

19

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Regional
Development
Australia
Riverina
Annual Report



RDA Riverina - facilitating regional growth and prosperity

Acknowledgement of Country

RDA Riverina acknowledges the Wiradjuri people, who are the traditional custodians of the lands across the Riverina region. We pay our respects to the Elders past and present, and recognise the culture, strength, resilience, and capacity of the Wiradjuri people. We remember and respect the Ancestors who cared for and nurtured this country.

Vision

The RDA Riverina region will be renowned for its excellence in all dimensions – economic, social and environmental – with an emphasis on innovation, life-long learning, healthy living and an optimistic, outward looking culture based on confidence, resilience and social inclusion.

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.

Regional Development Australia Riverina

acknowledges the great loss felt by many across our region. We thank those who've risked their own lives for the safety and wellbeing of others. We appreciate and thank our many partners, contributors, and valued stakeholders in carrying out important roles for the region and RDA Riverina.

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.

RDA Committees have an active and facilitative role in their communities with a clear focus on growing strong and confident regional economies that harness their competitive advantages, seize economic opportunities, and attract investment.

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 prosperity of the Riverina. This Annual Report showcases some of RDA Riverina's key areas of progress, activities, and achievements in 2019/2020.

RDA Riverina have a focus on workforce development as a key priority. We support other projects that enable economic development of the Riverina on their individual merits.

We also offer services in:

- Grant Writing/Proofing
- Statistics
- Economic Impact Analysis
- Report Writing
- Business Award Writing Assistance/Mentoring
- Investment Impact Analysis for Business Case
- Data Subscription

- Tourism Impact Analysis
- Regional/Local Economic Profile
- Secretariat Services

Professional Services Testimonial

"The assistance provided by RDA Riverina has been of immense value to our organisation, particularly post bushfires when large quantities of information have needed to be gathered. The letters of support given, and grant writing assistance have helped us with successful applications for projects that will lead to growth in the region. RDA Riverina are committed to providing high quality information and working with us to ensure outcomes are met"

- Snowy Valleys Council



Message from the CEO



Rachel Whiting CEO and Director of Regional Development

2019-2020 was a year unlike any other. Through spring and summer, we watched in horror as bushfires tore across the state, affecting our colleagues in other regions, never imagining that our beloved Snowy Valleys region would be under threat. The Dunns Road bushfire started in late December and was finally extinguished in February, having burnt an astonishing 333,940 hectares over 50 days.

182 homes were destroyed, along with countless other structures, farms, softwoods plantations and national park. Countless native animals and stock were killed and injured. The towns of Batlow, Tumbarumba and Adelong were all threatened by fire and sadly one person lost their life while helping a friend defend a property during catastrophic conditions in Batlow. A Rural Fire Service volunteer from Wagga Wagga also lost his life fighting the Green Valley bushfire at Jingellic in our sister RDA, RDA Murray, in late December.

RDA Riverina staff contributed to the relief effort, assisting volunteers in Tumut with packing of essential supplies to go out to stranded residents. Throughout the crisis we provided regular updates and support to the community, including reports to government, and in the aftermath, we have assisted with recovery projects and research into the impact of the disaster. A mere 12 days after the Dunns Road fire was out, the Australian Government declared that Covid-19 would become a global pandemic, extending a travel ban on visitors from China that would soon become a total travel ban both into and out of Australia. With the Riverina still very much in crisis following bushfires, this new crisis added to the burden facing our communities.

With plans for an event-led recovery from the bushfires now impossible to carry out, local governments, businesses and individuals innovated and inspired us all with their response to the pandemic restrictions. When regional travel reopened in June there was a feeling of optimism that the most difficult stage had passed, however the outbreak in Victoria in July led to the closure of the border. The closure has had numerous impacts on our region, with many industries relying on a cross-border workforce.

Throughout this second crisis, RDA Riverina has continued our work, which has become more valuable than ever. During this year, our website has recorded 54,000 unique visitors, with peaks during the bushfire crisis and the beginning of the Covid-19 crisis. Our staff have worked from home, conducted meetings via video conference and served as a conduit between the community and governments to ensure that the varied impacts were visible and addressed. Our skills study research has continued with the implementation of a survey of businesses in the Riverina. Skills shortages have been exacerbated by domestic and international border closures impacting migration internally and preventing skilled visa holders from travelling to the region.

RDA Riverina had been successful in applying for funding through the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal (FRRR) VISY Tumut Region Recovery fund for Landholder Resilience workshops along with Riverina Local Land Services. These were one of the projects delayed due to Covid-19, finally beginning in October.

Our partnership with the Bridge Hub on their global water challenge held in 2020 will help to uncover and fast track solutions for water, waste and biosecurity challenges across the agriculture and food supply chain. After years of crippling drought, the rain seems to have returned and crops are doing well – the challenge has been finding workers for the bumper harvest. RDA Riverina is instrumental in making this happen through our existing workforce development plan and new strategies developed in response to pandemic restrictions.

As 2020 ends, state borders are once again in flux due to a fresh outbreak of Covid-19. This has been no ordinary year, but through challenges we can find opportunities. The huge shift in workplace habits to working remotely, as well as confinement in cramped housing, has led to increased interest in regional living. The Riverina has a shortage of skilled workers, many of whom are now considering a 'Country Change'. Let us welcome them with open arms and hope for a brighter year in 2021.

About RDA Riverina

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



It is a facilitator of networks and partnerships, and a provider of information and economic and social support to the communities of the Riverina. We serve as a conduit between government and local communities.

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 who also holds the role of Director of Regional Development.

