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Regional
Development
Australia
Riverina
Annual Report

Vision

RDA Riverina - facilitating regional growth and prosperity



Values

RDA Riverina embraces and supports the following values:

- Innovation/creativity
- Commitment to a learning culture
- Inclusiveness
- Sustainability
- Optimism

Mission

RDA Riverina will build partnerships that facilitate the development of a sustainable region.

RDA Riverina connects communities, business and government to projects, programs, services, funding and other people.



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Our role

Building strong, confident and vibrant regions.



Regional Development Australia (RDA) is a national network of Committees made up of local leaders who work with all levels of government, business and community groups to support the economic development of their regions.

RDA Riverina plays a pivotal role in ensuring the long-term sustainability of the Riverina.

Through collaboration, knowledge sharing and facilitation, RDA Riverina leverages the skills and expertise of its networks to develop local solutions to local problems. The results are evidenced by the number of regional businesses, councils, industry sectors and community groups supported each year, and the region-relevant advice given to government on issues critical to the economic prosperity of the Riverina. This Annual Report showcases some of RDA Riverina's key areas of progress, activities and achievements in 2016-17.

In the year ahead, RDA Riverina will change its focus and make structural adjustments that will see it less reliant on grant funding from government. However, it will continue to play an active and facilitative role in the

Riverina community, working with other like-minded organisations to grow strong and confident regional economies that harness competitive advantages, seize on economic opportunity and attract investment.



Message from the Chair



Diana Gibbs RDA Riverina Chair

Once again, RDA Riverina has had a very busy year!

The 2016-2017 period marks the start of a process of structural change that will see us better equipped to handle a financial future less reliant on grant funding from Government.

Following a period of speculation about funding, in May 2017 we received much needed reassurance with the announcement that the Australian Government will provide funding through to the end of 2020.

With the NSW State Government committing to provide funding to the end of calendar year 2017 to assist the transition to a new business model, we are now confident of continuing our regional development services for the Riverina into the future.

This year has seen some key personnel changes. In January 2017, we welcomed a new Chief Executive Officer, Rachel Whiting. Our sincere gratitude goes to Lani Houston who so ably acted as Interim CEO after the sudden resignation of Mark Ritchie. Since her appointment, Rachel has been instrumental in changing our focus to adapt to a decrease in grant funding, and is to be congratulated on assisting our move to a new business model, including major reviews of our communications and IT needs. This past year also saw the replacement of Committee member Phil Pinyon by Dean Hawkins, and the retirement of long-serving Committee member Bill Thompson whose position has not yet been filled as the new Charter between the Australian Government and the RDA Committees requires changes be implemented in the new year.

Despite these changes, we have successfully continued existing activities such as our Industry Tours, Development Officer Forums, and various workshops, and have undertaken a number of major projects that have delivered outstanding results for the Riverina community.

These include:

- the on-going "Grow Our Own" workforce development program in the Western Riverina
- a major analysis of skills supply and demand in the region's horticultural sector
- assisting the world-scale timber processing sector in our eastern area to access funding to examine possible plantation estate expansion
- hosting the Business Accelerator Program in which nine businesses were mentored to discover expansion paths (resulting in an expected total of 45 jobs – direct and indirect – to be created in our region)
- reinvigoration of "Country Change" – a campaign designed to encourage relocation of people and businesses to the Riverina. A major focus of our collaborative role with local government, this campaign will continue into the coming year
- co-hosting 2016 "Taste Riverina" – a celebration of local food and wine. This continues to be an important project for RDA Riverina, with the festival growing in strength every year
- helping to identify infrastructure investment priorities for NSW
- providing a regional perspective to the State Government's discussions with local government regarding the allocation of Regional Growth Funds.

I would like to thank our dedicated staff, the Committee members, and the many individuals who have all done so much to help us achieve our goals over this rather difficult year, and whose support we continue to value into the future.

About RDA Riverina

Regional Development Australia Riverina (RDA Riverina) is part of an Australian Government initiative based on building partnerships and responding to local priorities and needs.



Backed by Australian Government and NSW State funding, it serves as a conduit between government and local communities. It is a facilitator of networks and partnerships, and a provider of information and economic and social support to the communities of the Riverina.

RDA Riverina covers 14 Local Government Areas (LGAs) and includes the major centres of Wagga Wagga and Griffith.

