Regional Australia Raise Your Voice

Policy proposals from the *SEGRA 2012* Communiqué

Prepared by the *SEGRA 2012* National Steering Committee
With particular acknowledgement to
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Introduction

The *Sustainable Economic Growth for Regional Australia (SEGRA)* national conference brings together regional development practitioners, business, elected government officials, managers, policy advisors and academics with a passion and commitment to regional Australia. As always, *SEGRA* provides an excellent source of inspiration for ideas and acts as a much needed 'meeting post' for practitioners.

This document highlights proposed policy actions raised at the conference. For more detail about key messages and discussion, please view the full document at www.segra.com.au.

The *SEGRA* program comprised of plenary sessions in which a host of stellar speakers urged delegates to look at the 'blue sky' opportunities for regional development. Delegates were spoilt for choice with over 40 practitioners speaking in the concurrent sessions and whose presentations demonstrated locality based responses to the range of challenges regions confront.

Held at Terrigal, Central Coast NSW, *SEGRA 2012* focused on ensuring that regions leverage maximum benefits from regional growth. It examined how people living and working in regional Australia act to maximise end-to-end value from the economic activities in their region and to ensure ongoing legacies are derived from regional economic activity and growth. Practitioners noted that in order to maximise development outcomes and leverage sustainable growth, the right mix of community resources, human capital, strategic partnerships and linkages must be met.

This document is a summary of the robust discussions that took place the closing "Regional Australia Raise Your Voice" plenary sessions where key issues for today and into the future were canvassed by all delegates.

Now in its 17th year, *SEGRA* is recognised as Australia's most credible independent voice on issues affecting regional Australia. *SEGRA* is unique in its commitment to regional Australia at economic, social, environmental and governance levels with a focus on practical application and transferable knowledge. It is from this base that *SEGRA* seeks to propose policy actions that are multi disciplinary and cross sectoral.

The *SEGRA* 2012 communiqué and this summary are organised around five themes:

1. Securing Sustainability
2. Economic Imperatives
3. Growing Capacity
4. Regional Catalysts
5. Achieving Regional Outcomes

SEGRA is once again setting the agenda on regional issues in Australia with real proposals, policy actions strategies and steps.

1. Securing Sustainability: innovation, communications, technology and land use

➢ Innovation

❖ Policy actions

1. Establish policies that directly target and support innovation champions and entrepreneurial spirit at a regional level by:

   a. Providing funding which allows for research, development and testing at the business level;

   b. Identifying and encouraging future nascent entrepreneurs, new entrepreneurs and existing entrepreneurs by promoting and supporting employer sponsored entrepreneurs;

   c. Fostering the use of practical tools and processes to enable businesses to implement new ideas;

   d. Promoting incentives to encourage and promote regional leadership and collaboration.

i. Embed the principles of innovation into the range of policy instruments that impact upon sustainable regional development in Australia, specifically by establishing:

   a. Policy settings that not only encourage, but expect (and actively resource) regions to think, plan and act innovatively, including cross-regionally.

   b. Designated funding for community–industry engagement by regional universities, and a greater role for universities in driving and supporting the direction of regional development.

   c. Policy settings that allow for innovation dividends to be maximised from regional Australia, with the purpose of increasing regional economic bases in the knowledge economy (and reduce drawdown of natural assets).

   d. Greater engagement amongst regional SME's and other actors in the innovation system, including R&D and venture capital providers.

➢ Communications Technology- NBN

❖ Policy Actions

1. Increase attention to the opportunities of social media communication in regional Australia to inform government policy and practice as it impacts on regional Australia by:

   a. Constructing less formal knowledge transfer environments to allow jointly supported ambitions of stakeholders to be explored, formulated and actioned; and

   b. Supporting the establishment of 'virtual communities of practice' in a range of regionally based issues.