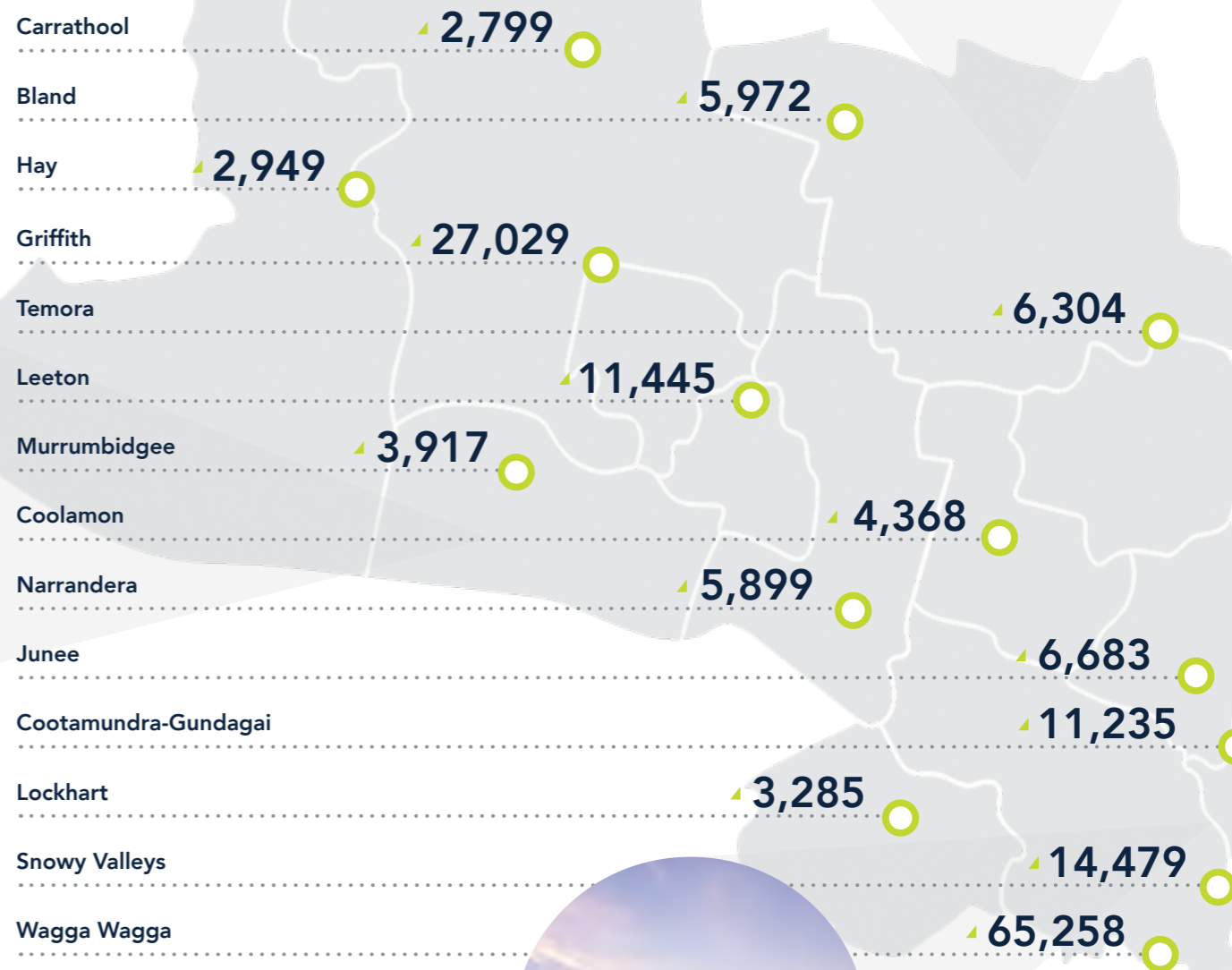


Shear Outback, Hay
Credit: Destination NSW



Gundagai
Image credit: Destination NSW

Estimated Resident Population



Total Population
171,598



De Bortoli Wines, Bilbul
Image credit: Destination NSW

Regional profile

The Riverina is an agricultural region of south-western New South Wales (NSW), which extends from the foothills of the Snowy Mountains, north west through the Murrumbidgee River catchment area to the flat dry inland plains of Hay and Carrathool.



The **RDA Riverina region** covers an area of 80,545km² and services an estimated population of 171,598 (ABS, ERP by LGA 2001 to 2019). It comprises the regional cities of Wagga Wagga and Griffith and the local government areas of Bland, Carrathool, Coolamon, Gundagai, Hay, Junee, Leeton, Lockhart, Murrumbidgee, Narrandera, Snowy Valleys and Temora.

RDA Riverina thanks local government area councils and their representatives for their commitment to economic development for the betterment of the region.

Employment is primarily driven by agribusiness and service industries. RDA Riverina estimates that **94,503** people were in the labour force in the Riverina region as of March 2020.



0.3%
Of population
Growth increase



970
Socioeconomic
Index Rate



\$26.646b
Region
Output



total value
\$186.81m
546 new homes
approved



total value
\$11.65m
48 other residential
buildings approved



total value
\$245.81m
Non-residential
building approvals



\$444.28m
Total Building
Approvals



17,215
Businesses



88,088
People Employed



75,265
Jobs (ABS, 2016)



total value
\$12.94b
Gross Regional
Product (increase
of 8.7%)



50.04%
Female
49.96%
Male



37.96
Median age

61.59%
aged 15-64,

20.12%
children under 15,

18.29%
aged 65 and over



\$1,517
Median Weekly
Household Income
remains unchanged



Regional profile

The labour force participation rate for the Riverina is estimated at 68.94% as of March 2020 with an unemployment rate of 3.82%. Post Covid-19, the unemployment rate is 5%. The Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing industry sector is the Riverina's largest employer with 9,991 jobs or 13.27% (REMPAN), followed by Healthcare and Social Assistance at 9,619 (12.78%) (REMPAN).

The Murrumbidgee River runs through the Riverina region and delivers water to major food producing areas of the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area (MIA) and Coleambally Irrigation Area (CIA). These irrigation areas provide over one-quarter of all the fruit and vegetable production in NSW and are also one of Australia's largest exporters of bulk wines. Further growth in Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing is being experienced in cotton, aquaculture, and nut industries.

The Riverina's burgeoning food culture currently presents numerous opportunities for businesses. The diversity of the produce grown in the area is unmatched and has enhanced the attractiveness of the region.

It is also home to a strong education base with Charles Sturt University, TAFE NSW, RAAF Base Forest Hill, and Kapooka Army Base. These facilities are vital in building the skills and confidence of all people (including Aboriginal people & migrants) in the region.

The Riverina has a wealth of people with a proactive and entrepreneurial approach to business and life. Opportunities for development exist in the Riverina region in agriculture, aged care, defence, manufacturing, wood products, transport and logistics and education.

RDA Riverina Committee 2019/2020

The RDA Riverina Committee comprises 10 members from across the region who represent local communities, businesses and local government and understand the challenges, opportunities, and priorities within these communities.



Richard Allsopp
Chair
Business Owner
Term: 1 Jan 2019 - Dec 2020



Sue Molyneux
Acting Deputy Chair
HR Manager at Casella
Family Brands
Term: 21 Nov 2018 - Jun 2021



Dean Hawkins
Treasurer
Fibre & Forestry Manager -
Visy Pulp & Paper
Term: 24 Nov 2016 - Jun 2021

Christine Howard
Secretary
Director of Three Rivers
University Department of Rural
Health, Charles Sturt University
Term: 21 Nov 2018 - Jun 2021

Kerry Penton
Committee Member
Regional General Manager,
South - TAFE NSW
Term: Jan 2012 - Dec 2020

Shaun Duffy
Committee Member
Managing Director, Great
Southern Electrical
Term: 21 Nov 2018 - Dec 2020

Iva Quarisa OAM
Committee Member
Chief Executive Officer,
Murrumbidgee Private Irrigators
Inc and Murrumbidgee
Groundwater Inc
Term: 21 Nov 2018 - Jun 2021

Bradley Kent
Committee Member
Farm Owner
Term: 21 Nov 2018 - Jun 2021

Gary Lavelle
Committee Member
General Manager, Temora
Shire Council
Term: 21 Nov 2018 - Jun 2021

Deirdre Lemerle
Committee Member
Professor of Agricultural
Innovation - Charles Sturt
University
Term: 1 Jun 2015 - Jun 2021

In 2019 meetings were held in Darlington Point on 15 August and Griffith on 14 of November. In 2020 meetings were held in Bland on 13 February, through a video conferencing platform on 21 May due to the Covid-19 Pandemic, and in Temora on 12 November.