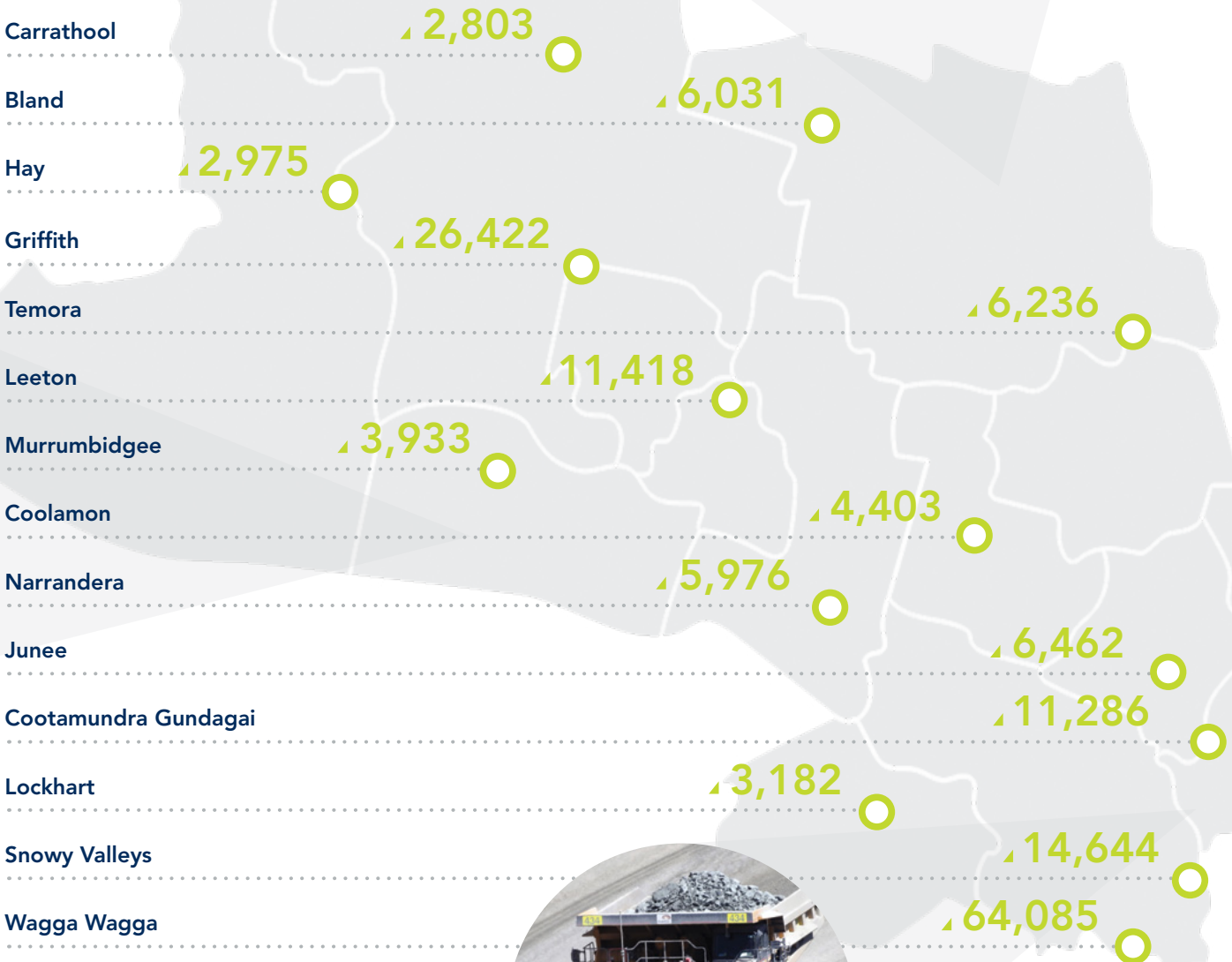
A non-profit, community-based organisation, RDA Riverina is steered by a committee of 12 members from across the region who represent local government, businesses and communities. Collectively, the Committee brings a broad and diverse skills base and demonstrated networks and alliances to the organisation.

The work of RDA Riverina is undertaken by a small but passionate team based across the region led by a Chief Executive Officer.





Population



Town populations – projections from 2016 Census Data (REMPPLAN)

Regional profile

The Riverina region stretches 500 kms east to west across south-central NSW, covering an area of almost 59,665sq kms. The region includes 14 LGAS and home to a population of approximately 175,000 people.



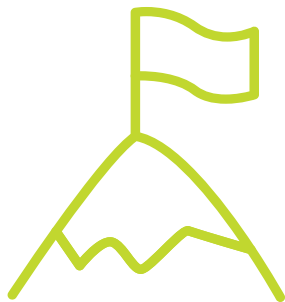
The Riverina region is home to the Murrumbidgee River and the major food producing areas of the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area (MIA) and Coleambally Irrigation Area (CIA). Renowned for being **one of Australia's largest agricultural hubs**, the Riverina region relies heavily on the agriculture sector for its economic prosperity.

Unemployment across the Riverina region is **4.62%** and the workforce participation rate **64.4%**. The median age is **39** and the average weekly household income is **\$1,354**.



Unemployment across the Riverina region is

4.62%



The Riverina has a wealth of people with a **proactive** and **entrepreneurial** approach to business and life.

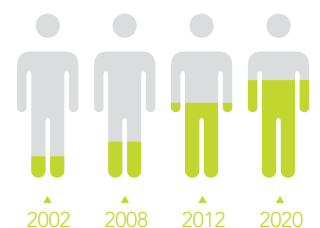
Apart from agriculture, retail, manufacturing (particularly value-adding to food and beverages), health care and social assistance are also major employers in the region.

The cities of Wagga Wagga and Griffith are the major centres of the region and hubs for the provision of health, education and other government services. Wagga Wagga in particular has experienced significant population growth and has been noted as one of the state's fastest growing regional cities.

The region has a strong education base with Charles Sturt University, TAFE NSW (Southern Region), RAAF and Kapooka Army Base – all of these facilities are vital in building the skills and confidence of all people in the region.

Opportunities for development exist in the Riverina region in agriculture, aged care, aviation, manufacturing, transport and logistics and education.

Wagga Wagga in particular has experienced significant **population growth**.



To read the full Riverina Regional Profile January 2018, visit: rdariverina.org.au/our-region

RDA Riverina Committee

2016-2017

The RDA Riverina Committee comprises 12 members from across the region who represent local communities, businesses and local government and understand the challenges, opportunities and priorities within these communities.

Working together, the Committee develops a Regional Plan, which is used to guide the organisation in strengthening the region. The committee held five meetings in 2016-17 across the region: one via teleconference and one each in Gundagai, Griffith, Temora and Lockhart.