2. *Greater application of institutional arrangements that operate in an increasingly powerfully networked world at local, regional and national levels including initiatives by:*

   a. Optimising web based citizen engagement opportunities;
   b. Representing regional groups in decision–making and planning forums on matters that impact upon the well being and development of regional communities and businesses;
   c. Fostering the evolution of public policy processes that allow for greater diversity in application relative to place-based needs and aspirations; and
   d. Improving coordination of hard and soft services across all levels of government to optimise service delivery.

3. *Increasing the capacity of all citizens (particularly those in regional Australia) in the use and application of the NBN and other technology through regionally based:*

a. Projects to identify current gaps and existing barriers to digital technology use by businesses and community organisations across regional Australia;
b. Technology application awareness raising programs; and
c. Funding to enable start up access to software and hardware and for training in application of technology to business development rather than on technology features.

➤ Land use

❖ **Policy actions**

1. *Greater investment in Australia's agricultural potential through:*

   a. Identification and protection of key agricultural areas;
   b. Minimising of ad hoc fragmentation of rural land;
   c. Preservation of large broad acre farming land;
   d. Matching land capability and agricultural forms;
   e. Research into flexible and high productive cropping.

2. *Integration of planning and management for water and land resources to ensure nature conservation outcomes by:*

a. Strong local ownership and coordination of governance;
b. Research and development into sustainable farming practices, in particular soil structure maintenance; and
c. Provision for rehabilitation of degraded land.

3. *Strong focus on vertically integrated product and service offerings from farm gate to plate through development of:*

a. Flexible transferable in place workforces skills;
b. Infrastructure and legislation for getting product to market;

c. Investment and trade capacity at the local regional level; and
d. Specific assistance to enable growers to target overseas markets which are attractively large but challenging.

4. *Ensure key legislation and infrastructure to support intensive farming and 'green technology' is embedded in all future regional and urban land use planning and development decisions by:*

a. Lobbying for Council of Australian Government support for a national policy on the retention of high quality rural and peri-urban arable land for intensive high-value commercial food and fibre production;
b. Harmonising statutory land use planning mechanisms within and between jurisdictions;
c. Optimising the policy and practice input from inter and intra-governmental natural resources management mechanisms (such as catchment management groups); and
d. Promoting the adoption of 'green technology' to enhance horticulture, farming and grazing yields.

2. Economic Imperatives

❖ **Policy Actions**

1. Strengthen the capacity of regional Australia to engage with Asia at a strategic level through a greater understanding of:

- Commercial contract frameworks for doing business with Asia;
- Legal and regulatory requirements for doing business with Asia; and
- The foreign investment policies of Australia.

2. Develop regionally and local based mechanisms to support local businesses making investment in their own regions such as:

a. Utilising the networking opportunities provided by Regional Development Australia;
b. Drawing on the strengths and reach of national, state and territory departments of commerce and trade;
c. Garnering the support of peak industry bodies and encourage their active participation in and support of regional and local initiatives;
d. Working closely with local Chambers of Commerce and regional economic development bodies.

3. Growing Capacity to Support Regional Development

❖ **Policy Actions**

1. Design policies in a way that implementation and funding recognise and supports government and industry collaborations by developing:

- Systems based understanding of individual enterprises within the broader regional economy and how they can respond to dynamic change;
- Strategies to support an enterprise's capability to adapt faster; and
- Mechanisms to enable industry based organisations to make change happen by building on the work of RDA and Local Government Authorities.

2. Establish new program structures that provide for multiple entry and exit pathways along an articulated continuum involving the upper secondary school system, the TAFE sector and the University sector that can:

- Operate through innovative management mechanisms such as Credit Project Teams;
- Facilitate the negotiation process to review existing credit transfer agreements and create new articulation pathways for students moving from the TAFE to the university sector;
- Identify and promote exit points within undergraduate degree programs that enable students to gain a VET sector qualification; and
- Strengthen the working relationship between all education sectors to develop critical mass in terms of comprehensive course profiles leading to awards.