In June 2020, RDA Riverina Committee member Iva Quarisa was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia for services to primary industry, particularly to irrigation management.



RDA Riverina Committee and Staff, August 2019



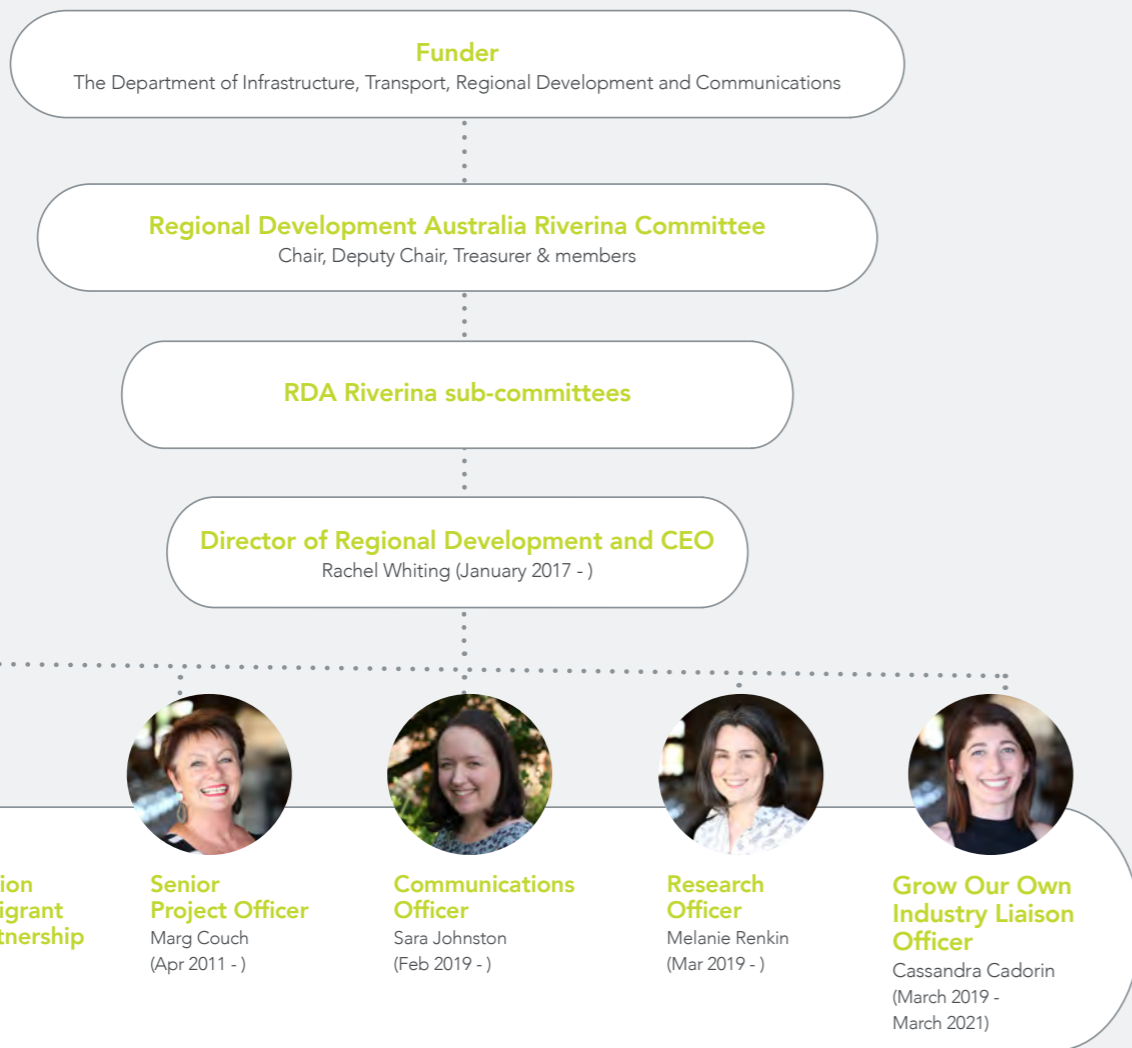
Iva Quarisa OAM



Evolution Mining Cowal
Gold Operation, Bland Shire

RDA Riverina

Staff structure



Stakeholders/collaborators:

- LGAs: Bland, Carrathool, Coolamon, Cootamundra-Gundagai, Griffith, Hay, Junee, Leeton, Lockhart, Murrumbidgee, Narrandera, Temora, Snowy Valleys & Wagga Wagga
- Regional Organisation of Councils: REROC/RIVJO and RAMJO
- Government Departments (NSW and Commonwealth) / Agencies / NGOs
- Regional Tourism: Visit Riverina, Destination Riverina Murray
- Chambers of Commerce, Committee4Wagga, Women in Business groups

- Charles Sturt and Deakin Universities
- AusIndustry
- TAFE
- AgriFutures
- AgriPark
- Smarter Regions CRC
- Multicultural NSW

Clients:

- Community members, Business and Industry Groups, Businesses, Regional Organisations, Community Groups
- RDA Riverina has offices located in Griffith and Wagga Wagga to ensure adequate servicing of the region.

RDA Riverina can assist you or your organisation in growth and development



RDA Riverina Office at the AgriPark, Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga campus



Our team includes professionals who can assist with grant writing/proofing, statistics, economic impact analysis, report writing, business award writing, investment impact analysis, tourism impact analysis, regional and local economic profiles, and secretariat services.

Melanie Renkin, our Research Officer, is a highly qualified researcher who has been leading our Skills Audit project. The project will identify current and future skills shortages to provide advice and develop strategies to fill those gaps. Melanie excels in data analysis and in this past year has worked with the Gears and Beers festival to conduct tourism impact analysis, provided reports on bushfire impact for various levels of government, conducted a specific project on the impact of bushfires in the Snowy Valleys region, consulted our migrant community regarding the impact of Covid-19 and assisted several councils and businesses with data and grant applications.

Marg Couch, our Project Officer, is an extremely experienced staff member who consults with regional stakeholders to identify regional issues and project opportunities and provides advice to stakeholders to assist with the identification of partners, programs and funding (government and philanthropic) to support projects. In addition to playing a support role to the CEO, she plans and coordinates information sessions and economic and community development capacity building workshops.

Our Communications Officer, Sara Johnston, is a country-changer with a passion for our region. Overseeing all of our communication channels, Sara has provided timely and relevant updates throughout the upheaval of the past 12 months. As part of our secretariat services, Sara is the contracted Executive Officer of Visit Riverina, the Riverina's tourism destination marketing organisation. Sara provides administrative/governance support as well as digital marketing services.

Cassandra Cadorin was our Grow Our Own and Industry Liaison Officer and was instrumental in the success of the STEM Industry School Partnerships (SISP) program in the Riverina. This program has now returned to the Department of Education. Cassandra also provided information to potential students, trainees, and business in the Western Riverina through our Grow Our Own program.

Faye Anderson is our Skilled Migration Officer and recently appointed as our Migrant Economic Partnership Coordinator. In this new role Faye will build pathways to economic participation for migrants and refugees already living in the Riverina region, perfectly complementing her existing activities of assessing and processing visa applications for nomination and sponsorship.

