



## Good regional policy?

SEGRA linked in has been having a recent discussion around 'What is good regional policy'. Below is my attempt to pull some of this together into the next level of discussion.

The comments seemed to be divided into three groups:

- **good policy practice**
- **strategic policy**
- **the inherent subjectivity of policy e.g 'good policy'.**

Obviously these are artificial divisions however there seem to be distinct and somewhat different questions arising from each of these considerations.

Drawing on traditional texts on policy, good policy is policy that achieves its objectives, is durable and sustainable and has the necessary formal institutional arrangements to be implemented. Another and more vexed consideration is the inclusion that the policy has the support of a wide range of players in its policy domain.

The extent to which regional policy objectives adequately reflect the needs and interests of an ambitiously defined 'regional Australia' is much harder to measure.

However the discussion followed the policy issue at an area/ spatial level, interspersed and more practice based discussion about the roll out of the NBN.

There was a lot of discussion about the various ways in which regions could be defined/identified almost exclusively settling for spatial definitions of regions within complex adaptive systems ( refer Phil Cooke University of Cardiff) thinking rather than functional divisions. Key themes emerging from within this spatial definition were cross regional relationships, regional integrity, context and inter regional cohesion. These in turn related to connectivity, governance, economic transfers and regulatory compliance and alignment.

Regional systems can then be considered as sub systems which integrate into larger systems and interact with other sub systems (spatially, functionally etc)

## Good policy practice

Comments around good policy practice noted:

### *Setting the agenda:*

This issue needs a level of understanding as to how and why issues get on the agenda, how they was articulated and broad acceptance of the nature of the problem. Regional Australia has often been captive to political/electoral cycles of interest or dismantled into industry policy

### *What is the issue/ problem:*

Absence of regional stakeholder collaboration – the need to understand the unique characteristics of each region within regional Australia there are different patterns of



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## National Conference

### Sustainable Economic Growth for Regional Australia

demography, economy and climate. Policy needs to reflect these different regional needs and interests

Impacts of compliance policy on primary industries are often not adequately accounted for – eg agriculture, forestry, meat processing.

There is no common language or broad acceptance of what is the problem that regional policy is fixing.

Responding to the economic, environmental, social and governance issues associated with a vast sparsely settled continent with large urban conglomerations on the coast – and the cost of not responding to the issue.

A patchwork economy.

A negative framing of regional Australia is seen as service hungry, a series of industry sectors, isolated, less educated modal points to ports - these perceptions result in policies that exclude activating the innovation capacity and advantages regions have eg greenfields

Regional Australia is not seen as integrated within the national agenda – there is no overall social, economic design plan, work on governance design e g RDA provides some opportunity for this.

## Strategic Policy

Much of the discussion raised that good regional policy must primarily be strategic. Ideas included that good regional policy strategy included:

Good regional policy sits within a complex system of value creation that understands the larger context as well as the core business and understands and considers the interdependencies.

Policy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century needs to accommodate interrelationships within converging and competing systems, as well as positioning within its 'ecosystem'.

In a globalised and networked world, more than ever policy needs to have a predictive intent looking for departures from the past and allowing for prospective changes.

The already recognised nature of policy as hypothesis must come to the fore and allow for constant testing of core activities and embrace analytical and intuitive learning

## Policy Actions

Getting to grips with the competing government policy agendas regarding service delivery, cost sharing and the devolution of the responsibility across all of Australia.

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) and communities can flourish.



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Sustainable Economic Growth for Regional Australia

Greater understanding and integrated mapping of regional networks:

- technological networks ( internet, telephone power, transportation, delivery and distribution networks)
- governance networks – social affiliation, interactive, decision making, power distributions and scale free networks
- governance networks
- defence networks
- Information networks – knowledge, resources,
- Environmental networks
- Greater understanding of network components, shortest paths and small-world effect, distributions and centrality measures, clustering coefficients, mixing.



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The real game changer is creating a globalised virtually connected world in parallel with people valuing close local relationships.

We need a 'sub urbanization' policy.

There needs to be an alignment of policies through all levels of government and across all departments to ensure that incentives provided by one level of government and not contradicted to policies of another government sector – eg Federal health budget included incentives for telehealth into remote and regional Australia but many of these regions are not able to access these services due to lack of broadband connectivity do not appear to be on the roll out for the NBN . (Private enterprise is picking up on some of this need)

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