

**Submission
No 34**

**INQUIRY INTO ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
IN CENTRAL WESTERN NEW SOUTH WALES**

Organisation: Regional Development Australia Far West NSW

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Subject: Submission, Inquiry into economic and social development in central western NSW

Dear Chairman

The RDA Far West NSW appreciates the opportunity to respond to your request for a submission and we are grateful for the granting of the short time extension, given my travel commitments late in August.

Please find attached our thoughts on the issues identified in the terms of reference. If you have any further queries on these, please do not hesitate to contact me. We also welcome any opportunity to appear before any hearing you may conduct. We encourage you to visit our region for this purpose and we will be happy to facilitate introductions to our key civic and business leaders.

Yours faithfully

Linda Nadge
Chief Executive Officer
Regional Development Australia Far West NSW



**Standing Committee on State Development
Submission
Regional Development Far West NSW**

Inquiry into economic and social development in central western NSW

The submission addresses the matters raised in the terms of reference.

(a) Provision of health, education and cultural facilities

A critical issue concerning provision of health, education and cultural facilities is the fact that the declining population base impacts upon the economic justification for continued or consistent investment in these services. Since there are fewer people to spread the cost of services over, it means that the cost of service provision per person is generally high. This is a problem for many facets of social and economic issues in this region. Over the years the region's facilities and infrastructure in general have been down-sized to suit smaller populations but the flip side to this is that issues like the increasingly ageing population profile are adversely impacted.

Below is an example from the health sector that demonstrates how the aged care issue has developed into an ongoing challenge for the region over the decades.

AGED CARE: INSUFFICIENT INFRASTRUCTURE

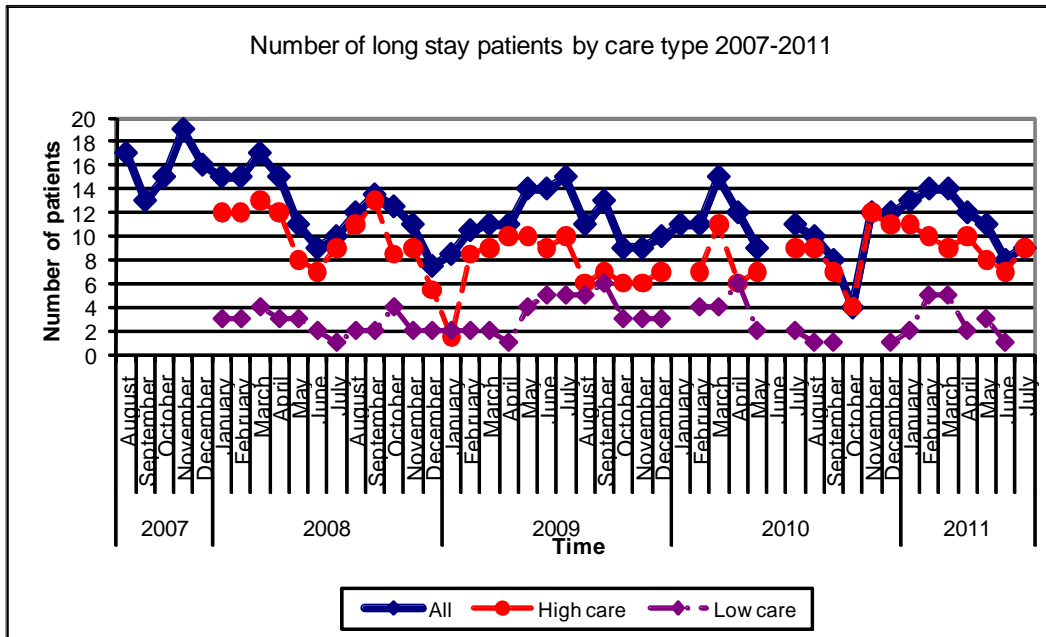
The Far West Local Health District's Dr Steve Flecknoe-Brown has the following to say about the occupation of acute hospital beds in Broken Hill, by people waiting for an aged care facility bed. Are we at a crisis point?

I'm not sure that the word "crisis" is technically the correct term for a situation which has caused huge pressure for more than the 12 years I have been living and working in Broken Hill.

I can only remember less than 5 days in this whole time in which the local hospital did not have any people in the wards who were there for no other reason than that they were waiting for a bed or room in a purpose-built aged care facility.

Further information from Dr Flecknoe-Brown is attached (Appendix A) in the brief article entitled "Long-term frail aged residents in rural acute hospital beds". This was prepared for the Federal Member for Farrer, Sussan Ley, who may have additional data on the topic in this region.

He was also able to supply some data, collated from records at the Broken Hill Hospital, over the last four years, see below.



“Low care” refers to residents who cannot look after themselves in their own homes but who do not need intensive nursing interventions. “High care” residents are those who are, for example, totally bed-fast and need more nursing resources in a typical week than others.

There are conclusions drawn by local health staff about the situation. For example, Dr Flecknoe-Brown says:

Because the residential aged care funding formula pays less per day to the aged care provider to reflect this lower cost of looking after low care residents, they usually wait longer for a place in a specialised hostel than the “high care” residents. This may seem paradoxical, until you realise that they will usually live considerably longer than the high care people, particularly when given the excellent care that (aged care provider named) provides. In addition, (aged care provider named) feel a higher moral obligation to those frail aged in need of residential care waiting in their own homes than those already receiving care in the hospital. Thus, although at any one time there are usually about as many frail aged in all categories awaiting residential aged care facility placement in their homes as in hospital, the wait times for those in hospital are considerably longer than those who struggle on at home. Hence the city's long-standing need for a more flexible funding system for aged care than the one imposed on us, based upon high-density coastal city models.

GENERAL HEALTH: REMOTE RESIDENTS, ACCOMMODATION, FACILITIES

Detailed information is also attached from the Royal Flying Doctor Service South Eastern Section. Their focus is on providing health care services to people in central western and far western NSW. They seek to provide remote residents with services closely matching those provided to urban residents.