“The Riverina is an exciting entrepreneurial heartland where inspirational community, business and agribusiness work together to make dreams a reality, creating a vibrant and progressive region into the future.”

– Marg Couch, Project Officer at RDA Riverina



Marg Couch, Senior Project Officer

Workforce Development Plan

In 2018 RDA Riverina brought together several existing programs under the banner of Workforce Development for the Riverina. Rachel Whiting said, "Our Workforce Development Plan is all about getting the people we need in the region and encouraging economic development. It's exactly what we've been doing all along, but now it's coming together in a centralised plan."

This four-pronged plan is a response to the anticipated shortage of 10,000 workers in the next 3-5 years. The RDA Riverina workforce development plan acknowledges this shortage is due to industry growth, aging workers and increased service industry positions that align with increased population.

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



RDA Riverina also continue to closely monitor the impact that Snowy Hydro 2.0, Transgrid's SecureEnergy Joint Venture and Inland Rail will have on existing workforce demands and where relocation to the region will be necessary.

"RDA Riverina help employers find the right people for their business and potential employees to find careers that suit them as we build our local economy."

– Rachel Whiting, CEO and Director of Regional Development, RDA Riverina.

Economic Growth 2019 - 20

RDA Riverina's focus is on facilitating the growth and prosperity of the region. Our team of professionals have assisted local governments, business, and community groups in 2019-2020.



Cherry Blossoms, Temora
Credit: Destination NSW



Projects receiving assistance from RDA Riverina in 2019-2020

Letters of Support

In 2019-2020 RDA Riverina provided letters of support to 32 projects with a total value over \$300 million.

Snowy Valleys Fire Recovery Report

In January 2020 RDA Riverina held discussions with bushfire affected stakeholders in the Snowy Valleys. We put together an on the ground report for local, state, and federal government. This report included details about physical losses and bushfire damage as well as anticipated economic impacts and needs going forward. In March of 2020 we held follow-up discussions and provided an update to this report.

Later in the year RDA Riverina worked with Snowy Valleys Council to conduct a survey of businesses and organisations within the LGA. We collected information on the economic impact of the bushfires and used the information provided to put together an economic impact assessment of the 2019-2020 bushfires in the region.

COVID-19 Migrants Survey

RDA Riverina conducted a survey of migrants living in the Riverina in April of 2020 to determine how they had been affected by COVID-19. This report was provided to state and federal MPs to assist migrants living in our region.

Skills Audit

Between March and July 2020, we conducted the first phase of our Riverina Skills Audit. This project is being conducted in partnership with CSU and aims to identify skills shortages in the Riverina. The first phase of the audit was a survey around skills shortages, targeting businesses and organisations in the Riverina. This research project is ongoing, and the community consultation phase will be conducted later in 2020.

Regional Activators Alliance

RDA Riverina became a member of the Regional Activators Alliance, an initiative of the Regional Australia Institute. The alliance officially launched in November 2020, with the aim of promoting the opportunities to live, work and invest in Regional Australia.





Railway Bridge and Prince Alfred Bridge Viaduct, Gundagai
Credit: Destination NSW

Funds to Build a Better Region

Building Better Regions Funding

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

Building Better Regions rounds one, two, three and four provided organisations with grants of \$20,000 to \$10 million to support projects involving the construction of

new infrastructure or upgrading or extension of existing infrastructure that provide economic and social benefits to regional and remote areas. Round 4 specifically focussed on drought support. Round one results were announced at the end of 2017, Round 2 in 2018, Round 3 in 2019 and round 4 in 2020. There were two streams: Infrastructure and Community.

The following Riverina projects were successful in rounds 3 and 4:

| Fund | Applicant | Project | Grant | Total Project | Supported by RDA Riverina |
|-----------------------|---|--|-------------|---------------|---------------------------|
| Infrastructure | | | | | |
| 2019 | Griffith City Council | The Griffith Regional Sports Precinct (Stage 1) | \$4.5m | \$24.8m | ✓ |
| | Temora Shire Council | Temora Airport runway, apron and taxiways upgrade | \$5,353,151 | \$5,353,151 | ✓ |
| 2020 | Wagga Wagga City Council | Botanic Gardens Precinct Renewal Project | \$4,288,879 | \$8,595,565 | ✓ |
| | Griffith City Council | Griffith Pioneer Housing Project | \$6,000,000 | \$11,998,800 | ✓ |
| Community | | | | | |
| 2019 | Griffith & District Citrus Growers Incorporated | Strategic plan to support a Riverina citrus centre of excellence | \$19,990 | \$19,990 | |
| | Matriark Theatre Incorporated | The Secret World: Cootamundra, a night festival hosted by young people | \$15,000 | \$20,000 | ✓ |
| | Griffith Shed For Men Incorporated | Griffith Shed for Men Strategic Plan for the Future | \$17,500 | \$19,500 | |
| | Bland Shire Council | Bland Shire Council Business Workshop Program | \$18,170 | \$18,170 | ✓ |
| | Carrathool Shire Council | Local Supply Chain Multiplier Opportunities – A Strategic Approach | \$60k | \$60k | |

| Fund | Applicant | Project | Grant | Total Project | Supported by RDA Riverina |
|------|-----------------------------|--|-----------|---------------|---------------------------|
| 2020 | Narrandera Shire Council | Narrungdera Earth Fest Creative Economy Project | \$136,675 | \$273,350 | |
| | Griffith City Council | Sunshine Super Girl World Premiere and Yarruwala Wiradjuri Cultural Festival | \$25k | \$60k | ✓ |
| | Destination Riverina Murray | Destination Inspiration and Activation Program | \$44,765 | \$89,530 | ✓ |

Written Submissions and Letters

Submission - Public Exhibition – Wagga Wagga City Council Local Strategic Planning Statement 2020

RDA Riverina provided a submission in response to the Wagga Wagga City Council Local Strategic Planning Statement highlighting the need for greater diversity of housing mix; loss of liveability due to land use change; the need for a structure plan and landscape strategy for areas undergoing potential zoning changes; inconsistency in subdivision requirements; congestion on the Gobbagombalin bridge in relation to the 15 min wagga plan and expansion of housing in North Wagga, and the potential for water recycling in new subdivisions.

RDA Riverina Submission to the Select Committee on Regional Australia

RDA Riverina provided a submission to the Select Committee into Regional Australia. The submission covered: national and international best practice strategies to encourage people to settle and stay in regional areas; strategies to develop regional skilled migration; strategies to develop regional humanitarian migration; key local, state and federal initiatives for successful regional settlement outcomes; volunteers, employers and community organisations and their role in facilitating regional settlement; and related infrastructure matters.

Regions at the Ready 2019

RDA Riverina provided a submission to the Regions at the Ready panel covering: Priorities for Growth; Regional Leadership; Regional Planning; Local Government and Current Investment.

Smarter Regions CRC – Riverina Regional Showcase proposal

RDA Riverina has partnered with the Smarter Regions CRC in a bid for funds from the Federal Government's CRC Program that involves more than 20 companies, 11 universities, a Venture Capital fund, and 11 "Showcase Regions" from across Australia. The bid seeks to secure \$50M from the CRC Program.