3. Conduct employer needs analysis and capability workshops to increase the integration of educational services with a focus on:

- Professional development through university and VET sector programs;
- In-house industry based professional development and technical collaboration with educational institutions;
- Up-skilling and transferable skills and cross- industry skilling particularly prevocational skill sets (mining, local government and agriculture); and
- Optimising the use of regional educational infrastructure.

4. Regional Catalysts

❖ **Policy Actions**

1. *Expand enterprise education including provisions for skills based training.*

   a. Supporting skills, knowledge and attributes designed to foster entrepreneurial awareness, business start-up and growth along with student propensity and intentionality towards entrepreneurship;
   b. Improving an innovator's skills, knowledge and attributes in conducting a business and managing business opportunities and growth;
   c. Providing business coaching to foster a training and learning culture and the capacity to access external information and apply it to service delivery;
   d. Enhancing skills on how to: stabilise in response to disruptive change; undertake situation analysis; and align business processes, structures and systems in response to rapid change; and
   e. Providing programs and funding initiatives to enable nascent entrepreneurs to be linked with like-minded or experienced others.

2. *Greater application of policies that support 'Bottom of the Pyramid or Fifth estate' sustainable development in regional Australia including:*

   a. Microcredit;
   b. Venture capital and social venture funds; and
   c. Business and community partnerships.

3. *Foster the establishment and maintenance of 'Sustainable Aboriginal Communities' that are "able to make decisions but more importantly fund those decisions" without any need for governmental funding by developing the capacity for Indigenous groups to:*

   • Use their land to generate revenue through strategic land development;
   • Access revenue streams to provide community benefits;
   • Build on and strengthening internal operating capabilities; and
   • Develop asset optimisation and management strategies.

5. Achieving Regional Outcomes

➢ Settlement Patterns

❖ **Policy Actions**

1. *Regional policy impact statements need to report on the way in which particular policy actions will enhance or otherwise impact on the local regional networks for example by:*

a. Disseminating statements on how policy actions are spatially (regional) and vertically (government/administratively) integrated;
b. Making greater use of regional advisory boards/development commissions with expert knowledge on regional development integrated at local, state and federal levels;
c. Fostering concomitant business and private investment especially major commercial landholders and investors;
d. Developing new models for leveraging opportunities for public and private collaboration and funding of key projects, individually and as clusters across regions; and;
e. Holding discussions and developing collaborative networks with major commercial landholders and investors.

2. *Developing frameworks/policy position on concepts of regional equity by creating:*

a. Tools/methodologies for balancing out the needs of smaller populations and larger populations – allowing for more sophistication than majority rules;
b. Ways to articulate mining areas with high employment opportunities and high unemployment areas – collaboration across regional/urban needs; and
c. Opportunities to increase skilled regional immigration

3. *Provide certainty that decentralisation is not a shift of problems of urbanisation and suburbanisation of large capital and regional cities by ensuring that:*

a. Regional growth plans include the support of strong regional centers within a well-connected region;
b. Environmentally sustainable design for infrastructure and housing (e.g. appropriate block sizes);
c. Establishment of community infrastructure is geared to be a catalyst for regional innovation; and
d. Appropriate levels of education and technology centers are provided within the fabric of existing regional settlements.

➢ Sustainability technologies for water, wastewater and renewable energy

❖ **Policy Actions**

1. *Evaluate and test the technical and economic feasibility of sustainability technologies in a range of regional settings by:*

   a. Undertaking project specific studies that fully evaluate business as usual headwork's costs on 'Greenfield sites' compared with introducing sustainable technology across a range of urban and peri-urban sites in regional and remote areas; and
   b. Facilitating the establishment of a small loans funding scheme directed to assist the introduction of sustainable technology in regional areas.