Please see the separate files attached (a cover letter to the Committee Chairman and six additional files supplying background information on activities and objectives in service enhancements).

This information summarises projects and fundraising efforts as they strive to improve services in our region. Without the dedicated efforts the RFDS there would be increased tragic outcomes for many families in Far West NSW. We all know someone who has been flown to a capital city for urgent or specialist medical treatment. The extending of services in dentistry and medical training throughout our remote areas is a welcome bridging of the gap in service delivery of the broader health services sector which is based largely in Broken Hill. The availability of housing and accommodation is an ongoing problem in general in our region, when attempting to attract medical professionals to our region. In many instances, there is insufficient good quality housing for residents, let alone for professionals the region is attempting to attract and retain.

The neglect of infrastructure provision and planned maintenance scheduling must stop. Importantly, maintenance and construction of new infrastructure like quality accommodation for medical professionals, is critical for the future worthwhile endeavours of organisations like RFDS.

EDUCATION

As the Standing Committee is probably aware, there is no bricks and mortar university in Far West NSW. There are strong links in existence between the University of Sydney and the Broken Hill University Department of Rural Health (BHUDRH). There are traces of past links between the RTO Robinson College and Charles Sturt University.

Education services in our region are a critical issue for the future. At present the RDA Far West NSW is highly dependent upon the rollout of the NBN as a matter of urgency in order to improve access to education and other services. Two specific projects under development by TAFE and BHUDRH will help to broaden the online delivery of a greater variety of courses and also seek to engage new students in a future working career in the region. The mining industry also could benefit from increased formal relationships with the University of NSW as virtual reality training in its mining school could be realistically delivered to industry in this region via NBN enabling links.

We have desperately tried to engage the NBN Co and Federal Government in recognising the critical need and urgency for the NBN in our region. We look forward to providing this information to the Standing Committee. We have submissions and correspondence, but never receive feedback. Perhaps the State Government may be able to take the time to understand the plight of the region in the current non-NBN condition and help us ramp up our region on the third release priority list?

WHAT IS A BENEFICIAL OUTCOME FOR FAR WEST NSW TO ADDRESS THESE AND OTHER HEALTH, EDUCATION AND CULTURAL MATTERS?

Relevant industry leaders in the region should be consulted on matters where they have expertise, preferably before decision-making processes. With their experience and wisdom, they can provide advice on key issues concerning the region.

Local knowledge is a significant resource all levels of government could access more. Future proposed solutions to challenges in this region should be considered, critiqued and accepted locally. Open, transparent and honest communication processes should support decisions that have an impact in the Far West NSW region.

Throughout this submission there are ideas that will help sustain this region's growth and economic output.

We urge the Standing Committee to visit our region and meet with our key leaders to become more informed and aware of the situation here, and to hear some of the solutions we propose, first hand.

(b) Reasons for population decline or growth in different areas

The Far West is the most sparsely populated region in NSW, accounting for 18.4% of the land mass, but only 0.4% of the population. Almost nine in every 10 people (86%) live in Broken Hill, with the remainder living mostly in the Central Darling Shire towns of Wilcannia, Menindee, White Cliffs, Tilpa, and Ivanhoe, or Tibooburra in the surrounding Unincorporated Area.

Dramatic population declines over the past 50 years have been directly linked to a significantly restructured mining industry. We would like to think this decline has stabilised and that there is potential for growth.

There is sufficient infrastructure and housing in Broken Hill to attract several thousand more residents.

Among the major population centres, Broken Hill and Menindee have an older demographic than NSW, while Wilcannia's younger demographic is linked to a high Indigenous population with associated shortened life expectancies.

Individual and family incomes are well below the national average – with Wilcannia's almost half the national average – and stated unemployment is about double the national average in Wilcannia and Broken Hill, three times the national average in Menindee.

JOBS

The most compelling reason for people to reside in the region is work. If the jobs don't exist, people move. The history of Broken Hill's population decline (and throughout the region) has been linked to jobs. This was proved in 2008-09 when Broken Hill and Mt Isa both experienced the greatest population declines based upon redundancies in mining as a result of the global financial crisis.

Child care is an issue closely related to employment. The letter to the editor on the right, Barrier Daily Truth (BDT), Broken Hill, was published on 18 August 2011. Following are two front page articles published in the BDT on 8 July and 9 July, 2011. The closure of a care centre as depicted is probably beyond the control of authorities, but the impact on the community is significant and some assistance to get through such a crisis is within control.

It is possible that government leaders and local leaders could come up with solutions to stop people like Stephanie from quitting work because of inadequate care services. Eventually, in cases like these, people opt to leave a region because of inadequate services. Lack of jobs and a lack of child care for people in jobs are two critical issues in our region that have contributed to population decline.

Child care changes make things worse

(An open letter to Ms Sussan Ley, MP)

I am writing you this letter under the assumption you do not have children of your own because if you did you would have done something about the child care crisis Broken Hill is facing.

I moved back to Broken Hill 15 months ago after having my two children in South Australia where I had my eldest in Kindergarten (SA's version of NSW's pre-school). This cost me about \$50 a school term and he could go up to three days a week.

Moving to Broken Hill I had to get my two children into some sort of day care/preschool. I was shocked to find pre-school would cost me near \$120 a day. I got my children into Family Day Care eventually after taking them to work with me a few times. They were juggled between two carers until I changed my work hours. The people at the office and the carers worked hard to try and cater for us, however government restrictions held them back.

More changes to government regulations have now forced my carer to resign. After October I will have to leave the workforce because of this. I only have one four-year-old needing care five days a week and I am finding it impossible to find anything for him.

I love the way Family Day Care works and operates. The homey, caring atmosphere made the transition from farm to town much easier for my children. Every carer I've met has been welcoming and I feel my children are treated as part of the family.

I just want to be able to go to work knowing my children are well looked after, fed and if they fall over someone is there to wipe their tears. Let them play with other kids or on their own, who cares if they all share a towel? It's what being part of a family is all about.

