and provides the region with a ready skilled workforce.

Changes to water policy we believe will dampen economic activity and thus threaten the availability of apprenticeship and traineeship opportunities in the region in the future.

Evidence clearly indicates that when economies slide into recession or experience sudden impacts that young people in the main are the first to suffer.

Previous economic recessions in Australia saw many young people lose their apprenticeships and or found it extremely difficult to enter the job market.

The following tables below give the destination data for Year 12 students and early leavers in the Swan Hill and Gannawarra LGA's in 2009.

Destinations of 2009 Year 12 or equivalent completers, Swan Hill LGA and Victoria

Destination	Swan Hill		Victoria	
	n	%	n	%
Bachelor degree	62	39.0	17561	49.0
Certificate IV and above	22	13.8	5037	14.1
Certificate I-III	6	3.8	1452	4.1
Apprenticeship	16	10.1	1909	5.3
Traineeship	7	4.4	1137	3.2
Employed full-time	16	10.1	2737	7.6
Employed part-time	22	13.8	4211	11.8
Looking for work	8	5.0	1763	4.9
<i>Total interviewed</i>	159	100.0	35807	100.0

Note: Completers who deferred a place at university or TAFE have been allocated to their labour market destinations.

Destinations of 2009 early school leavers, Swan Hill LGA and Victoria

Destination	Swan Hill		Victoria	
	n	%	n	%
Certificate I-IV and above	18	30.5	815	21.2
Apprenticeship	21	35.6	1086	28.3
Traineeship	4	6.8	244	6.4
Employed full-time	7	11.9	510	13.3
Employed part-time	5	8.5	545	14.2
Looking for work	4	6.8	638	16.6
<i>Total interviewed</i>	59	100.0	3838	100.0

Destinations of 2009 Year 12 or equivalent completers, Gannawarra LGA and Victoria

Destination	Gannawarra		Victoria	
	n	%	n	%
Bachelor degree	39	45.3	17561	49.0
Certificate IV and above	11	12.8	5037	14.1
Certificate I-III	4	4.7	1452	4.1
Apprenticeship	13	15.1	1909	5.3
Traineeship	4	4.7	1137	3.2
Employed full-time	4	4.7	2737	7.6
Employed part-time	6	7.0	4211	11.8
Looking for work	5	5.8	1763	4.9
<i>Total interviewed</i>	86	100.0	35807	100.0

Note: Completers who deferred a place at university or TAFE have been allocated to their labour market destinations.

Destinations of 2009 early school leavers, Gannawarra LGA and Victoria

Destination	Gannawarra		Victoria	
	n	%	n	%
Certificate I-IV and above	5	35.7	815	21.2
Apprenticeship	3	21.4	1086	28.3
Traineeship	4	28.6	244	6.4
Employed full-time	2	14.3	510	13.3
Employed part-time	0	0.0	545	14.2
Looking for work	0	0.0	638	16.6
<i>Total interviewed</i>	14	100.0%	3838	100.0

The Board of the MMLLEN contends that young people in the Swan Hill and Gannawarra LGA's will be exposed to this phenomenon more than any other community in the Murray Darling Basin leading to more disengaged young people in the system in the MMLLEN region.

The dollar cost of disengaged young people

- There is considerable evidence that clearly links unemployment, poor health, relationship breakdown and prison with non completion of secondary school, lack of qualifications and difficulty with basic numeracy and literacy in Australia and in other developed countries.

- The overall cost to our communities due to disadvantage is estimated at \$2.6 billion every year.
- “Failure to broaden and strengthen the education and training outcomes for young people will weaken our economic future as well as weaken a social fabric that is based upon principles of social justice” (Kirby Report 2000)

Raising attainment in schools

To raise attainment either in school or through alternative programs in the Vocational Education and Training sector implies a greater focus on the economic incentives to successful learning and qualification achievement. These are strong for high achievers, but weak for low achievers.

They include access to full-time work, a reliable training pathway, structured workplace learning opportunities, flexibly delivered programs that accommodate working hours, manageable tuition costs and charges, and physical accessibility.

Without valuable and perceptible economic benefits, there is less incentive for young people to complete school or to undertake alternative programs if they leave school early. (MYCEETYA 2006)

“Vocational education is the single most important avenue for creating learning incentives and for raising achievement” (OECD 2007). This is particularly important for learners whose aspirations differ from the traditional academic pathway.

The cost benefits of varied career pathways are:

- building social capital and equity inclusiveness
- improved labour market productivity
- technological innovations; economic
- organizational and individual flexibility
- enhanced investment opportunities

Retention in school rationale

Australia needs a skilled workforce to take her competitively into the future, ensuring economic growth and global competitiveness, and thus better living standards for more of her populace. Retention and engagement in education is a worthy goal in itself, but it is also critical for Australia as a nation. We will

be increasingly relying on all of our young people to be the innovative, educated, engaged members of Australia's wider society, contributing in both the workforce and in civic society. So, while retention in school is a goal, supporting all young people as they transition from education and training to employment and become productive members of society with appropriate qualifications and experience is the broader goal.