The CRC aims to empower regional Australia to gain maximum benefit from Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning technologies. The success of the CRC will be built on participation with regions (from opportunity identification, training and promotion through to delivery of research projects and commercial opportunities). The CRC will promote local solutions, educate and partner with and support regional communities through its Showcase Regions.

RDA Riverina is proud to partner with the Smarter Regions CRC as a "Riverina Showcase Region". In our Showcase Region, we bring together 5 LGAs from the Riverina region along with RDA Murray, RivJO, RAMJO, South West Slopes Forest Industry Hub, Bridge Hub, Blue River Group, CSU AgriPark, Farm Link, Riverina Local Land Services, and Committee 4 Wagga.

The regional industries who will benefit from this CRC in our region include the delivery of local government services, agri-tech related manufacturing, broad-acre farming, forestry and timber processing, mining, fishing, education and wine.

Collaboration



Rebound, Regain and Improve Workshops

RDA Riverina applied for the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal (FRRR) VISY Tumut Region Recovery grant for Landholder Resilience workshops along with Riverina Local Land Services to deliver workshops on farms for bushfire-affected landholders. The workshop provided access to information to support their recovery journey, including rural financial counselling, mental health advice, environmental and pasture restoration. The funding was allocated from the VISY Tumut Region Recovery Fund. Three workshops were held in October 2020 and were attended by 44 landholders. The workshops will be followed up with a collaboration with the Department of Primary Industries for a twilight series of landholder workshops.



Regional Profiles

RDA Riverina produced regional profiles for Temora Shire Council and Snowy Valleys Council with the latest data from REMPLAN and the Australian Bureau of Statistics as part of our yearly REMPLAN data subscription package. This package also includes grant writing assistance, economic and tourism impact analysis and more at our reduced rate of \$50/hour.

Belisi Wellbeing & Equestrian Centre

RDA Riverina reviewed a successful \$300,000 Category 3 ClubGRANT application for the construction of fit-for-purpose accessible facilities.

RDA VISY Rebound, Regain and Improve Workshops
Credit: Riverina Local Land Services



RDA Riverina serves as a conduit between government, business, and local communities across 14 local government areas in the Riverina.

Our role is to facilitate networks and partnerships, in addition to providing information, economic and social support to these communities. In this role we support business development and growth across the Riverina region and are

Stakeholder Support

RDA Riverina provided support to the following Riverina stakeholders in 2019-2020:

- Griffith City Council – Streets as Shared Spaces project
- Griffith Regional Theatre – Yarrowula Wiradjuri Cultural Festival
- REEF Group Ethanol Plant, Murrumbidgee Shire
- Tumut Art Society – REGENART
- Leeton Shire Council – Investing in Rural Communities Futures

Five Riverina local government areas were supported with data and statistics through our data subscription service and individual projects. These included one off data sets and detailed economic impact assessment reports to support grant applications and business cases. Seven other businesses and organisations were assisted with sourcing/collecting appropriate data, data analysis, economic and tourism impact analysis for projects and grant applications. We supported our region with data and information during the 2019-2020 bushfire season and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

CEO and Director of Regional Development Rachel Whiting, RDA National Forum 2019, Canberra



Development Officer Forum, Whitton Malt House, Whitton

committed to providing business operations with helpful resources, advice, and expertise. RDA Riverina supports start-up businesses, provides regional networking opportunities, and assists established businesses looking to expand.

Development Officer Forum

RDA Riverina held two development officer forums in May 2020 via video conference and in November 2020 at Whitton Malthouse. The forums provided an opportunity to share insights, new trends and initiatives which respond to the challenges in developing a vibrant and liveable region.

RDA National Forum

In November 2019 RDA Riverina's Chair, CEO and one of our committee members attended the RDA Nation Forum: *Influence and Impact*, held in Canberra. Our CEO Rachel presented on our workforce development plan under the heading 'more jobs than people' and on her research into communications in Coolamon Shire.



Presentations

In August 2019 Cassandra Cadorin, Industry Liaison Officer, presented on our Grow Our Own and STEM Industry School Partnerships (SISP) program at the NSW Future Skills Conference at Charles Sturt University in Wagga Wagga.

In late 2019 RDA Riverina CEO and Director of Regional Development Rachel Whiting presented at the Regional Australia Institute's Regions Rising conference in Sydney, and the RDA National Forum in Canberra.

In May and June of 2020 Rachel presented at the Welcoming Cities virtual symposium. The Welcoming Cities Symposium brings together international, national and local practitioners, policymakers, researchers, business innovators and civic leaders to share and discuss the challenges, benefits and opportunities of migration, settlement, cultural diversity and inclusion.

In August 2020 Rachel Whiting and Megan Dixon, Director of Regional Development, RDA Orana joined SEGRA for a conversation on the challenges of attracting and retaining a skilled workforce. The conversation 'More Jobs than People' was recorded and is available to view on the SEGRA Conference Australia YouTube channel.

Murray Darling Basin Inquiry

RDA Riverina were invited to attend a Murray Darling Basin Authority Public Consultation. RDA Riverina also attended a consultation with Mick Keelty regarding the Murray Darling Basin Inquiry.

Housing Strategy

RDA Riverina attended a community forum seeking feedback for the Griffith Housing Strategy.

RDA Riverina responded to Wagga Wagga City Council's Draft LEP, commenting on development and housing strategies.

RDA Riverina are working with HIA and Committee4Wagga to determine the land release needed for Wagga Wagga's continual growth.

Wagga Wagga Equine Centre/ Exhibition Centre

RDA Riverina Chair and CEO facilitated discussions on development of an Equine Centre/Exhibition Centre in Wagga Wagga. These ongoing meetings have included negotiations over a range of historical issues, resulting in interest from Wagga Wagga City Council in adding it as a potential project.

EnergyConnect Project

RDA Riverina has regularly liaised with TransGrid and SecureEnergy Joint Venture over the 2019/20 year regarding the EnergyConnect project to investigate the proposed construction and operation of a new electrical interconnector and network support options between NSW and SA.

The interconnector is aimed at reducing the cost of providing secure and reliable electricity transmission between NSW and SA in the near term, while facilitating the longer-term transition of the energy sector across the National Electricity Market (NEM) to low emission energy sources.

NSW Business Chamber Murray Riverina Regional Advisory Council

RDA Riverina attended meetings in a workforce advocacy capacity in July and October 2019, and January, March and April 2020.

NAWO (National Association of Women in Operations)

NAWO's mission is to inspire women to take charge of their career via networks, role models and development opportunities; and to connect businesses via membership that offers ideas and actions to achieve greater inclusion and gender balance in operations. RDA Riverina is a member of the Riverina committee, there are three events held per year. Two were held in this financial year due to a cancellation in 2020. RDA Riverina hosted the NAWO Quick Bite Event 'Mirror, mirror – who is the best leader of all?' in partnership with Deakin University and Murrumbidgee Irrigation, in October 2019.

BridgeHub 2020 Water Challenge

The purpose of the Bridge Hub 2020 Water Challenge was to uncover the best and brightest research, the most innovative ideas and the best startups that positively impact water sustainability within our agrisystem.