The Government's push to get mothers back into the workforce is a load of complete bull! Childcare should be easy and affordable for those who use it and provide it.

The paper pushers in Canberra need to be replaced with people who have a little common-sense, and the kids need to be allowed to be kids.

Stephanie Hendriks
Broken Hill

Centre closes

"No warning, no idea" - staff

By Kurtis Eichler

The struggling Lilliput Early Learning Centre was handed over to the liquidators on Wednesday following months of uncertainty about its future.

Children were still under care when the centre's remaining three employees were told at 3.20pm that the centre had been handed over to Brisbane-based liquidating firm, Insolvency and Turnaround Solutions.

The closure comes just weeks after owner

Kerry Moreton had to dismiss one employee and stop providing care to infants under two years of age when the State Government reduced the child to carer ratio to 1:4 earlier this year.

The BDT understands the centre was forced to close its doors for financial reasons.

Sandra Miller, who worked full-time for the centre for 12 years, was phoned by Ms Moreton on Wednesday and told to inform other staff not to come to work the next day.

"It's a big shock," she said.

"This morning, all we did was cry.

"We've been calling parents today and they've been coming and collecting (personal belongings.)

"Parents and grandparents have been in and they're in tears."

Kristy Hurley, who was employed for five years at the Bagot Street day care centre, said they didn't see it coming.

"They've been saying for a few months now the centre is fine," she said.

"They were struggling but we were just hoping numbers would pick up."



Ms Hurley and colleague Kandy Dart worried about the many children enrolled in the centre who are now without day care. "They were all settled," Ms Hurley said.

"They (other centres) pretty much are full," Ms Dart added.

Deepti Kumar's daughter was enrolled at the centre for more than two years, and she said she now has to find another long-day care centre.

She spent yesterday on the phone to the city's other day care centers trying to find a place for her four-year-old daughter.

"For me it was late notice.

"What about working parents? How do they manage?"

Currently on holidays from her work at TAFE, Ms Kumar worried

about finding the same rapport at a different day care centre.

Ms Miller said it isn't the first time the centre has been forced to shut its doors.

"It was community based and they had to close it then for financial reasons."

The centre shut its doors in April 2003, and re-opened later that year after a Queensland company bought the business.

Former owner and operator, Kerry Moreton refused to comment yesterday afternoon, saying she was too

"emotional."

Childcare shortage

By Kurtis Eichler

Shadow Minister for Child Care and Early Childhood Learning, Sussan Ley said the closure of the Lilliput Early Learning Centre leaves the city with a shortage of long-day care options.

The centre was handed over to liquidators, meaning the city now has only two long day care services still running, with 15 children needing alternative long-day care.

Ms Ley, the Member for Farrer, said she began following the troubles of Lilliput last month and was upset when she heard the news on Thursday.

"I knew there was trouble last month when they were going to close their babies room," said Ms Ley.

"(It's upsetting) because it's a business that's gone under.

"I feel for the staff and the parents who can not find alternative child care places."

Ms Ley said the new 700-page National Quality

Framework implemented by the government last July has so far reduced the carer to child ratio from 1:5 to 1:4, and set new staff qualification requirements.

Lilliput Early Learning Centre had to close their infant section and make a staff member redundant to keep their business afloat.

Owner Kerry Moreton told the BDT in June that the 1:4 was putting considerable strain on the centre.

"At five to one, it pays for the staff member and part of the overheads."

"At four to one, it doesn't pay for itself."

Ms Ley is now calling on the Government to wind back the quality framework.

"It's highly complicated," she said.

"I am hearing these stories across the country from directors that fear they may have to close their doors."

She said directors have told of their fear in having to ask parents to pay an increased fee because of the changes.

"I'm starting to hear from

mums who would like to go back to work but can't."

"Often the people who move to Broken Hill don't have their family members, they don't have family to fall back on."

Ms Ley said she was writing to Minister for Child Care and Early Childhood Learning, Kate Ellis.

"The Government needs to know what's happening."

Ms Ellis said the Government was committed to ensuring families have access to quality affordable care.

"I appreciate that this is a

difficult time for families, however, these decisions are a matter for individual service providers.

"We provide funding for an unlimited number of long day care places to enable services to set up or expand.

"Overall we are investing \$20 billion in early childhood education and care - well more than double that provided by the previous government."

Meanwhile, the centre was listed on a real estate agent's website yesterday for \$350,000.

There are decades of experience in the region that highlight the link between job losses and the subsequent impact on population loss. The centres of Broken Hill, Tibooburra, Ivanhoe and Menindee all have stories from the past about the losses of key jobs in road or rail maintenance and the subsequent population decline. **Please refer to the attached file submitted to the Federal Government re sustainable population, on 15 March 2011.** The Pastoralists Association of the West Darling highlights drought and its most recent impact on job losses and population decline. Please see the Pastorals' submission in Appendix B.

The region's leaders look forward to discussions with government about positive ways to address population decline in Far West NSW. We do have suggestions and are looking forward to further involvement in discussions and solutions. We draw your attention to Table 6 on p. 20 of our submission noted above (sustainable population) which highlights components of a sustainable society. Health, education, jobs, income, law and order, food, water, and so on are all part of the key elements.

There are other aspects to living in this world beyond the traditional GDP measures and we encourage the NSW Government to continue to embrace any policies which contribute to an increase of quality of life in NSW, beyond Sydney, its hinterland, and beyond the east coast in general.

The idea of creating financial incentive to motivate people to move, like the Government's relocation assistance package, is a great step forward, but we think more can be done.

We would like to draw your attention to a few of our ideas, which would necessitate the cooperation of the State and Federal Governments to achieve, as we have so far seen these ideas fall on deaf ears in the Federal arena. It should not be this difficult to get action from any Government, some feedback at the very least, when a region like ours which is struggling economically, socially and environmentally, and fraught with challenges (unemployment, high rate of school drop-outs, loss of population and deterioration or loss of facilities for aged and child care, many others) puts up great ideas.

