



2013 **SEGRA** Communiqué

Regional Australia Raise Your Voice

Kate Charters (**SEGRA** Convenor) would like to acknowledge
the assistance of the **SEGRA** National Steering Committee
in preparing this Communiqué

Regions: unleashing their mojo in an interconnected world

Key issues arising out of *SEGRA* 2013

- 1 Promoting best practice regional development
- 2 Identifying and engaging local talent, passion and finances to grow your region
- 3 Policy development and implementation for regional Australia
- 4 Using practice-based research to promote regional development
- 5 How regional Australia can effectively respond to the changing place of Asia in the national economy
- 6 Stewardship of natural resources
- 7 Development and governance for northern Australia
- 8 The importance of a dedicated communications strategy for remote and rural Australia
- 9 Current *SEGRA* 2014 Challenges – Walking the Talk
- 10 The Way Forward: *SEGRA* Leadership and 2013-14 Strategic Plan

1 Promoting best practice regional development

SEGRA provides a critical ideas exchange hub for practitioners working in rural, remote and regional Australia. Case studies provide real life experiences and transferable learnings for economic and community development strategies. Each year at *SEGRA*, delegates report on the value of these networking and case study opportunities. Another outstanding value reported by delegates is for practitioners and academics to be able to speak to and liaise with one another on the interface of regional development practice (that often grows out of necessity and innovation) with frameworks and theories. Often the work practitioners are innately undertaking is already consistent with some framework or theory that meeting with researchers is able to confirm and enhance. This helps to formalise thinking and crystallise potential actions in a more coordinated and methodical approach and on occasions in advanced research in an area.

In this context, *SEGRA* continues to present outstanding examples of best practice regional economic development activities. These are highly valued by delegates and the broader networks and include narratives about: business development programs; mobilising local talent; promoting coordination amongst key agencies; and the provision of alternative domestic water and energy systems. A large number of these best practice examples are based on location theories of economic

development and clearly demonstrate the capacities of people working in regional Australia to tailor theoretical frameworks to the local experience.

Many presentations and an array of other information from the conference can be referenced via the website: <http://www.segra.com.au/segra13ConfProc/index.html>

2 Identifying and engaging local talent, passion and finances to grow your region

A strong theme at **SEGRA** this year was that of engaging and accessing local talent, passion and finances to grow your specific region.

SEGRA has led the way in promoting and highlighting ideas on making the most of the skills and talents of people in the regions. Over the 17 years of the **SEGRA** conferences, there has been an obvious and important move from a focus on external and usually large investors and reliance on government agencies, to much more attention to mobilising local human capital.

Coffs Harbour as a destination highlighted the success their place-based strategy has in mobilising local people to invest and build businesses in the region. Keynote speakers including Peter Kageyama, Co-founder of Creative Cities Summit, Michael Shuman, Director of Community Portals, Mission Markets New York, Ernesto Sirolli, Sirolli Institute and Neil McInroy, Centre for Local Economic Strategies highlighted a range of proven strategies to encourage regional passion, enterprise facilitation and community based development. Neil McInroy encapsulated this thinking in saying a “people strategy ... is also an economic strategy.” A case study of the Outback Business Network highlighted the application of these ideas in remote regional Australia.

3 Policy development and implementation for regional Australia

Following from the summary of the previous theme, there has also been a notable increase in communities and economic development taking on board the government and research messages about the importance of self-reliance. This message has been evident and obvious in government policy, statements and reports since the early 1980s and people in regional development policy and practitioner communities have also noted the problems with high dependency on external investment, not least being the threat and reality of ‘capital flight.’ There is however, still scope for facilitated self-reliance within a consistent policy framework.

Primarily delegates are concerned with and sometimes critical of:

1. The lack of continuity and apparent short term focus of regional development policies and programs. Examples of concern include changes in emphasis in foci and criteria for business support programs and changes to the operation, structure and purpose of regional

advisory/administrative bodies. This does not imply a wish for ongoing assistance but that a longer view is taken and policy settings are more consistent.