2. *Provide incentives for enhancing professional and technical capacity to support the adoption of sustainability technologies through:*

   a. Promoting the establishment of programs and courses in the university sector in regional Australia that will prepare a new generation of sustainability professionals in the engineering, environmental, economic, primary industry and social sciences fields;
   b. Providing additional resources to the VET sector to support training of sustainably focused trade apprentices;
   c. Undertaking local and regional professional and technology skills needs analysis to help quantify the demand for new professions, skills and the skill-sets required;
   d. Fostering industry-trade union-Vet sector collaboration to streamline the preparation for the integration of sustainability technology skills into emerging and established workforces; and
   e. Allocating additional funding for living allowances for university students and apprentices to undertake programs in sustainability technology in rural and remote regions.

3. *Encourage small demonstration projects that exhibit renewable utilities in action, for example:*

   a. Establishing secondary school, VET institutions and community based food gardens to demonstrate and experience sustainable production landscape principles and practices;
   b. Using underground, roof space and building surrounds in public and private sector facilities to house infrastructure, such as water tanks, solar panels and small scale wind turbines;
   c. Undertaking sewer mining to produce recycled water for use in toilets and to enhance recreational facilities and urban open spaces; and
   d. Detailing and promulgating the benefits and cost savings inherent in the removal/ partial removal of stormwater from municipal waste water treatment systems.

4. *Initiate public awareness and communication strategies for community engagement aimed at the acceptance of sustainable technology by way of:*

   a. Identifying 'champions' of sustainability technologies and promoting and supporting case examples of applications in local communities;
   b. Encouraging local and regional electronic and print media to run 'good-news' stories on the benefits of providing self-sustaining integrated urban utility services and sustainability technologies in general; and
   c. Using social media and community based social marketing in regional centers that explain what the new technologies would look like and what skillsets supporting professionals and technicians would require;

➤ Policy and Governance

❖ Policy actions

1. *Develop strategic directions for the sustainable economic, environmental and social management at the relevant levels and set a climate that builds and supports a positive and pro active economic and social environment where business (especially small-medium ones) are able to flourish by:*

   - Promoting greater understanding and integrated mapping of regional networks;
   - Fostering technological networks (internet, telephone, power, transportation, delivery and product distribution);
   - Supporting formal and informal governance networks – social affiliation, interactive, decision making, power distributions and scale free;
   - Enhancing information networks to exchange knowledge, share resources and provide opportunities for innovative collaborations; and
   - Supporting regional networks in food , water and waste management and energy.

2. *Embed proactive regional development strategies in whole-of-government provision of infrastructure and the delivery of services by:*

   - Integrating departmental and agency policies that geographically common regional focus;
   - Organising regionally; and
   - Acting with one voice.

➢ Stay involved

This document is a summary of the policy actions proposed in the **SEGRA** 2012 Communiqué. A full copy of the Communiqué is available at www.segra.com.au.
The themed content is indicative rather than comprehensive. As such, it is a living document with discussions on many of the themes raised in this paper continuing to be debated in the **SEGRA** LinkedIn group and at **SEGRA** later this year at Coffs Harbour, NSW on 16-18 October.

To receive regular updates about **SEGRA** please subscribe at www.segra.com.au or by email info@segra.com.au.

➢ *SEGRA* 2013: Regions releasing their mojo in an inter-connected world.

SEGRA 2013 will be held in Coffs Harbour, NSW on16, 17 and 18 October 2013.

The energy, passion and fight of a local community is often what stokes the fire that drives change. The focus at **SEGRA** this year will be on regional communities and how they harness local energy and passion to respond to challenges. Key ideas include how to work cocreatively; structures and processes for community based action; social enterprise facilitation and regional business models in the new globally networked world.

Call for papers is open now: to offer a paper visit www.segra.com.au. If you would like to be on our mailing list or receive email updates, please register at www.segra.com.au , email info@segra.com.au or phone 07-3210 0021 .

> **SEGRA** continues to be the not to be missed event for those who are looking for real-action not reaction and who have a passion for regional Australia.
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> **SEGRA** *2012 delegate*