We maintain that self determination and local ideas generation to solve our troubles, is a must. Here are some of the ideas we have generated locally for the purpose of reenergising our communities, sparking up economic activities, creating jobs, improving quality of life, and increasing our population:

Broken Hill Community Foundation – must attain deductible gift recipient (DGR) status

Zone Rebate Pilot Scheme – combine this weary and unindexed ATO scheme to true work, when combined with the NSW Government's relocation package and payroll tax relief

Far West NSW Regional Council's Alliance – stop the waste and inefficiency, think smarter about use of tangible resources in region, cooperate and collaborate on key goals in region

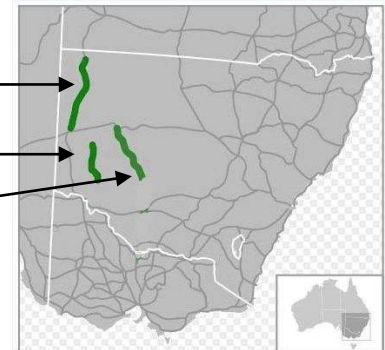
Regional Leadership Advisory Network (RLAN) – get technology to the next level in our region and reengage remote residents, increase computer literacy and encourage enabling technology to become part of smart solutions for the future (socially and in business, health, education)

Combined with our economic diversification efforts (ecotourism, creative industries) and steadfast support for the existing mining and agricultural sectors, these are just a few of our great ideas that will serve to keep the Far West NSW region functioning during tough times, as well as attract skills and new employees to the region. We have much information on these and look forward to talking about these with the Standing Committee so that something can actually eventuate as a result.

(c) Adequacy of transport and road infrastructure

For decades, opinions about the adequacy of the road infrastructure in Far West NSW have prompted many discussions and raised numerous points of difference amongst authorities, organisations, residents and politicians. Some older members of the community who have been part of this lengthy discussion over the decades, most recently expressed that they feel tired of the debate and have also expressed their concerns that past opportunities for road improvements, during better economic times, may have been squandered. Some are so tired that they have almost exhausted their interest in setting priorities within the region – they just want the roads sealed, in a systematic approach, in a planned and transparent way. From all of the RDA Far West’s interactions to date, the top three road sealing projects in our region, arguably, are

- Broken Hill to Tibooburra (Silver City Highway)
- Menindee to Pooncarie Road, and
- Wilcannia to Ivanhoe (Cobb Hwy),



(although it is acknowledged there are many other sections of roads in the far west NSW region that require sealing).

It is not difficult to understand that residents in the specific towns like Tibooburra, Menindee, Wilcannia and Ivanhoe, place greatest priority on the roads in their district. This creates the problematic discussion within our region about which roads are the top priorities. The residents served by the Broken Hill to Tibooburra road mostly agree that the sealing of this road is vital for all pastoral, tourism and freight activities. The residents served by the Menindee to Pooncarie road are likewise adamant that the sealing of this road will be the most important infrastructure achievement in the region.

Local residents may blame the Central Darling Shire Council for poor road maintenance activities and the residents in the Unincorporated Area, who seek the full sealing of the Broken Hill to Tibooburra road, for example, may tend to direct their frustrations at the local MPs, State and Federal. No political party and no level of government is spared from the road debate in this region. Road sealing evokes emotions amongst residents in ways like the Menindee Lakes and water discussions do.

Within this context, there is possibly increased support for concepts to be pursued like those raised in the ABC Radio, Broken Hill, interview with Western NSW Minister Kevin Humphries on Friday 19 August 2011, <http://blogs.abc.net.au/files/outback-outlook-reloaded---19.08.11.mp3>.

Minister Humphries noted generally many shires in the NSW western area were not financially viable and struggled to provide the necessary services. He specifically mentioned the financial constraints faced by the Central Darling Shire Council and its ability to maintain its vast road network in a 55,000 square kilometre area, with a sparsely populated ratepayer base.

However, before jumping to proposed solutions, it is pertinent to consider specific issues faced by the residents in the region, and how the unsealed or poorly maintained roads impact upon them. The shaded data below is from the Menindee Branch of the NSW Farmers’ Association chairman, Terry Smith.

The Menindee Branch of the NSW Farmers' Association recently wrote to relevant shires in Far West NSW raising concerns about the condition of local unsealed roads, post flood and significant rain events. Here are some extracts:

Whilst the membership can appreciate the difficulties faced by the shires over the recent few months with extreme rain events there now seems to be a lack of will and enthusiasm from the shires to repair roads to even a basic standard. The roads I refer to are now dried of flood and rain water and could be repaired and in some cases have not been graded for over 18 months. This has impacted on producers' ability to access markets during the recent upward trend in beef and lamb prices, now as prices ease this equates to a massive impact on the bottom line of some of these businesses sometimes losses into the tens of thousands of dollars. There have also been cases of people using smaller transport options than they would have otherwise preferred; single trailer semi units as opposed to B-double or road trains due to concerns of trucks tipping over or bogging; this adds substantial additional cost. The purchase of new stock or bulk consumables has been curtailed for long periods during this time as well with suppliers refusing to travel bad roads. ... this lack of reasonable road serviceability is also impacting on tourism in the area as the average tourist doesn't wish to put their expensive motor home or caravan through the rigours of such a trip.

The road networks maintained by shires are vast and cross over several shires. Whilst sympathetic to the farmers' concerns, the shires are under-resourced to deal with extraordinary events. During the best of times they still struggle to raise sufficient revenue to cover all the necessary road maintenance jobs and other critical shire functions. It has been suggested that road use due to tourism and freight could support the economic cost/benefit analysis for sealing some of these key roads. However, regional tourism data is aggregated in our region into too large an area of NSW to differentiate specific road use by tourists. Likewise, data on the use of roads for freight purposes is arguably inadequate and may require more extensive data than currently available.