2. Coordination across multiple levels of government. While there is generally seen to have been improvement in this area, outcomes vary across jurisdictions and cooperation is hard to sustain with political and policy shifts. There is a high reliance on local personal relationships and culture to 'join up government' and such arrangements can be vulnerable.
3. The capacity of governments to deliver national and state policy at a place- based level. It is well understood that agency/stewardship theory and attendant program-based management can ensure a form of consistency and minimum standards. However neither the underpinning theory nor the program-based approaches are well suited to the innovation and micro businesses that are often characteristic of regional and remote Australia.

The need to provide policy certainty and consistency whilst promoting and embracing change and inviting emotional connections with citizens was seen as a significant policy challenge. Specifically, it was seen that the task for planners and economic developers is not just to create amenity rich destinations to attract creative/ innovative human capital but also to create an environment where innovators and co-creators feel they can experiment and be engaged. This can be easier when there is the opportunity for smaller more intimate connections with fewer transaction costs.

This was well described by keynote speaker Tim Williams who noted the following four drivers of territorial performance.

The four keys are:

1. Innovation, economic diversity, skills and human capital, place quality and strategic governance capacity
2. Territory and places matter more not less in a global world
3. Leadership matters
4. People not just place strategies

These drivers are about complex relationships that take time to dissect, understand and nurture. Recent reports from the UK Institute of Public Policy and the Australia Journal of Public Administration speak to the relational aspects of governance and how this impacts on public policy.

Discussions are currently in train to secure funding to bring Idris Mootee, CEO, Idea Couture Inc, and leading expert on applied design thinking, to the **SEGRA** 2014 conference. Idris is best known for his fresh and practical framework that accommodates the dynamic and uncertainty surrounding decision making in today's global and connected environment.

4 Using practice-based research to promote regional development

Over the last few years, **SEGRA** conferences have increasingly included sessions and strategies to facilitate the transfer of research into practice and to facilitate the development of research along with practice. Recently, **SEGRA** and a private business joint venture met with staff from Southern Cross University to consider how the above cutting edge ideas described might be applied in regional Australia. A number of regions have also indicated in participating in an early adopters' project.

This is a clear indication of support for **SEGRA's** ongoing commitment to evidence-informed policy and practice. The annual industry/practitioner/research network, an initiative of **SEGRA**, has continued to grow and successfully transitioned to a viable level following the cessation of the seed funding through RIRDC.

A second outcome from this seed funding has been the now regular offering of professional development sessions at the conference around understanding and using mega data and regional specific data to inform decision making. These sessions conducted jointly by **SEGRA**, universities, government organisations (BTRE and ABS) and private enterprise - AEC Group, Remplan and Roy Morgans - have received strong support.

The Journal of Social and Economic Policy also publish a special edition each year featuring ground breaking research presented at **SEGRA**.

5 How regional Australia can effectively respond to the changing place of Asia in the national economy

How regional Australia might more effectively respond to the changing place of Asia in the national economy was a feature at **SEGRA** this year. The participation of the Australian-Taiwanese Business Council and a delegation from Korea created a number of opportunities for individual regions to make direct connections with these two countries. As a result, the Australian-Taiwanese Business Council are to meet with Geelong City Council, the Queensland Korean Business Council has signed an MOU with Coffs Harbour and Southern Cross University. Additionally, Central Queensland University and Charles Sturt University are continuing dialogues with QKBC for student exchange programs. The Orana RDA is also discussing with us how best to establish Korean work experience placement opportunities.

The Korean delegation was facilitated through a division of Management Solutions (Qld). The funding for ongoing **SEGRA** support of this activity still needs to be established. **SEGRA** is keen to advance links between the renewed Colombo Plan and regional Australia.

6 Stewardship of natural resources

Regional Australia, by virtue of location and industry, has always understood and valued stewardship of natural resources. For many rural industries ensuring soil, water and air quality are essential day-to-day tasks. This year there was strong interest in the Murray Darling Basin and example, in gaining a greater understanding of (for example) the links between: the water allocation processes; the ecology and biodiversity of the rivers and wetland systems; the sustainability of production landscapes under changing environmental conditions; and best practice in relation to management of contested land use.

Given the co-location of the conference venue and the National Institute of Marine Science at Coffs Harbour, **SEGRA** again took the opportunity to further investigate the opportunities and barriers to inland and coastal aquaculture. Opportunities were seen in replacing less profitable crustacean species with finfish that have more appeal in Japanese and Chinese markets. The lack of 'level playing field' to allow Australian Growers to compete with imported sea foods was seen as the major barrier. Notwithstanding, the ongoing potential for aquaculture-based industries is still regarded as being most important in broadening the economic base of regional Australia.