Diana Gibbs

RDA Riverina Chair
Principal - Diana Gibbs
and Partners

Term:

1 Jan 2012 – 31 Dec 2017



Miriam Dayhew

Committee Deputy Chairperson
University Ombudsman &
Head of Campus - Charles
Sturt University

Term:

15 Jan 2015 – 30 Jun 2018



Brett Stonestreet

Committee Secretary/
Public Officer
General Manager -
Griffith City Council

Term:

1 Jan 2012 – 30 Jun 2018



James Davis

Treasurer/
Committee Member
General Manager -
Junee Shire Council

Term:

1 Jul 2015 – 30 Jun 2018

Paul Pearsall

Committee Member
Managing Director -
Grain Link Storage

Term:

1 Jul 2015 – 30 Jun 2018

Bill Thompson

Committee Member
Solicitor/Partner -
Commings Hendriks

Term:

1 Jan 2012 – 30 Jun 2017

Margaret Andreazza

Committee Member
Grants Officer -
Griffith Regional Theatre

Term:

1 Jan 2012 – 30 Jun 2018

Patricia Wilkinson

Committee Member
Tourism & Strategy Senior
Project Officer - National Parks &
Wildlife Service

Term:

1 Jul 2015 – 30 Jun 2018

Kerry Penton

Committee Member
Institute Director -
TAFE NSW Riverina Institute

Term:

1 Jan 2012 – 30 Jun 2018

Deidre Lemerle

Committee Member
Professor of Agricultural
Innovation - Charles Sturt
University

Term:

1 Jul 2015 – 30 Jun 2018

Karen Hutchinson

Committee Member
Customer Services & Policy
Manager - Murrumbidgee
Irrigation Ltd

Term:

1 Jul 2015 – 30 Jun 2018

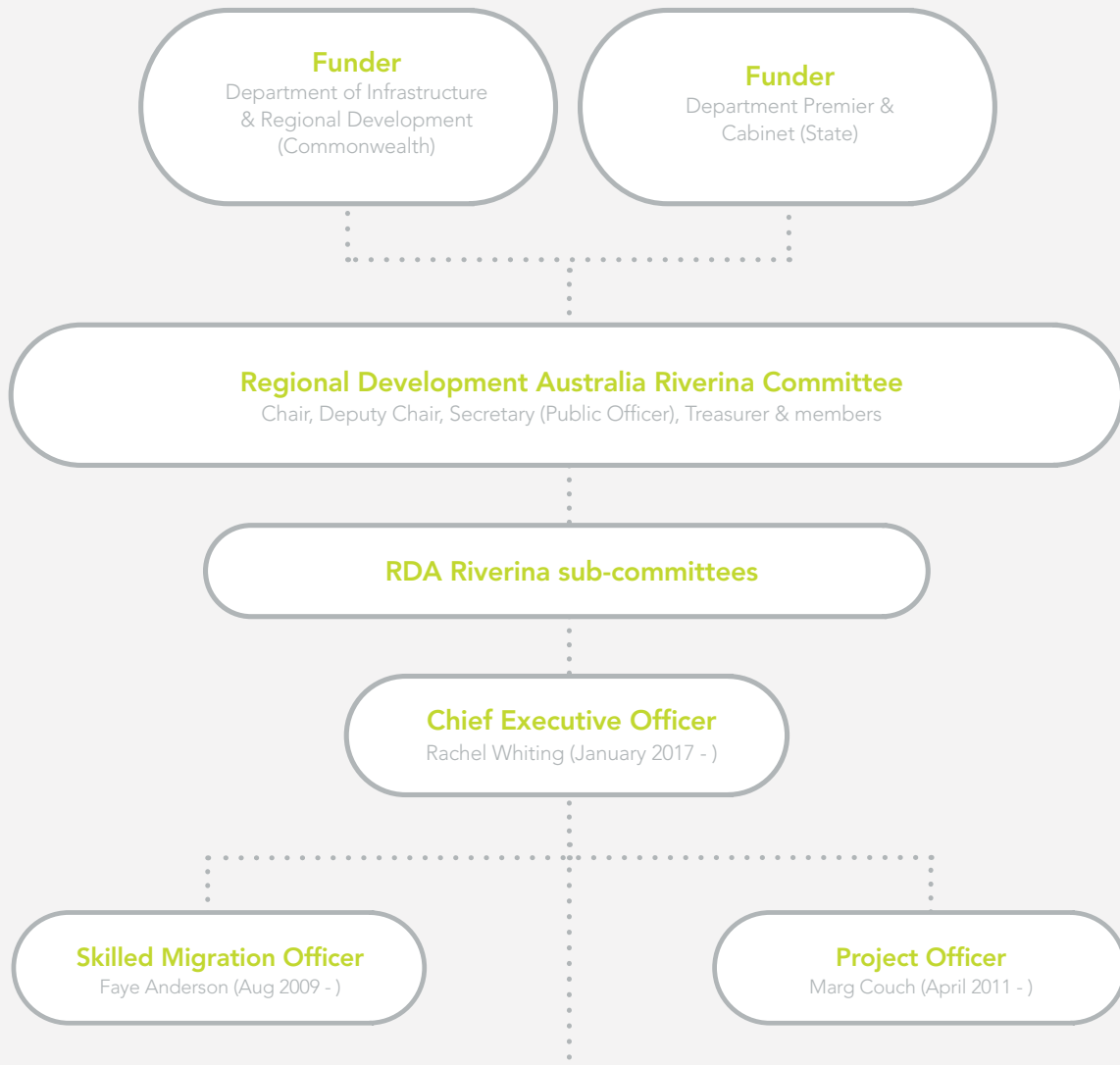
Dean Hawkins

Committee Member
Fibre & Forestry Manager -
Visy Pulp & Paper

Term:

24 Nov 2016 – 30 Jun 2018

RDA Riverina staff structure



Stakeholders/collaborators:

- Government Departments (State & Federal)
- 14 LGAs: Bland, Carrathool, Coolamon, Cootamundra-Gundagai, Griffith, Hay, Junee, Leeton, Lockhart, Murrumbidgee, Narrandera, Snowy Valleys, Temora and Wagga Wagga
- Regional Organisations of Councils: REROC and RAMROC
- Community members
- Business/industry groups
- Businesses
- Chambers of Commerce
- Business Enterprise Centre (BEC)
- Regional organisations
- Community groups (Indigenous, cultural, sporting etc)
- RDA Murray
- Charles Sturt University
- Deakin University
- TAFE
- Graham Centre
- AgriFutures Australia
- REMPLAN
- Thrive Riverina
- Destination Riverina Murray

Economic growth

2016-17

Working with all levels of government, business and community groups, **RDA Riverina** has a clear focus on growing a strong and confident regional economy that harnesses the Riverina's competitive advantages, seizes on economic opportunity and attracts investment.