The following information from the Menindee Branch of the NSW Farmers' Association helps to highlight how poor road conditions increase costs to producers:

The issue of road conditions was raised at the New South Wales Farmers Menindee branch AGM on 12/07/2011 - members were concerned about the poor state of local roads with some members down-sizing transport options from B-double trucks to single trailer semi trucks due to dangerous road conditions. This is a much more expensive option to move stock, for instance a B-double may charge \$6.50 per kilometre and carry 600 sheep over say 500 kilometres (equals \$5.42 per head of stock at the destination). A single trailer semi may charge \$5.00 per kilometre and carry 400 sheep over the same distance (equals \$6.25 per head at the same destination). The difference is 83 cents per head, and the further the end destination, the greater the cost difference. This can be a substantial cost if the farmer has a lot of stock to move.

Another member had to resort to sandbagging gutters and drains along the road and pumping water off to allow access at his own expense with no assistance from the shire. This action left the landowner liable to prosecution if there was an accident in this area during the time the work was undertaken. This was the action taken after about 10 weeks without road access. From a financial perspective this has cost the producer a lot of money. During this time there was a record peak in the lamb market with national high prices being set on a weekly basis with premiums of \$2.00 plus per kilo dressed weight. A 22kg lamb carcass, times \$2.00 per kilogram premium, equals

\$44.00 per lamb, times 600 lambs on a B-double equal \$26,400 (this producer could not access these lucrative markets and is therefore out of pocket by a lot of money, all because there was a small stretch of water over the road). There is also the issue of lambs becoming too old for the market. This also attracts a reduction in price around the \$2.00 per kilogram mark but can vary quite a lot possibly up to \$4.00 per kilogram.

Other issues surrounding rough roads that were discussed at the meeting include wear and tear on vehicles both personal and business; and transport operators either refusing to take some loads or routes, and down time while stock crates are welded and repaired.

Damage to an area's reputation as a tourist destination - word travels fast in this industry and most people don't enjoy bouncing along a road in their car or caravan then restacking the interior when they arrive at their destination. Heavy vehicle driver fatigue laws allow a driver a specific number of hours to work or drive in any 24 hour period. If that time is used up crawling along a rough road at 15 or 20 km per hour which they may not have known was rough, the drivers are then forced to either pull up and rest and miss a curfew or deadline for a sale with the stock they are carrying, which is not really an option, or to break the law and complete misinformation in their work diaries. This misinformation is easily proved to be incorrect by police accessing the data stored in satellite tracking devices and computers that are fitted to all modern trucks. The driver is then fined for breaching the fatigue laws. Animal welfare is an issue during transport. The rougher the road, the more stock slip over or go down causing losses or damage to stock that are then rejected by saleyards and abattoirs.

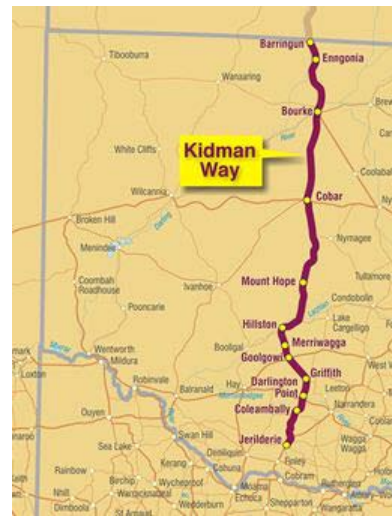
The members at the AGM understood that this was an exceptional year for rain but felt that there had not been enough work done prior to the rain event by the shire works departments' and that the secondary and mail roads are not very well maintained at all regardless of the season.

Further information was provided to the RDA Far West NSW by former president of the Pastoralist's Association of West Darling (PAWD), Peter Beven. His focus has for many years been the sealing of the Broken Hill to Tibooburra road. The ability to access northern markets is essential for the pastoralists, however, the gas fields and tourism are additional compelling reasons. Mr Beven produced a photocopy of a letter, dated 16 March 1998, from PAWD to the then federal Minister for Transport and Regional Development, Mark Vaile MP.

The issues have not changed despite the passage of 13 years. These issues are summarised in the box below.

Critical factors to consider to justify completion of the sealing of the Broken Hill to Tibooburra road:

- sealed road links can be better integrated between NSW and Qld (further discussion is necessary with shires over the border to ascertain their projects and timeframe for delivery but there are significant projects underway that could help seal a road route from Broken Hill through to Mt Isa and on to Darwin (shires include Bulloo, Quilpie, Barcoo, Diamantina, Boulia, Winton);
- significant gas fields and mineral exploration in this part of the country can be better accessed with sealed roads;
- stock movements from NSW into Qld can occur;
- tourism will flourish;
- freight, eg stock and horticulture produce from Menindee, can travel north more efficiently;
- a new 'north-south highway' can help open the economic growth of the region stuck in the middle (far west NSW region) which otherwise is forced to access the 'north-south highway' via the Stuart Highway (see *top map*, ie Darwin, Alice Springs, Port Augusta) or the Kidman Way (*middle map*, Hillston through to Bourke), both of which are hundreds of kilometres west or east and access is inefficient, expensive; the new north-south route could be Darwin, Mt Isa, Coopers Creek, Broken Hill, Mildura, Melbourne – see *the bottom map* where critical road works can be better integrated between NSW and Qld to promote economic growth in inland parts of Australia in the pastoral, minerals, gas, tourism and freight sectors.



Map of the Lake Eyre Basin showing Cooper Creek

Views from Tandou Ltd about the Menindee to Pooncarie Road can be seen in their submission, attached in Appendix C. Tandou is a key regional employer and the RDA Far West NSW would encourage the Standing Committee to make contact with this company during hearings.

The suggestion by Minister Humphries to do something different in order to facilitate road improvements should be explored enthusiastically. In addition, RDA Far West NSW supports the efficiencies that can be gained for residents in the far west NSW region through alliances and other strategic organisational change and manoeuvrings, see next shaded box, extracts from RDA Far West NSW's Council Alliance project proposal.