This year, **SEGRA** (funded by RIRDC) undertook a study of *Perceptions of the place of agriculture in regional economies*. Future meetings are to take place between RIRDC, the University of Southern Queensland and **SEGRA** to: discuss implications and future actions arising from the study to enhance the understanding of agribusiness in the broader regional development context; and identify ongoing research synergies with the primary authors.

7 Development and governance for northern Australia

One of the challenge areas identified at **SEGRA** focused on the development and governance of northern Australia. Key issues included the following:

- The imperative that any policy and governance actions act to unite south and north Australia.
- The true costings and funding sources for development need to be well understood and gain wide spread consensus from the commencement of engagement at the national level. In particular, development of the north will raise issues of levels of foreign investment that need to be carefully considered in a global context.
- There needs to be a recognition of the diversity of northern Australia from west to east as well as north to south including (for example): location and ease of accessibility to offshore seabed mineral resources such as manganese; the inherent potential to grow high income earning food and fibre crops; and the vulnerability of energy resources including imported diesel fuels for agricultural, mining and transport uses.
- There is considerable caution about plans for northern development given past experiences in relation to problems with (for example): decision-making between the Commonwealth

and the other jurisdictions; the ecological implications of harvesting water; the sustainability of agriculture production systems; distance to markets and shipping costs; and commercial and risk financing.

This challenge area is one of the five ongoing topics delegates from **SEGRA 2013** have agreed to work cooperatively on throughout the year and to report back at **SEGRA 2014**.

8 A remote and rural communications strategy

The importance of remote and rural Australia having a dedicated communications strategy was discussed at **SEGRA**

Several ways the Government could improve remote and rural telecommunications were suggested:

- The expansion of mobile coverage,
- Getting digital infrastructure right – both the rational use of existing infrastructure and expanding infrastructure,
- Smart 'last mile solutions' for small towns and communities,
- Affordable pricing for mobile calls in remote and rural Australia,
- Improved digital literacy,
- Good research to underpin remote communications policy,
- Improving Indigenous communications programs.

9 Current SEGRA 2014 Challenges – Walking the Talk

During **SEGRA 2013**, a number of challenge groups formed with a view to developing proposals and projects to address key ideas emerging from the conference.

Six challenge groups were formed:

1. How might regional branding grow regional economies?
2. How might we best develop northern Australia?
3. How might we maximise the opportunities of the Murray Darling Basin Plan?
4. How might we create greater community resilience?
5. How might we maximise design to create greater regional cities?
6. How might we maximise leadership and governance capacity in regional Australia?

Progress on these proposals will be presented at **SEGRA 2014**.

10 The Way Forward: SEGRA Leadership and 2013-14 Strategic Plan

SEGRA Leadership

- **SEGRA** comprises a National Steering Committee (NSC) with honorary representatives from regional, rural and remote areas across Australia.
- A local planning committee informs each national conference theme, program and action agendas.
- Management Solutions (Qld) is responsible for obtaining funding and managing the business plan. **SEGRA** is conducted on a full cost recovery model.

SEGRA National Steering Committee leadership commitment is to ensure **SEGRA** is:

- An independent and credible voice on issues affecting regional Australia.
- An inclusive, network based group – there are no prerequisites for participation.
- Practice based and applied.
- Encouraging and supporting of innovators and those at the cutting edge of sustaining a regional Australia.
- An open learning environment – where everyone’s input is encouraged.
- A disseminator of information and ideas.
- Collaborative; sharing knowledge and skills in strategies that advance regional Australia.

SEGRA 2013-14 Strategic Plan

SEGRA is a community of practitioners, government, business, researchers, regional development organisations, not for profit groups and regional communities with the intention of creating an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable regional Australia that is inherent in forming the national outlook.

The SEGRA Advantage

SEGRA is based on the following principles:

- People in regional Australia have know-how, ideas and innovations – **SEGRA** reflects what is happening on the ground in regional Australia
- Regions are systems – environmentally, socially, economically and politically, regional solutions must be interrelated and interconnected across all these spheres.
- Good policy is derived from research and evidence as well as the knowledge, expertise and professional judgments of practitioners. Proposed policy actions will draw on the wide range of advice from researchers and practitioners shaped by professional input from policy experts.