From start-ups through to established businesses, RDA Riverina supports business development and growth across the region by providing business operations with helpful resources, advice and expertise, connecting regional

businesses and industry sectors with international trade partners, new markets and potential investors, and providing regional networking opportunities.

Runs on the board

RDA Riverina worked with local government, business and industry to prioritise and support significant projects that contribute to the economic, social and environmental development of the region in 2016-17. These include:

- examining the skills shortage in the horticultural sector of the Riverina (including irrigation crops of citrus, tree nuts and vegetables, the wine grape industry and the cooler climate apple industry)
- hosting an Economic Development Forum and three Energy Technology forums across the region with greater focus on jobs growth and business development
- showcasing successful agritourism businesses in the Snowy Valleys Local Government Area of Tumbarumba and Batlow. Participants on the industry tour visited six tourism operators and enjoyed four lunchtime presentations
- partnering with Riverina Regional Tourism (now known as Thrive Riverina) and TAFE NSW Riverina to host the month-long Taste Riverina Food Festival for the sixth time
- partnering with the Softwoods Working Group to successfully apply for funding to conduct an economic development study into the expansion of the softwood plantation industry in the eastern portion of the RDA Riverina boundary
- collaborating with 10 councils to reinvigorate the Country Change campaign – a program of activities designed to increase investment in the Riverina by attracting new residents and businesses
- providing leadership, business input and support for a number of Murray Darling Basin Regional Economic Diversification Projects including an almond milk processing facility in Griffith, processing plant facility for fresh water fish, several aquaculture developments, and cold storage facilities for the walnut industry.
- hosting the Business Accelerator Program in which nine businesses were mentored to discover expansion paths.

Case study: Pitching brings focus

Sarah Curry, Majors Mulch

When **Sarah Curry** took part in RDA Riverina's Business Accelerator Program, she wanted help to step outside of her busy daily life to examine her business with fresh eyes.



Sarah and husband Josh run Majors Mulch, producing mulching pellets on their family farm 'Majors Point', near Quandialla.

"We have three different aspects of the business. We have a farming operation, a wholesale business producing pelletized mulch which we sell into the garden and nursery industry, and a retail business in West Wyalong.

"We're in our third year now, and I really felt like I'd slipped through the gaps – I'm a woman in business, I'm a young mum, and I have 15 full-time staff and I've gotten to this level by myself. How is it that there is no government assistance for me, given I'm rurally based, a woman, and have all these employees? How come there's no help for me?"

Then someone in her network suggested she take part in the Accelerator Program.

For Sarah, the Program provided an opportunity to network with a variety of different businesses and to get helpful feedback from independent business experts. She describes the graduation 'pitch', where participants showcased all they learned during the Program, as a highlight.

"The best part was having to pitch, because you really needed to know very clearly what it was you were pitching.

"It was helpful for me to clearly identify the future direction of the business and what my focus should be. As a result, we've decided to sell the retail division of the business, which will allow us to focus on where our real potential is.

"Our product is our own invention, and has huge environmental benefits. Our stubble isn't burnt anymore, it's now used to add value to gardens and soils, and we're working closely with the Department of Primary Industries and the Grains Research Development Corporation on a range of new products for broad acre farming."

The Program also exposed Sarah to the work of RDA Riverina, which she knew next to nothing about before applying.

"Now I know that there is somebody locally who's there to support you and that they have a network of contacts and information that can be really helpful to your business. If you're in business, I think it's well worth making yourself known to the people at RDA Riverina and seeing what help they can provide."

"The best part was
having to pitch,
because you really
needed to know very
clearly what it was you
were pitching."

Case study: Support and guidance

Luke Piccolo, Limone and Piccolo Family Farm

Luke Piccolo is part of a family-run business that encompasses a fine dining restaurant, a busy café, produce stall, a farm and an events venue. To say their business keeps them busy is an understatement.

The family runs Limone restaurant, where Luke is the head chef, Miei Amici Café, The Pantry and Piccolo Family Farm, which is located just outside of Griffith and provides seasonal produce for all arms of the family business.

March 2017 was a pivotal time for the business and Luke joined RDA Riverina's Business Accelerator Program to get support and advice about how to keep the business progressing.

"I was already speaking to RDA Riverina regularly as I came across challenges and ideas for the family business so when the Accelerator became available they encouraged me to sign up. I remember Marg Couch (Project Officer for RDA Riverina) saying, 'Do this course. It will answer all of your questions,' so I did."

One aspect of the Program that had a real impact on Luke was the opportunity to get together with other regional businesses and talk confidentially about the challenges they faced.

"It was so encouraging to realise everyone was in the same boat and having similar problems. We spent four or five hours all together as a group with the mentors John Hemphill (from Voyager Strategies) and Michael Harper (from BizScaping) running through lots of topics and learning about each other's businesses."

After the initial realisation that the challenges the Piccolo family was facing were common to many regional businesses, Luke found it valuable to go through all the steps of planning for growth and undertaking due processes.

"In our business, lots of us are really energetic and good at just getting stuff done, but perhaps what is lacking is some of the planning. I got great advice from John Hemphill about the roles everyone plays in our family and in our business – who is

doing what and how to make that work best. We talked about how to capture our energy, play to everyone's strengths but also make sure to do the planning and put it down on paper."

In the six months since Luke completed the Accelerator Program, the Piccolo family business has actioned everything set out in the plan.

"So much has happened since the Accelerator. We have expanded the café, we have opened the produce stall (The Pantry) within the café so we can sell produce from the farm, we have extended the dining space at Limone and we completed all the branding and the new website for the farm."