Part time and Casual Employment

The retail sector is particularly important to young people, as it requires many casual and part time staff. This type of work is suitable for people with limited work experience; in fact many people begin their working life in the retail trade and service industries that include accommodation, cafe and restaurant sectors. Businesses in these sectors typically require extra staff during busy holiday periods.

The number of people in employment varies throughout the year due to seasonal variations such as:

- Seasonal work such as fruit picking
- Retail peaks leading up to Christmas, and
- Young people entering the workforce for the first time as they complete their education and training.

In the last ten years, the percentage of people employed in part time and casual work has increased. A contributing factor has been the growth in those sectors of the economy that most significantly demands a part time and casual workforce. These sectors include service industries and this type of work usually requires on the job training and is often taken up by young people while they pursue other pathways.

The environment in which young people look for their first job has changed over the last ten years. The "casualisation" of today's workforce presents less full time job opportunities. In today's environment those available jobs often require post school qualifications. An increasing number of young people are working part time while studying full time. If part time work was all they could obtain then they may have chosen to study to increase their chances of work. On the other hand, full time students choose to work to support their living expenses.

Industry challenge rationale

Australian industry faces many challenges and opportunities in the years ahead in responding to the rapidly changing dynamics of global competition.

New pressures from emerging industrial giants, such as China, the rebalancing of our currency, climate change, the push towards global outsourcing, the introduction of the US Free Trade Agreement, and the erosion of Australia's traditional export markets mean that dynamic and world competitive industries need a highly skilled workplace to remain competitive. Australian industry as a whole will need to work smarter, become more innovative, and more knowledge intensive.

The Ai Group study *Industry in the Regions 2004* concluded that regional industry is increasingly looking to global markets to grow and prosper in the 21st century. Global engagement is seen as a means of overcoming the significant disadvantages of smaller local markets, providing wealth for regional economies and creating a foundation for sustainable jobs and growth.

Ageing Workforce

In 2003, 3.2million people employed in the national labour force were aged between 45 and 64, a figure representing 32% of all employed people, up from 24% in 1983.

Currently, the Australian workforce increases by 170,000 per year. For the entire decade of the 2020s, growth is predicted as 125,000.

As a result, the labour force is set to experience severe upset due to increased shortages across all industries. Several major industries have been identified as being affected by an ageing workforce – Education, Agriculture/Forestry/Fishing, Health and Community Services, Electricity/Gas/Water supply, Transport and storage.

Swan Hill and Gannawarra LGA's have an aged community profile and it will be imperative that for the long term economic viability of these LGA's that young people are given the opportunity to work and live locally.

Attachment 1: Background information on LLENS

LLENS receive funding from the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) and have a key role in the policy directions outlined in the Victorian Government's Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development (2008), including improving transitions from school and facilitating partnerships between businesses and schools.

A Fairer Victoria, the Victorian Government's long-term strategy to tackle disadvantage and increase opportunities for all Victorians specifically identifies LLENS and their partnerships as vital in addressing skills needs and developing new opportunities for young people who are at risk of disengaging from education and training.

Retention and re-engagement of young people in education and training are seen as imperative for the State of Victoria. Victoria is currently performing relatively better than the national average in terms of Year 12 completion; however, progress needs to be made in order to meet the target of 90 per cent of young people in Victoria completing Year 12 or its equivalent by 2010, which is outlined in *Growing Victoria Together: A Vision for Victoria to 2010 and Beyond* (DEECD, 2006). With the implementation of the COAG Agreement and the setting of the National Partnership Youth Transition and Attainment targets, Victoria's targets are 92.6% by 2015.

In addition, the COAGs National Indigenous Reform Agreement in 2009 established a national target to halve the gap for Indigenous students in attaining year 12 or its equivalent by 2020. (*National Indigenous Reform Agreement – Closing the Gap* (Council of Australian Governments 2008).

On the basis of the similarities between the two initiatives and in keeping with the principles outlined in the COAG agreed National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions, the Commonwealth and the Victorian Governments (through the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, DEEWR, and Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, DEECD) have agreed that the Partnership Brokers role in Victoria will be delivered using existing LLEN geographic boundaries, through an enhancement of the LLEN initiative.

LLENs will improve connections with existing stakeholder groups across the identified groups to **develop strategic, whole-of-community approaches** that support young people’s learning and development. In turn, this work will also contribute to broader national objectives, including:

- Australian schooling promotes equity and excellence;
 - all young Australians become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens;
 - all young people gain the skills, understandings and connections, and have health and wellbeing outcomes to make successful life choices; and
 - all young people experiencing high levels of disadvantage including those from low SES backgrounds and Indigenous Australians (DEEWR 2009) will achieve improved education and transition outcomes
-