- The historically strong participation of practitioners, government, business, researchers, regional development organisations, not for profit groups and regional communities in regional development within the **SEGRA** network ensures 360⁰ representation in all aspects of discussion and solutions.

Goals of **SEGRA**

SEGRA acts to provide end to end value to regional Australia using a systems approach to:

1. Raise the profile of regions as an essential part of Australia’s national outlook.
2. Promote regions and regional issues and empower regions to be responsible for their own destinies.
3. Identify emerging issues and opportunities for change by identifying choices and presenting effective options and action strategies.
4. Build knowledge and skills and promote ideas and innovations.
5. Identify emerging issues critical for regional sustainability and encouraging evidence based responses by supporting practice-based research.
6. Provide cutting edge professional development and training in regional Australia.

Aims for 2013 and 2014

Aim 1: Raise the profile of regions as an essential part of Australia’s national outlook

Objective: to retain **SEGRA’s** recognition as the leading voice in issues affecting regional Australia by connecting people with a commitment to regional Australia.

Action focus:

- Release a comprehensive communiqué to identify big picture policy agenda issues and options for governance, administration, policy and planning.
- Seek opportunities for NSC to speak at events, issues press releases.
- Hold an annual conference, symposiums, forums and web-based discussions.
- Build **SEGRA** capacity to deliver against its values.
- Further develop good governance mechanisms for an ongoing sustainable **SEGRA** network.
- **SEGRA** will provide:
 - an editor and contributing authors for publication, Australia’s Regional Advantage Innovative Approaches to Achieving National Outcomes.
 - an editor and contributing authors for Journal of Economic and Social Policy (JESP).
 - a co-editor and contributing authors for Innovation: management, policy and practice.

Aim 2: Development of regional capacity to ensure a resilient, diversified and sustainable regional economy

Objectives: To connect people and build collaborative opportunities that promote and facilitate development of effective knowledge and skills in matters affecting regional Australia.

Action Focus:

- Establish and maintain partnerships opportunities with like minded organisations that advance the interests of regional Australia through collaborative workshops, think tanks and research proposals.
- Develop e-networking capacity to promote best practice through interaction regardless of distance and remoteness.
- Retain links with the wide range of federal and state government departments and local government regarding government programs and auspiced projects.

Aim 3: To promote regional issues

Objective: to advance issues with strategic targeted actions around central concerns relating to: governance, sustainable technologies, economic development and community engagement in regional Australia.

Action focus:

- To develop a 'go to list' for media to get expertise and professional commentary on issues affecting regional Australia.
- Undertaking surveys of members of its own network that identify new and emerging issues.
- Entering into co-research activities with Universities and private research based organisations on constructed regional advantage and cluster development in fragmented regions.
- Conduct cutting edge workshops at **SEGRA** and other forums throughout the year.
- Report back to government on **SEGRA** each year.



To find out more about **SEGRA** 2014, please contact:

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About the Author



Kate Charters has worked in policy development and organisational management at senior levels in both the government and private sector for more than three decades. For the past six years she has been the Chair of the National Steering Committee for Sustainable Economic Growth in Regional Australia (**SEGRA**). In this role, Kate represents regional initiatives and issues arising from **SEGRA** at the highest level of elected officials and government agencies. Kate co-authors the annual regional communiqué *Speaking up for Regional Australia* and is a co-editor of the recently released book *Regional Advantage and Innovation: achieving Australia's national outcomes* Springer Germany, 2012.

Prior to working with **SEGRA**, Kate was a principal in a professional development and training company delivering applied workshops across all aspects of policy development, implementation and evaluation.

Throughout her career, Kate has been recognised for her high level skills in conflict resolution and group facilitation and she has undertaken complex engagement strategies with a number of government agencies addressing both internal and external organisational matters.

Her appointment to numerous boards, committees and working parties involving government, profit and not for profit sectors evidence Kate's strong strategic thinking capacity and project skills. Kate is a member of the Governance Institute of Australia (Cert) and the Australian Institute of Company Directors.