The Piccolo family business has now all come together under the umbrella brand of Piccolo Family Farm, which allows people to understand how the different parts of the enterprise are connected and work together to achieve an authentic paddock to plate experience for customers.

Luke counts himself lucky to be part of the RDA Riverina network and says it's a great organisation for regional businesses to connect with.

"I've been lucky to have been working with RDA Riverina since I was a young apprentice chef. Back then I was involved in the Riverina 100 Mile Challenge dinner that RDA Riverina helped to coordinate.

"Even when I was away from the region completing my training, I would come back and do events for Taste Riverina (a partnership between RDA Riverina, Riverina Regional Tourism and TAFE Riverina) and other festivals, bringing the chefs I worked with to Griffith. And since I've returned and we've opened Limone and built up the business, I've looked to RDA Riverina again and again for support and guidance."



“I was already speaking to RDA Riverina regularly as I came across challenges and ideas for the family business so when the Accelerator became available they encouraged me to sign up.”

Image credit:
Dee Kramer

Case study: Program accelerates Cathy's business

Cathy Gairn, Courabyra Wines

Cathy Gairn and husband **Brian** established Courabyra Vineyard, Tumbarumba and began making their award winning cool climate premium wines in 1999. The pair opened their cellar door and restaurant in 2014.



While the business has gone from strength to strength, and won Gourmet Travellers Best Cellar Door two years running, Cathy knew that she needed help.

"I'm one of those people who try to do everything and that's always been the case, but I knew I needed to work on the business rather than in it. So, I tried to find someone who might be able to guide me on the right way to let go of some of the tasks that I shouldn't be doing and learning the tasks that I need to improve the business."

RDA Riverina Project Officer Marg Couch referred Cathy to the RDA Riverina's Business Accelerator Program.

The Program helped Cathy to assess which parts of her business were performing well and to set goals for the long-term.

"I had a huge learning curve through this Program. My mentor Michael Harper said on his first visit, 'Show me what you're doing and where you're heading' and I couldn't answer most of his questions.

"It made me stop, and start recording where customers came from and what they were buying. I didn't know where my market was coming from but in a short period of time I learnt that 70% of our business was from visitors. We had assumed they were locals.

"It was a really good tool for me to know where to market, and to get programs in place. I ended up changing accountants and accountancy programs, and I've engaged someone to help with the marketing side of things."

"It's also made me manage my time and tasks better, which has been fantastic for us.

"When I first started the business, I'd be the person out the front, I'd be in the kitchen – I'd do whatever job needed to be done. The Program has made me stop and say, 'Well I can't do everything', and realise that eventually something was going to fall down, either me or the business.

"It's good to remember that there's always someone to help you. The Business Accelerator Program has been a real privilege to be involved in and it has given us enormous benefits. RDA Riverina in general has always been there if we've needed any help – it's just a matter of making contact."

" It's good to remember
that there's always someone
to help you. The Business
Accelerator Program has been
a real privilege."

Image credit:
Blue Clay Productions

Collaboration

Working with individuals, community groups, organisations, businesses and local government to **achieve economic and social prosperity** is RDA Riverina's top priority.



Our very existence relies on our ability to develop partnerships, share information and resources, support and collaborate with others, fostering networks and connections within the region, and running specific programs that build community capacity to collaborate, lead and adapt to change. Our work in this space led us to invite Robyn Henderson to present workshops on Collaboration and Strategic Partnerships, held in August 2017.

Promoting the region

The Riverina offers a diverse range of facilities, services and jobs with affordable housing, low congestion and a good work/life balance. Despite these factors, many people in metropolitan Australia are unaware of the opportunities available in regional areas.

To build awareness, RDA Riverina partnered with like-minded organisations on two major projects: Taste Riverina and Country Change.

Taste Riverina

Understanding that the Visitor Economy – showing the region to overnight visitors – is often a critical first step before relocating to a region is even considered, in 2016 RDA Riverina once again partnered with Riverina Regional Tourism (now known as Thrive Riverina) and TAFE NSW Riverina Institute, local government, businesses, industries and media outlets to host and promote a showcase of locally grown and value-added food through the Taste Riverina Food Festival.

The month-long festival during October saw:

- more than 35,000 people attend – 29,192 people visiting free events and 6268 visitors at ticketed events
- 70 events held in 14 cities and towns
- An increase in visitors from outside the region, with a 12% increase in visitors from outside the region and a 3% increase in people travelling from other Riverina communities
- An estimated \$1.3million spent
- Launch of Riverina Top Plates initiative

www.tasteriverina.com.au

Country Change

Supporting the development of a skilled and diverse workforce and investment in the region, RDA Riverina collaborates with 10 councils on the Country Change campaign aimed at attracting new residents and businesses to the Riverina.

The Country Change website is a critical component of the campaign, providing useful and up-to-date information to prospective 'country changers' about career and business opportunities, affordable housing, infrastructure, lifestyle options and more throughout the region.

www.countrychange.com.au



Case study: Building Better Regions funded projects

The **\$297.7 million** Building Better Regions Fund supports the Australian Government's commitment to create jobs, drive economic growth and build stronger regional communities into the future.

The program will run over four years from 2016-17 to 2019-20.

The program has been designed to achieve the following outcomes in regional and remote communities:

- create jobs
- have a positive impact on economic activity, including Indigenous economic participation through employment and supplier-use outcomes
- enhance community facilities
- enhance leadership capacity
- encourage community cohesion and sense of identity.

Applicant organisation:

Cootamundra-Gundagai Regional Council

Project Name:

Replacement of the Gundagai Sewage Treatment Plant

Grant Approved: \$3,500,000

Total Project Cost: \$7,000,000

Cootamundra-Gundagai Regional Council received \$3.5 M of funding assistance under the Australian Government's Building Better Regions fund to replace its century-old sewage treatment plant that has deteriorated in recent years, primarily due to flood damage.