Far West NSW Alliance

Description

- The unincorporated area of NSW, Central Darling Shire Council and Broken Hill City Council (and possibly other councils in western NSW) attempt to achieve similar outcomes in the region and these activities can be more sensibly and efficiently aligned.
- The vision for the economic diversification and growth in Far West NSW requires dedicated efforts, alignment of priorities.
- Cost savings in some areas due to sharing or aligning of activities could be significant.
- Elected representation may or may not be affected, but the current declining population in the area is causing an imbalance in current representation. Some parts of the region have more say than others.
- No local authority in western NSW is profitable. Forming an alliance will help to achieve economies of scale.

Outcomes

- Effective and efficient use of resources
- Fairer representation among the population
- Absolute unity in regional priorities, goals
- The best possible chance to achieve economic diversification, sustainable growth, and indeed all the regional goals for the Far West NSW region

The road infrastructure in Far West NSW crosses various shire and State boundaries. There must be merit in some Federal Government and Cross Border alliance discussions to marry up the various projects so that the bigger picture is clear and visible. The alliance mentioned here need not only involve NSW shires, but should involve those over the border in Qld and SA as a priority.

(d) Ways to encourage development of local enterprises and the potential of the region overall

The RDA Far West NSW with the funding support through the Department of Trade and Investment (NSW) are in the final stages of completing a review of a report on this topic, as conducted by consulting firm SKM. The work was conducted in light of the proposed water-constrained future within the context of broad economic issues under consideration within the Murray Darling Basin. The report is only weeks away from completion and the Standing Committee may wish to read it. However, it must be emphasised that mining has been the key employer for over a century in the region. Recently, more people are employed in the health, education and services sector. There is opportunity for mining expansion.

At present, there is opportunity for expansion in the lead, silver and zinc mining operations of both Perilya and CBH Resources. Mining of mineral sands south of Broken Hill is continuing and new mines are being developed as planned by Bemax. A significant iron ore project about 60km south of Broken Hill offers great potential and the support of State and Federal Governments to address skills and training initiatives in our region to fill the projected several thousand job vacancies over the next several years, will be imperative.

Skills development in mining is one area where Governments, RDA Far West NSW, education providers and mining companies can cooperate to ensure a steady stream of qualified people is on hand to fill the vacancies as they arise. There are too many unemployed people in our region, particularly amongst Indigenous people. With the support and cooperation of all relevant stakeholders, a coordinated approach could be developed to focus on addressing this single, important issue in our region.

It will be important to avoid what has been an outcome in the past – many trained people on hand, but no jobs.

In the RDA Far West NSW Business Plan for this year, we propose to form a skills working group to assist with solutions to jobs and skills issues relevant to this area. It is intended that key employer representatives from mining and industry spearhead input into the ways to best match jobs and skills in the region. Another critical issue to be addressed is how to backfill jobs taken from small business when employees chase higher remuneration in mining. Already, several mining and mining support companies have indicated a willingness to participate in collaborative efforts to find solutions. Registered training bodies like the TAFE Western Institute and Robinson College have already been briefed on upcoming opportunities and are in contact with mining industry officials on the emerging needs. The skills working group will also seek to involve representatives from within critical government agencies at State and Federal levels.

It must be highlighted that many of the most relevant and influential government representatives are located outside our region and can be difficult to contact. They often have too much work on their plate and may or may not put a full focus on our region's needs.

Something that the NSW Government (and Federal agencies) could consider that will help to boost the economy in our region is to appoint relevant senior, influential "Go To" people in our region who can access anyone needed within the deepness of State and Federal spheres in order to get quick decisions (ie access to Departmental heads as necessary).

We have already ascertained that the emergent, significant iron ore industry in our region, as well as existing metalliferous miners, will welcome the premium engagement of relevant decision-makers in the field of road, rail and port infrastructure. The decisions concerning export port location have been perplexing for the emergent iron ore industry with their needs different to those of other miners. New technologies, transportation and other product conveyance modes present effective logistics options not in place in the region. Given that the life of mine of several projects in our region exceeds 50 years, conservatively, there is very good reason for the State Government to closely monitor needs and seriously consider locating a senior "Go To" entity in the region for the needs of the mining industry.

Skills and infrastructure are two issues to work through, but there are many, many other issues that could benefit from focused Government support.

Added to the complexity of the development of local mining projects is the competition between States – NSW, SA and Vic. There are ports in all three states that could benefit from infrastructure development due to mining projects in Far West NSW. Some strong leadership in these issues from the NSW Government now, rather than too late, could help secure benefits for NSW and this region.

The RDA Far West NSW is also well aware that a new global economic decline could stop regional mining growth quickly. Therefore, other strategies in place to diversify the economy must also be considered.

Agriculture is an important employer in the region. Following good rain in 2010 and 2011 the local industries are enjoying good seasons. There are some infrastructure improvements that can be made to support continued growth, and the SKM report references an integrated transport study and construction of stock spelling yards as two initiatives that would benefit the Far West NSW agriculture sector. The transport study would also benefit mining and tourism.

The region will need additional resources to work through these complex issues. However, it is strongly recommended that locals help to populate task forces or work groups that may be formed to facilitate policy setting and future decision-making.

Other industries that we seek to further develop in order to diversify economic options in our region include creative industries (centred on the new national broadband network (NBN), the Broken Hill film studio and other initiatives) and ecotourism (centred on the targeted exploitation of natural assets like the Menindee Lakes, more specifically, a part of this system which we believe meets scientific criteria essential to support a listing under the Ramsar convention).

Two of the most important issues in respect of these two new industries for our region are as follows:

- NBN – irrespective of political party policies or preferences on the NBN at the State or Federal level, a significant upgrade to broadband services in our region is critical for education, health and business operations as current services are inadequate (we have much data on this we can supply from recent submissions to Federal Inquiries from February and July in 2011).
- Ramsar site – the seeking of a Ramsar listing at Menindee Lakes requires a formal indication of support from the NSW Government. We have received verbal support on different occasions. We now require a commitment in writing from the NSW Government to indicate whether this proposal has a State “blessing” in order to proceed.