More than 170 researchers and entrepreneurs entered the challenge which was supported by several RDAs including RDA Riverina, as well as a community of research, industry and government organisations from Australia, New Zealand and Israel.



Projects

National Ag Day

National Ag Day is a National Farmers Federation initiative. Each year RDA Riverina collaborates with Agrifutures and The Graham Centre for Agricultural Innovation at Charles Sturt University to celebrate. With well over 130 registered events, 2019 National AgDay was one to remember as people all over the country came together under the tagline #WeAreAusFarmers.

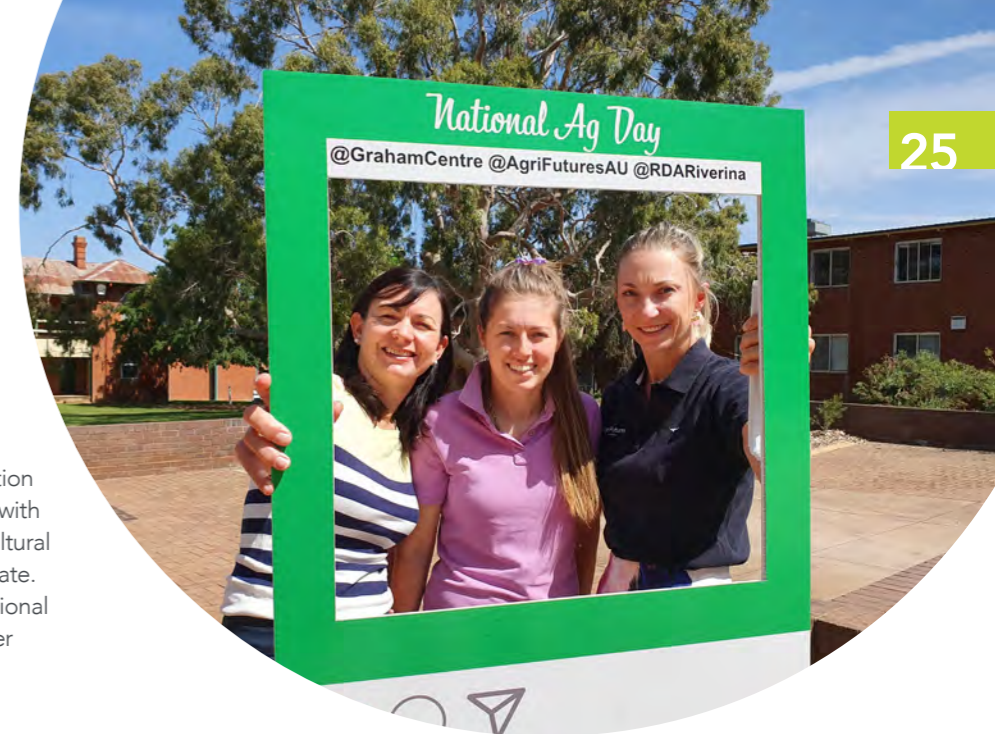
In 2020, to celebrate National AgDay staff and volunteers from all three institutions came together in small groups and maintaining Covid-safe physical distancing to take photos with the National Ag Day frame under the tagline #hatsofftoaussiefarmers to acknowledge the people who produce our food and fibre.

Sconversation

RDA Riverina, Charles Sturt University and Country Women's Association Uranquinty Evening Branch collaborated to host a 'Sconversation' with NSW/ACT Rural Woman of the Year Jo Palmer. Jo Palmer, founder of Pointer Remote Roles, discussed her role in helping people with skills in remote locations be more connected. The Uranquinty CWA Evening branch discussed the raising of awareness about Women's mental health in regional NSW. Attendees were treated to morning tea including scones baked by the CWA.

Sydney Home Expo

RDA Riverina partnered with the Independent Builders Association to present the benefits of regional living in a Q&A session 'Push for the Bush'.



L-R: Rachel Whiting (CEO RDA Riverina), Kayla Kopp (Graham Centre PhD student, CSU), Dallas Pearce (Agrifutures Australia) National Ag Day 2019



Country
Associ
New Sou

Diversity
Charity
Change

L - R: Samantha Beresford Director
External Engagement CSU, Jo Palmer,
Rachel Whiting CWA Sconversation

THE RIVERINA

Go with the Flow

Visit Riverina

The Executive Officer and Digital Marketing contract for Visit Riverina (formerly Thrive Riverina) was taken on by RDA Riverina in **September 2019** as part of our secretariat services offering. This partnership has been rewarding for both organisations, enabling closer coordination of tourism and economic development activities across the region.

In **November of 2019**, the Riverina Outdoor Art Trail was launched. The Art Trail covers silo art, statues and murals around the Riverina and encourages visitors and locals alike to get out and explore our region.

Early 2020 brought with it the devastation of the Dunns Road bushfire, heavily affecting the Snowy Valleys local government area. Visit Riverina and RDA Riverina collaborated to share vital updates regarding the fire through social media, websites, and e-mail.

In **March of 2020**, the Covid-19 Pandemic was declared. In the wake of widespread restrictions on both international and domestic travel, RDA Riverina and Visit Riverina collaborated to promote the amazing variety of Riverina produce, local businesses and cafés and restaurants.

In **June of 2020**, regional travel restrictions were lifted. Visit Riverina collaborated with Destination Riverina Murray to implement a strong digital marketing strategy to encourage visitors to the region and aid in the economic recovery of the Riverina.

Visit Riverina Marketing Campaign



89.45%

Visit Riverina Member LGAs cover most of the Riverina's area



17,695

Total audience



344,968

Facebook page unique reach (2020)



111,077

Instagram unique reach (2020)



5,751

Facebook fans and followers (as at Dec 2020)



2,449

Instagram followers (as at Dec 2020)



1,849

Newsletter Subscribers (as at Dec 2020)



7,646

Website users (2020)

Taste Riverina

Food Directory Project

The Taste Riverina brand is owned by Visit Riverina having formerly been developed by RDA Riverina. The RDA Riverina Food and Beverage Directory is a database containing details of 240 growers, producers and distributors working in the Riverina. The directory is maintained by RDA Riverina and can be downloaded from the RDA Riverina website. This year we began a project with the Freelancing Hub at Deakin University to develop the food directory into an online, searchable directory which will be situated on the Visit Riverina website, www.theriverina.com.au. The Directory is expected to be launched in 2021.

Borambola Wines, Borambola
Credit: Destination NSW



Grapes on the vine at Calabria
Family Wines, Griffith
Credit: Destination NSW



Wollundry Lagoon, Wagga Wagga
Credit: Destination NSW

Country Change



In 2019/2020 Country Change experienced increased engagement, enquiries, and media coverage, marketing the Riverina as a great place to live, work and play. The COVID-19 pandemic (declared in March 2020) forced many Australians to rethink their city-based lifestyles when they were ordered to stay at home to curb the spread of the virus. A veritable wave of city-dwellers began to explore their options – looking for a home with space for an office and a backyard for families.