Engineering evaluation assessed the plant as having a high probability of physical failure during the next significant flood event. A failure of the sewerage system would have a catastrophic impact on the township, forcing evacuation for an estimated minimum of two months, and severely damaging the economic, social, environmental and political landscape of the town. This made replacement a matter of urgency.

With the BBR funding, a replacement Sewage Treatment Plant capable of operating in flood conditions, and with a minimum of 50% increase in capacity, will be built. The project will include site civil works, new mechanical installations,

upgrading of the power supply, full commissioning and plant proving trials, removal of the old 1923 plant, new operational manuals and training for the operators, and employing between 30-35 people over the two-year project. It is also expected that the new plant will result in two full-time ongoing positions.

RDA Riverina assisted Council with its application, providing an informed letter of support. It attested to the personal, social and economic cost of a failure in the system, highlighted the added value to the town of a new system and cited the alignment of the project with a number of RDA Riverina goals, including encouragement of economic growth, diversity and industry innovation, and encouragement of a proactive approach to health and living.

Phil McMurray, Interim Director Asset Management at Cootamundra-Gundagai Regional Council, was grateful for the support.

"RDA Riverina's CEO and Chair attended a workshop and site visit about the project in advance of the application. This allowed them to form a considered response in support of our application and Council was very appreciative of these actions."





The official opening of the \$35 million Bomen Enabling Roads Project (Stage 1 - Riverina Intermodal Freight and Logistics Hub) was held on 10 November 2017. This project was made possible through funding contributions from all levels of government.

From left: Daryl Maguire MP (NSW State Member for Wagga Wagga), James Bolton (WWCC Project Advisor), Silas Darby (WWCC Project Manager), Cr Greg Conkey OAM (Mayor of the City of Wagga Wagga) and Hon. Michael McCormack MP (Federal Member for Riverina).

Applicant organisation:
Eastern Riverina Arts

Project Name:
Eastern Riverina Community Arts Venues Audit & Database

Grant Approved: \$19,350
Total Project Cost: \$19,350

Through the Eastern Riverina Community Arts Venues Audit and Database program funding, a detailed understanding of eight venues in the region, including technical specs, to increase venue use and help attract more touring performances from outside artists and Arts organisations will be developed.

“RDA Riverina provided advice to improve our application. As it’s a new, non-Arts fund, it was helpful to have Rachel Whiting’s guidance around the appropriate language to use in the application, particularly around economic benefits. It’s wonderful to have people to talk to about the project and confirm the value of it to the community.

“As the Executive Director of an Arts development organisation, it’s reassuring to have colleagues with that level of expertise around you. I’ve found that RDA Riverina are always willing to share resources and expertise.” – Scott Howie, Executive Director, Eastern Riverina Arts





“We had the pleasure of visiting beautiful and abundant orchards where you could pick your own buckets of apples straight from the tree.”

Case study: Untapped tourism potential in Snowy Valleys region

By Genevieve Fleming

I was privileged to attend a tour of the **Snowy Valleys region** organised by RDA Riverina and the Snowy Valleys Council.



We came together in Batlow on a crisp, sunny, winter's morning at local café Coffee and More. There we were welcomed by a few locals including Batlow Ciderfest committee member, Ray Billing.

Wearing a felt Irish-leprechaun style hat, Ray set the scene for a day full of delightful surprises and memorable experiences as we traversed the area.

First stop was the spectacular Braymont Gardens, where owners Chris and Jim Brayne spoke about transforming what was a bare six-acre stock paddock back in 2013 into the botanist's delight it is today.

A highlight of this stunning attraction is a tree chapel. Established for wedding ceremonies on the property, the tree chapel incorporates antique iron work and was born from Chris's research into similar stunning locations in The Netherlands and the UK.

Next door is the newly relocated Obsession Winery. Capitalising on the spectacular valley and mountain views, the winery produces its own label, as well as providing production facilities and services for other grapegrowers in the region. The elevation of Tumbarumba makes it the coolest climate wine region in NSW and it is becoming particularly known for producing premium sparkling wines, as well as cool-climate Pinot Noir and Chardonnay table wines.

We next stopped for a delectable, local lunch at Nest Cinema Café, featuring the freshest and best quality local produce from the region. Owner Laura Fraumeni welcomed us and after a tour, we were shown into the adjoining cinema for a

presentation about more delightful offerings of the Snowy Valleys region and heard from local tourism and hotel operators.

Boggy Creek Show highlighted its fantastic horse and sheep dog shows, complete with damper and sheep shearing. We also learned about the picturesque caravan park on the idyllic creek and plans for a serious mountain bike trail planned to attract thrill seekers.

A highlight of our trip was a tasting at the award winning Courabyra Winery. The sparkling wine has won numerous awards and is served in top Sydney restaurants, including Tetsuya, Aria and Pilu at Freshwater. We sat on the deck overlooking maturing vineyards and heard about plans for an amphitheatre and further developments at the site.

Next, we had the pleasure of visiting beautiful and abundant orchards where you could pick your own buckets of apples straight from the tree. Wilgro Orchard offered apple pies and homemade ice cream, followed by a quick tour of the Pioneer Women's Hut, which revealed historic relics and illuminating accounts of the hardships and challenges endured by women during early settlement.

After a full and thoroughly enjoyable day, we returned to our cars for a stunning drive home through the mountains as the sun set, washing over the mountains and valleys in a mesmerising sheen of golden colour.

Education and training

RDA Riverina is committed to supporting communities to build on their strengths and assets to address community challenges.



By supporting community and business-led organisations through education and training, RDA Riverina is helping develop and strengthen the capacity underpinning the growth and prosperity of the region.

From grantwriting workshops to facilitating other knowledge and skill building opportunities in emerging sectors (such as the energy sector), RDA Riverina seeks to better equip Riverina communities to participate collaboratively in the projects, processes and planning that address their local challenges.