Opportunities presented by both of these developing economic sectors (creative industries and ecotourism) are further addressed in the SKM report soon to be finalised.

(e) Comparative level of government business activity located within the region

We have already mentioned a lack of senior and influential “Go To” people in our region. The Department of Trade and Investment has the most capable and knowledgeable Mr Robert Sidford based in Broken Hill. However, he is one human resource and dedicated to a specific, limited area. The Pastoralists have noted in Appendix B, the lack of key agriculture staff. It is quite telling to note that key Federal representation in the region is from Centrelink and Medicare. The key State representation in the area consists of the usual services expected, eg health, education, transport, law and order, some Dept of Primary Industries (mining/environment) and regulatory (eg RTA), plus Robert and his support staff. There may be one or two other State Government agencies represented, but not many, and most lack independence or decision-making capacity. Most decision-makers are at least eight hours drive away. Very few people in our region have decision-making capacity and requests from our region to the local head of TAFE, or school education, or health or other State body, invariably is deflected to Dubbo, Orange, Parkes, Sydney.

Why can't some things be deflected to Broken Hill?

One of the most frustrating issues for business/employers in this region is the high cost of travel and communications involved in keeping in contact with out of region stakeholders who do make decisions, eg authorities and agencies in different departments and in different cities. A coordinated and collaborative effort to streamline contact for Far West NSW would make sense.

The RDA Far West NSW committee and staff are able to help develop what this may look like given experiences in the last year or so as new economic initiatives have emerged but without any significant resources or influence to progress. There is a constant feeling of “tippy-toeing” on egg shells within a “government-like” environment on the one hand, whilst on the other, the not-for-profit nature of RDAs implies some degree of self-help, freedom from government rigmarole. But that is not the case. The community here largely perceives RDAs as helpful, but largely ineffective without resources to make a difference.

Ultimately, our version of a “Go To” economic development resource for the region is like a one-stop-shop for industry (especially mining resource companies) to make local contact with, and that entity is empowered to make decisions or at least can access quickly others who can. This resource, if it was in place now, would be able to present to Government a strategic leadership position for the region and secure the interests of the region and the State in mining and agriculture, and the emerging economic diversification sectors, technology and tourism. The critical defining characteristics of this resource should include:

- Flexibility and agility (no red tape, no bureaucracy, action-orientated)
- Accessibility and availability (must be located in region, have open communication channels)
- Identity with region, issues and people (be collaborative, commercial-in-confidence capacity)
- Knowledge of key State and Federal Government contacts who can respond quickly
- Authority (have recognised authority to get through doors)
- Resources to do “Go To” work (support staff, budget, whatever is needed to get things done)

This is one way we can suggest that the NSW and Federal Governments do things differently in order to stop the impact of issues like population decline whilst also encouraging economic diversification and jobs growth. The resource could also look at some of the critical human issues in the region, eg high Indigenous unemployment rates, within the context of skills and job matching for mining and other industries. As with any new initiative, a business case should be developed to clearly define the purpose of the resource and its expected key result areas.

(f) Methodologies for local government to collectively cooperate to achieve increased infrastructure funding and economic growth

The rate paying base of local government throughout our region is insufficient to meet overheads of regional infrastructure maintenance and new capital investment, or to cover costs for adequate service provision. New thinking here is supported and the solution is yet to be derived. As noted in item (c) concerning infrastructure, an indication was given, in a recent radio interview by Western NSW Minister Kevin Humphries, that the time is right to seek new ways of delivering government services in remote or sparsely populated areas. The RDA Far West NSW has not formed a strong view one way or other, but commercial alliances between local authorities makes sense and offers a conversation start point. Key leaders in the region must be involved in these discussions.

The Minister mentioned an expansion of the Unincorporated Area to alleviate commercial pressures of uneconomic local authority areas, with some as yet unknown State body possibly to be established to administer key road and other infrastructure. This may be another good start point to find solutions. Certainly, the recommendations in the soon to be released SKM report would support a new way of managing infrastructure as assessing priorities for investment and maintenance.

However, based upon our interactions with community organisations and individuals, we believe it will be critical to gain community support for such a body. Perhaps this body is actually the same “Go To” resource suggested above in item (e) – a non-bureaucratic, commercial-focused, well resourced trouble-shooter with capacity to fast track sensible decisions that will promote economic diversification, support ongoing mining investment and help to create more jobs in the region.

It is perhaps also pertinent to suggest that some critical education and training links also be woven into this “Go To” resource, given these issues impact on economic growth and sustainable population maintenance.

The availability of NBN technology is critical for future efficiency improvements in local authority alliances. We have supplied Internet speed test results (a recent Federal submission on the NBN) for Wilcannia, Menindee and Broken Hill which highlight deficient performance compared to similar Internet packages on offer to customers on the east coast, at the same cost. Technology is the great enabler for our region, yet it is not available in terms of speed and capacity needed.

The NSW Government could help Far West NSW very much by helping us to:

- (a) Put Broken Hill on the top priority listing for NBN rollout (ie third release site); and,
- (b) Ensure that the NSW NBN Taskforce ensures the disadvantaged areas with small voices and vast distances to conquer become NSW NBN Taskforce priority areas.

The communities in Far West NSW will encounter both satellite and fibre solutions in the NBN rollout. There is perhaps a further basis for an alliance amongst shires and councils in the Far West to have streamlined NBN preparations and strategies.

(g) Any other factor restricting economic and social development in central western NSW

The issue below was raised by Kel Wise, Emergency Management Officer, Far West District, NSW Police Force, Western Region. Kel raised the issue of the difficulty in gaining eligibility for funding, within State and Federal grant fund criteria, by the Unincorporated Area of NSW. The issue is the red tape thrown at applicants within the Unincorporated Area as they do not neatly fit within a traditional definition of a local government area. He writes:

I have experienced the pampas "red tape" when trying to assist the Unincorporated Area in making applications for funding under the Remote Aerodrome Safety Programme within the Department of Transport and Regional Services.