Local Government Areas supporting the Country Change campaign in 2020:

- | | |
|---|----------------------------|
| • Bland Shire Council | • Leeton Shire Council |
| • Coolamon Shire Council | • Lockhart Shire Council |
| • Cootamundra-Gundagai Regional Council | • Narrandera Shire Council |
| • Greater Hume Council | • Snowy Valleys Council |
| • Griffith City Council | • Temora Shire Council |
| • Leeton Shire Council | • Wagga Wagga City Council |

Country Change Marketing Campaign

| | | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|--|---|
| | 15,702 Total audience | | 2,000 + Newsletter Subscribers | | 187,498 Facebook page unique reach (2020) |
| | 4,323 Facebook fans and followers (as at Dec 2020) | | 1,100 Instagram followers (as at Dec 2020) | | 10,138 Instagram unique reach (2020) |
| | 8,279 Website users (2020) | | | | |



Rachel Whiting, CEO and Director of Regional Development, with Deputy Prime Minister the Honourable Michael McCormack MP. Launch of Country Change Magazine 2020

Country Change Magazine

Launched in September 2020,

the Country Change 2020 Magazine showcases 10 Riverina Council areas including Coolamon, Cootamundra-Gundagai, Greater Hume, Griffith, Leeton, Lockhart, Narrandera, Snowy Valleys, Temora, and Wagga Wagga.



The magazine was launched by Member for Riverina and Deputy Prime Minister the Hon Michael McCormack MP in Wagga Wagga.

Featuring personal stories from people who have relocated to the Riverina, information on the Indigenous history of the region, along with housing, employment and education articles, the magazine provides a guide to the ultimate Country Change.



Regional Resettlement of Refugees

Riverina Regional Resettlement Taskforce

Multicultural NSW is implementing a three-year Regional Resettlement program in the Riverina with a focus on creating linkages and pathways between the migrant/refugee workforce, employers/industry and relevant training and support providers.

The broader objectives of the Regional Resettlement Pilot Program are to attract and retain migrants and refugees from Western Sydney to the Riverina. Considering the COVID-19 pandemic, it was determined that the role of Migrant Economic Participation Coordinator should initially focus on identifying and engaging migrants and refugees already living in the Riverina. Work undertaken during the initial phase will also benefit the broader objectives of the Regional Resettlement Pilot Program when it is safe and suitable to revisit the broader secondary settlement focus.



Food I Am, Wagga Wagga
Credit: Destination NSW

Our Skilled Migration Officer, Faye Anderson, has been employed as Migrant Economic Participation Coordinator and will:

- Identify and engage migrant and refugee jobseekers already living in the Riverina region
- Engage with employers and industry in the Riverina region to identify their capacity to employ migrant and refugee jobseekers already in the Riverina region
- Implement strategies that aim to connect migrant and refugee jobseekers with employment and training opportunities

A second Migrant Economic Participation Coordinator will be employed by Leeton Shire Council to provide project support where relevant to Leeton Shire Council as project partners and collaborators.

This project is proudly supported by Multicultural NSW.



Lyaz Khan and Family

Case study:

Faye Anderson

Faye Anderson is RDA Riverina's longest serving staff member and in 2020 was a finalist for the NSW Premier's Multicultural Community Medal.



The Premier's Multicultural Community Medals and the Multicultural Honour Roll highlight the outstanding contribution of migrants, and those who work in the multicultural field. As Skilled Migration Officer, Faye Anderson has made a valuable contribution to this field for more than 15 years.

In her role, Faye is called upon to respond to the needs of Riverina employers and migrants alike in processing visa applications for nomination. But as RDA Riverina CEO Rachel Whiting points out, Faye's contributions go much further.

"Faye is patient and kind. She goes above and beyond in responding to the needs of new skilled migrants and their families. She meets and greets new arrivals at the airport or train station, is invited to cultural celebrations and has been known to drive new arrivals to job interviews on her day off.

"Faye is the perfect example of a long-standing member of the Riverina community welcoming people to our region. She sets a great example for unity in the community and shows us what we can achieve if people are willing to act as a friend and neighbour to all."

Rachel said that Faye invests a great deal of time in building relationships with employers and migrants to help them make connections that benefit both parties and significantly contributes to the economic, social, and cultural wellbeing of our regional communities.

"Faye has contributed to the goodwill in our communities towards new migrants and has eased the transition for many families. This has been a slow and quiet change but, through her good works, Faye sets the standard for others in the community.

"Faye is a much-loved member of the community and highly respected for her extensive knowledge and experience and we are very proud of her and the work she has done in helping new migrants as part of and in addition to her role as Skilled Migration Officer for RDA Riverina."



Suraj Salam, Fatimah Salam and RDA Riverina Skilled Migration Officer Faye Anderson

Skilled Migration Service

As a gazetted Regional Certifying Body (RCB), appointed by the Minister for Immigration, RDA Riverina invited skilled migrants to enjoy the lifestyle of regional Australia by applying for sponsorship to live and work in the Riverina region under these specific visas in 2019-2020:

Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme
(Subclass 187) - 24 Applications

Skilled Regional (Provisional)
Visa (Subclass 489) - 73 Applications

Top 5 Occupations: Registered Nurse, Engineering Technologist, Chef, Accountant, Mechanical Engineer

Skilled Employer Sponsored Regional (Provisional)
Visa Subclass 494 (Introduced 16 November 2019) - 3 Applications

Top 3 Occupations:
Subclass 187 and 494: Café/Restaurant Manager, Chef/Cook, Industrial Engineer

Only 3 of these applications were processed after January 2020 due to the Covid-19 Pandemic. RDA Riverina are pleased to be able to offer applications for nomination for the Skilled Work Regional (Provisional) visa (Subclass 491) on behalf of the NSW Government from January 2021.



Caring for her ill mother inspired Chipo Mumbure to become a nurse.

"My mum was diabetic, and I was her primary carer."

"Unfortunately, she passed away in 2007 just before I moved to Australia but my passion for nursing definitely came from looking after my mother. Knowing that the elderly and vulnerable don't only need medications. They need extra love and reassurance that everything will be fine."

Originally from Harare, Zimbabwe, Chipo moved to Australia and studied nursing in Perth before completing her graduate nursing program in Echuca.

"After I finished my Bachelor of Nursing, I thought I should give back to the Australian community. While I was studying, it was difficult for me to pay fees, but I managed to be sponsored by my university. So, I felt I wanted to give back to the Australian community for giving me that opportunity."

"I moved to Echuca for my graduate program and then had to move to Melbourne to study English so I could pass my language competency. It was while in Melbourne that I realised my visa was about to expire. That's when I started to look into regional areas."

"RDA Riverina was so helpful. I told them my situation, where I was coming from and where I was heading. Faye Anderson from RDA Riverina asked me to scan my documents and send them through so they could assess my case. In a timely manner they came back to me to say, 'congratulations, you are eligible for 489', which is a regional visa for four years. I was so, so grateful for their help and assistance."

Chipo moved to Leeton in 2016 when her visa was granted. She says that she, her husband and their young son have been made to feel welcome.

"I have experienced both city life and country life in Australia, and regional people have more love. I have found the people here in Leeton very friendly. Here when you meet people, they smile, they know each other. It's a small community and it's full of life – there's a lot going on."



Chipo Mumbure

"I was made to feel very welcomed. I feel like I'm part of the Leeton community. They show us a lot of love."