Runs on the board	Total attendees
• 7 x Introduction to Grantwriting workshops	110
• 9 x Digital Skills for Community Groups	100
• 3 x Energy Workshops (Innovative Energy Technologies; Finance and Technology to Improve Energy Productivity; Bio Energy – The Answer to Energy Security in The Riverina)	91
• 2 x 7 Keys To Creating Successful Strategic Partnerships & Stakeholder Engagement with Robyn Henderson	54
• 2 x Riverina Business Accelerator Breakfast Clinics	43

12 x Partnerships – RDA Riverina collaborated with LGAs (Snowy Valleys, Temora, Cootamundra Gundagai, Leeton, Narrandera, Wagga City, Griffith City), Wagga Landcare, Griffith Landcare, TAFE NSW, Office of Environment and Heritage, and Industry Capability Network (ICN) to present the workshops, clinics and forums.

“ The strength of the Riverina region will be determined by the capacity of business, government and communities to work collaboratively to maximise resources available. ”

Riverina Business Accelerator Breakfast Clinics

“ The online assessor was simple yet effective and gave a great snapshot of where we are and where we want to be. ”

Grantwriting Workshops

“ I now have a greater understanding of the planning process when applying for a grant. ”

Energy Workshops

“ I wanted to congratulate and thank you all for a fantastic **BioEnergy** Forum in Griffith. The information presented was fantastic. I connected with nine new businesses / stakeholders and have followed up with meeting these people to see how we can help them. The information in relation to the Bio Energy Fund was also sent around to the 19 AusIndustry Regional Managers across Australia to promote this program to the right proponents. Some indicative feedback is that this will help three businesses in various regions. I think that is a great outcome. ”

Nicola James

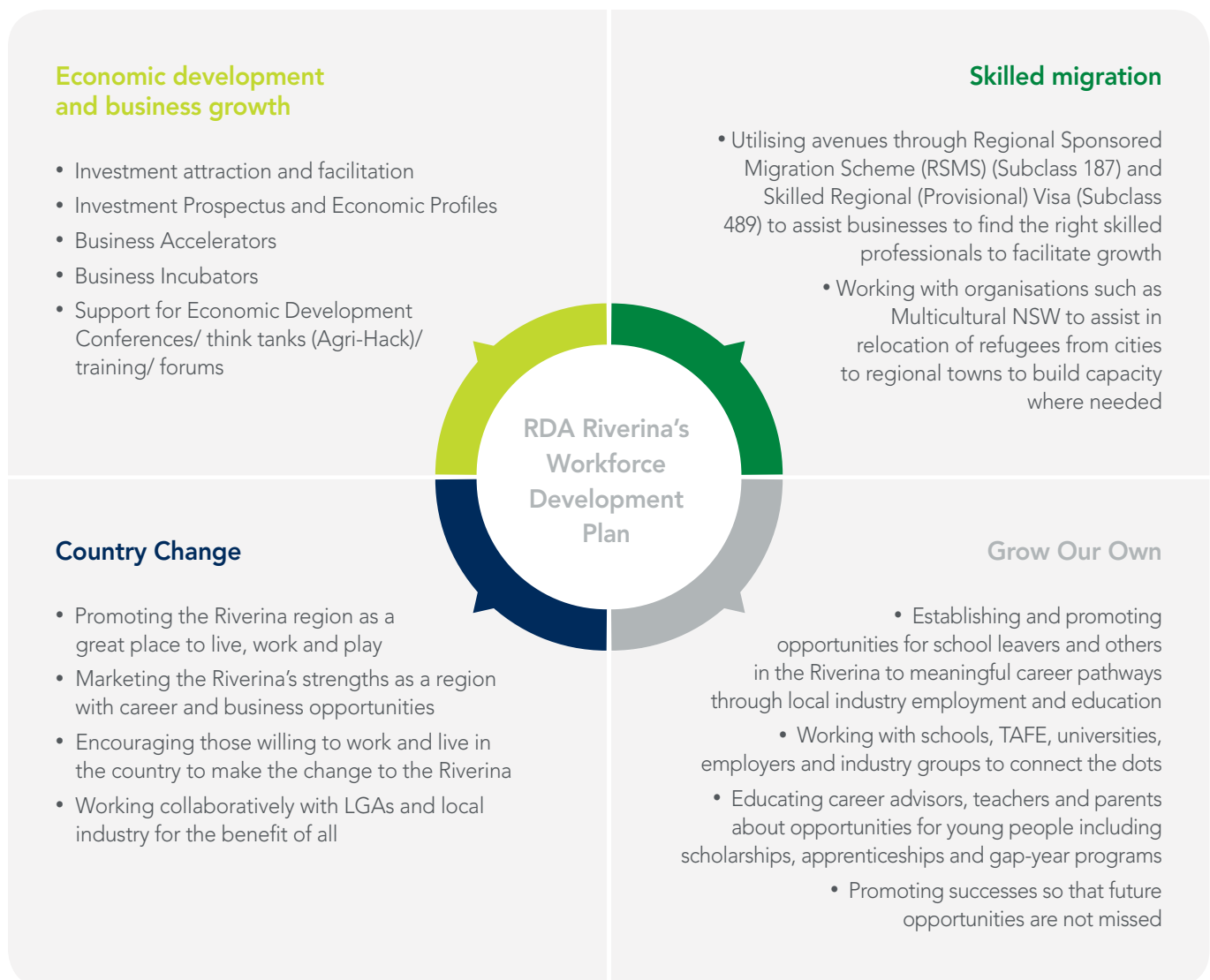
Regional Manager

South West NSW AusIndustry – Business Services

Workforce Development Plan

Our **Workforce Development Plan** is all about getting the people we need in the region and encouraging economic development.

The four quadrants of RDA Riverina's Workforce Development Plan are:



Case study: Grow Our Own

The **Grow Our Own** initiative was designed to build and retain skills for the benefit of communities and business in the Western Riverina.