Chipo says she's noticed a big difference in Australian health care services compared to Zimbabwe.

"In Leeton we have Leeton District Hospital, three nursing homes and have many medical centres. In Zimbabwe it was different. We only had one local clinic and a major hospital which was a long distance from where I lived."

"We really have easy access to health facilities compared to in Harare. There, access to health services is difficult and very expensive."

Chipo encourages other migrants to consider living and working in regional areas.

"I have experienced both city life and regional life, and regional is the best, especially to raise a family."

"I would refer people looking to move here to Faye. Faye gave us an easy process to follow. She was very professional and told us what to submit, in what timeframes. And it's the little things. Even before I came to the Riverina, she told me there was an Indian restaurant here which I have enjoyed so much. I love food! I was so glad to find that restaurant that Faye recommended to me. She gave us the heads up on that and how to look for jobs. It was very helpful, and I extend my gratitude to her and the whole team."

For Nirupa Widyaratne and her family, moving to the Riverina has meant a more comfortable life full of opportunities.

A civil engineer, Nirupa was sponsored by RDA Riverina to make the move from Sri Lanka in 2011.



Nirupa Widyaratne and husband Sudesh

"I've been living in Australia for eight years now and working for six years full-time."

"Initially we went to a private migration consultant and he said if we would like to go a regional area, there are opportunities in regional NSW. Our consultant put us in touch with Faye Anderson at RDA Riverina. She gave me a sponsorship letter, and we were able to come here because of that. It was great. Without it we wouldn't be here."

Nirupa and her family lived in Wagga for two years before her family moved to Melbourne for her husband's education while Nirupa moved to Parkes to take a job as a Project Engineer with Parkes Shire Council. The family then lived in Dubbo until 2017 when they moved back to Wagga where Nirupa now works for Transport for NSW.

"The first two years were hard. A lot of things affected me and my husband but immediately after we got permanent residency, I straight away got a very good job and now I'm a Project Manager at Transport for NSW. After that initial struggle, we are now well settled and really, really happy."

Nirupa said regional living has provided a calm and quiet environment for her family.

"Even though it is regional, we have many of the same facilities as Sydney and Melbourne. It's really comfortable and there's no traffic or congestion with room available around houses. It is better for our children. That's why we prefer to be in a regional area. Even though we could move to a big city, I never even think about it now. I love this freedom."

To people thinking about moving to the Riverina, Nirupa's advice is clear.

"I think this is the best decision people can make. There is a little bit of risk initially. Not everything will come to you immediately. But if you have patience and sheer determination to go forward, you will find a job and settle in. About 50 families came to Wagga Wagga when I came here and initially everyone struggled but now everyone is settled in different areas. We are doing very well, me and my family."

"My advice to other migrants is to come and settle in regional areas and definitely reach out to Faye at RDA Riverina. Her sponsorship letter, information about Wagga and contacts helped us very much."

Education and training



Grow Our Own and STEM Industry School Partnerships (SISP)

Grow Our Own is an industry driven innovative regional workforce initiative, established as a pilot program by Deakin University and Bendigo Bank in 2016, to support our existing and future workforce. Now coordinated and developed by RDA Riverina, Grow Our Own was successful in a bid to pilot a STEM Industry School Partnerships (SISP) Program in 2019 with a focus on Agritech.

In 2019-2020 the STEM Program went from strength to strength, with activity within schools increasing.

Activities

- The Women in STEM event and competition attracted over 1000 students from the Western Riverina
- The first off campus CSU Girls in Cyber Security Advancing 3-day course was facilitated in Griffith for 16 female high school students
- A Solar Car challenge was facilitated at Murrumbidgee Regional High School and local business Solar Mad
- Over 1800 new students were engaged in STEM in the Western Riverina program
- 27 representatives from the local workforce engaged with young people about local careers and pathways
- The Grow Our Own and STEM Program awards were launched and received 56 entries

STEM Industry School Partnerships Awards 2019



STEM Industry School Partnerships event in Griffith, 2019

Platform Connects Workers to Jobs

RDA Riverina invested in a new employment platform in 2018 to provide free access for potential job seekers and employers in the Riverina. The platform – **JobsRiverina** (www.jobsriverina.com.au) – is a one-stop-portal allowing job seekers to easily find work opportunities and apply online. It also gives employers a cost-free way to expand their recruitment activities to an audience specifically interested in working in the region.

This year saw a 71.88% increase in employers and 47.41% increase in job seekers using the platform.



Deputy Prime Minister the Honorable Michael McCormack MP and Industry Liaison Officer RDA Riverina Cassandra Cadorin



STEM Industry School Partnerships Awards 2019



STEM Industry School Partnerships
Solar Mad Race, 2019



RDA Sponsorship

RDA Riverina is a strong advocate for youth leadership.

In 2019 RDA Riverina called for Expressions of Interest to sponsor two delegates aged 18-35 to attend the fourth Regional Events Conference in Dubbo. The quality 3-day program blended networking opportunities and constructive discussions.

Successful candidates were:



Leeton

Manuela Gatt

Catering and Events Manager at The Hungry Fox Co.

"I just want to thank you for choosing me to go to the Regional Event Conference.

The experience was sensational and the information I took back invaluable. I learnt so much over those few days, some information in which I was straight on the phone to Matt the same night for us to organise a way to implement some of the techniques and strategies into our business.

The biggest thing I took from the conference was how new I am at the events industry and there is so much more involved in organising a successful event than just pretty lights and chic linen."

– Maneula Gatt



Wagga Wagga

Casey Wilson

Director/Marketing & Events Manager at House on the Hill Marketing

"I am beyond grateful to have been given this experience and learnt so much across the three days. Learning how others run their events, what has worked and what hasn't. The importance of storytelling. My most valuable takeaway is that we have to keep changing with the times, while change might be a scary thought it is absolutely vital to keep events alive.

Thank you to RDA Riverina for this experience."

– Casey Wilson

Marketing and Communications

Email



17
E-Newsletters



22 Other Direct E-mail
Communications



1,337
Subscribers

Social Media



4 Facebook Pages

RDA Riverina, JobsRiverina,
Country Change and Grow
Our Own - Riverina



2 Instagram Pages

RDA Riverina and
Country Change



1 LinkedIn Page

RDA Riverina

Websites



4 Websites

RDA Riverina, JobsRiverina,
Country Change and
Grow Our Own

Audience



59,604
Total audience



40,906
Facebook page
unique reach (2020)



1,271
Instagram unique
reach (2020)



1,311
Facebook fans and
followers (as at Dec 2020)



613
LinkedIn followers
(as at Dec 2020)



380
Instagram followers
(as at Dec 2020)



1,337
Newsletter Subscribers
(as at Dec 2020)



55,963
Unique Website
visitors (2020)

RDA Riverina is committed to workforce development in the Riverina

Jobs Riverina is a new employment platform to provide free access for potential job seekers and employers in the Riverina.

To find out more, visit
www.jobsriverrina.com.au



Wagga Wagga

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Griffith NSW 2680

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 www.rdariverina.org.au/projects and complete the Project Outline Form.

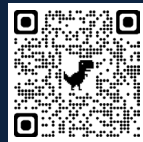
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