In October 2016, RDA Riverina Chair Diana Gibbs co-presented the Grow Our Own Western Riverina model of regional skills retention at the Sustainable Economic Growth for Regional Australia (SEGRA) conference in Albany, WA. Diana presented with Deakin University Senior Manager of Stakeholder Partnerships, Jacqui Bramwell, and Rural and Regional Affairs Strategist, Lauren Andrews.

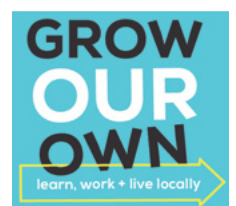
The presentation gained national interest when the team responded to the annual SEGRA Challenge *How might we develop the human capital of regional communities?* The model was well received, winning the People's Choice Award at the conference.

The objective of Grow Our Own is to transform the Western Riverina by:

- developing, mentoring and retaining local skills
- helping young people undertake tertiary studies while staying and working in the region, including local pathways to access
- education and training that leads to sustainable jobs
- attracting locally qualified workers into growth industries
- providing scholarship support to underrepresented groups
- supporting local economic growth through increased availability of human capital.

Led by Bendigo Bank and Deakin University, Western Riverina Grow Our Own is a partnership between RDA Riverina, TAFE NSW Riverina Institute, Griffith City, Leeton and Carrathool Shire Councils, and other businesses, organisations and networks.

The model was well received, winning the People's Choice Award at the conference.



Skilled migration service

As a **gazetted Regional Certifying Body (RCB)**, appointed by the Minister for Immigration, RDA Riverina invites skilled migrants to enjoy the lifestyle of regional Australia by applying for sponsorship to live and work in the Riverina region under two specific visas:



Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme (RSMS) (Subclass 187)

RDA Riverina provides an assessment for the RSMS visa which enables regional employers to sponsor overseas skilled workers and employ them to work in skilled vacant positions which cannot be filled using the local labour market. The program aims to attract young, skilled, English speaking migrants to areas of Australia where they are most needed.

In 2016-2017, RDA Riverina processed a total of 150 visa applications, which is almost double the amount processed in the previous year.

1

119 applications were for the employer nominated RSMS visas

- The top five nominated occupations were retail store manager, chef/cook, agriculture/horticulture farmer, management/accountant, restaurant and café managers.
- The top six countries of origin were India, China, UK, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Nepal

Skilled Regional (Provisional) Visa (Subclass 489)

RDA Riverina welcomes Skilled Migrants who live in Australia or overseas to apply for regional nomination to come to the Riverina. The long-term objective is to encourage these people to stay in the region - to live and work and enjoy the lifestyle.

In 2016-2017, RDA Riverina has assisted more than 250 employers to access skilled migrant workers.

2

31 applications were for the independent Skilled Regional Visa subclass 489.

- The top five occupations were agricultural consultant, cook/chef, Registered Nurse, agricultural engineer, metal machinist
- The top six countries of origin were India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, UK and the Philippines

Case study: Top skills migrate to the region

Vetafarm is a leading innovator in exotic animal health and welfare, based in Wagga Wagga.



Since starting the business in 1990, owner and Director Dr Tony Gestier (BVSc) has built Vetafarm into a dynamic, international success story employing 50 staff and exporting more than 450 individual products to markets all over the world.

The success of the specialised operation relies on a team of committed and highly qualified staff to research, produce and market its unique products. Up until six years ago, Tony was finding it difficult to recruit the specific skillsets he needed to advance his business.

"In what we do, technical knowledge is paramount. I need people with very specific skillsets and a tertiary education – pharmacists, chemists, food scientists – and it was proving impossible to find them in Wagga."

That all changed when Tony met Kamal Hossain in 2011.

Kamal is a qualified pharmacist with two Master degrees who arrived in Wagga Wagga with his wife Kamrun on a 475 Visa supported by the RDA Riverina. Tony describes meeting Kamal, Vetafarm's R&D Manager for the past six years, as serendipitous.

"After reading Kamal's CV, I met him and hired him on the spot.

"After this, Kamal entered the Skilled Migration Program through Faye Anderson at RDA Riverina and we have not looked back."

Kamal not only filled a niche position at Vetafarm, he also helped Tony fill no less than six other senior positions in the business through his connections.

Vetafarm now employs seven highly skilled overseas workers through the Skilled Migration Program.

"Hiring Kamal has helped the business to grow enormously. It has doubled since he started and while that's not all Kamal's doing, he is certainly a significant part of it.

"I am a big fan of being able to bring people into this country who have the skills that can't be found locally. We have gained a more skilled and experienced team and the individuals have gained satisfying work and improved lifestyle. Our guys are buying houses, sending their kids to school. Some are naturalised Australians now and most intend to stay in Wagga.

"I would absolutely recommend this Program to others."

Kamal can also see the mutual advantage of the Skilled Migration Program.

"The Program is working very well for employers and for the people migrating to Australia.

"At Vetafarm, we have brought expertise and skills that has made a significant difference to the business. Vetafarm has also gained some excellent employees who are trying their best to build the company.

"I am grateful to Faye and RDA Riverina for helping me with my visa applications and supporting me and the other Vetafarm employees through the Skilled Migration Program. I have been connected with RDA now for six years and Faye is excellent. She continues to help us get the technical experts that we need and is very friendly and helpful."

Griffith

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RDA support for Riverina projects

RDA Riverina is involved in the development and implementation of projects across the region. This involvement may be as initiator, facilitator, supporter or implementer depending on the nature of the project.

RDA Riverina values community-driven, innovative, inclusive and sustainable initiatives.

We develop close partnerships with many stakeholders from the three tiers of government, business, industry and communities when working on projects in the Riverina.

If you wish to enable this support for a regionally significant project, go to our website: www.rdariverina.org.au/projects, complete the Project Outline Form and submit to RDA Riverina Project Officer, Marg Couch po@rdariverina.org.au

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