I was engaged by the Far West District Rescue Committee to provide a report highlighting strategically placed Airstrips for the Royal Flying Doctor Service to assist Emergency Services with medical retrievals and community support in remote NSW.

The difficulty is that the Unincorporated Area is NOT a local government entity and therefore is not allowed to make an application for funding because they fall outside the selection criteria.

On this occasion, Kel noted the need to "plead the case tirelessly" with the relevant, multiple authorities to gain the decent outcome for the region. But he posed the question:

How many other projects in the Unincorporated Area have suffered the same fate or needed to go to the trouble I did to secure funding?

Appendix A

LONG-TERM FRAIL AGED RESIDENTS IN RURAL ACUTE HOSPITAL BEDS

(Provided by Far West Local Health District, Dr Steve Flecknoe-Brown)

The problem and its significance

Most rural acute hospitals have between 10% and 20% of their acute inpatient beds occupied at any time by frail aged persons awaiting placement in a residential aged care facility, either at Hostel or Nursing Home level. The local Aged Care Assessment Team (ACAT) has exhausted all options for their home-based care and insufficient licensed, Commonwealth-funded beds are available within a reasonable distance from their home town.

Because persons classified by the ACAT as needing higher levels of care tend not to live as long as those needing lower levels of care, a paradox develops: those requiring Hostel or low-level Nursing Home placement wait longer in the acute hospital than those needing high level Nursing Home care. Acute hospital stays for those awaiting Hostel placement frequently exceed 6 months.

For the individual resident, the result is being confined to a place that is ill-suited to their needs. Lack of stimulation further worsens cognitive decline and saps morale. Nursing staff and family also suffer as they watch this daily decline.

For the hospital, it means that an acute hospital bed is inadequately funded and 'blocked' from being used for its intended purpose.

The causes

Rural communities tend to have larger proportions of their populations in the older age groups than urban areas. The Commonwealth formula for allocating licensed, funded Aged Care beds depends upon a raw figure of the number of people in a given area over the age of 70 years. This is not sensitive to the larger proportions of older people (eg 75-82 yrs and >82 years) seen in rural communities.

Rural communities, as they involute, lose the middle generations who move to bigger centres to find work. Thus, the number of informal, family carers available is proportionately lower in rural communities, making home-based care for the infirm aged harder to sustain than in urban areas.

Rural centres can be separated by great distances, making transfer to a residential aged care facility a cruel dislocation of a vulnerable person from their life-long community. This is already recognized by the provision of Multi-Purpose Services (MPSs) in small and medium-sized rural centres. MPSs are not available for centres with larger populations, usually served by acute 'Base' hospitals and local Residential Aged Care facilities.

Housing stock in rural centres tends to be old and of low value. Older houses are poorly insulated, usually have floors on multiple levels (a problem for residents who require mobility aids) and require more maintenance than their owners are ill-equipped to perform. Their low capital value mitigates against renovation and makes the option of selling up and moving into a commercially developed Retirement Village out of reach.

Most Residential Aged Care providers are not-for-profit organizations. “Not for profit” does not mean “immune from bankruptcy”. As the operating margins that Commonwealth funding provides for these operators are very slim, the operators are very risk-averse. The Commonwealth has essentially shifted the financial risk onto these providers: they in turn shift part of the risk onto the State hospitals, which may not refuse a bed to those who need one.

Suggested solutions

The Commonwealth formula for allocating Residential Aged Care beds must be made more sensitive to the factors outlined above. This, however, is outside of the power of the State of NSW to direct, will take some time to achieve and the resulting extra facilities will then have to be built.

Enhancement of home-based and intermediate care is helpful, although it will only reduce the number of long-term frail aged residents in acute hospitals by a relatively small amount. Most rural communities have as many people awaiting Nursing Home placement in the community as those in hospitals: our ability to keep frail aged in their homes is already stretched to its practical limit.

The Commonwealth should be made to pay a premium to the States for the frail aged currently residing in public hospitals, given this long history of their exploiting the State hospitals’ role as the Home of Last Resort. This would encourage the Commonwealth to find more suitable accommodation for them and share the financial ‘risk’. May I suggest the Commonwealth pay the States a 25% premium over the price currently paid to private and not-for-profit aged care facilities for those patients classified as awaiting Nursing Home or Hostel level care by the Aged Care Assessment Team (ACAT).

Opening Comments to the Advisory Panels

The Terms of Reference (TOR) note the Minister's task to develop a Sustainable Population Strategy for Australia.

The size of the population that can be sustained in Australia is one concern, and the location of these people within Australia is another. Hence, the TOR notes the key relationships between population and infrastructure, growth opportunities, skills, regional towns, the environment and social policy issues.

In brief, we see the Minister's task through a simple lens that highlights the most relevant relationship which effectively represents all of the above – population and **financial incentive**.

Currently, 87% of the population lives in 'urban areas'; 81% live within 50km of the coast; and 86% of the land area holds just 2.3% of the population (p. 37). If there is economic incentive to live in a dusty, dry environment devoid of green trees and devoid of sandy beaches, then people will live there (eg mining operation, sheep station may currently offer a financial incentive to live in an outback area). The converse is true, and the great majority of Australia's population chooses to live close to the coast. If left unchecked, this preference will result in an unsustainable future for many small towns as people continue to desert these for the coastal lifestyle. The critical issues that emerge with the death of small towns is that mining and agricultural endeavours in the 86% of the national land area with just 2.3% of the population will become much more expensive to own and operate and the cost of living will then continue to increase for 100% of the people in the country. This is only one of the challenges we believe is yet to be fully appreciated our country's people, although the Issus Paper alludes to it.

This situation may be more easily understood, setting aside mining and agriculture influences. For example, Australia has very few policies in place that suggest there should be financial incentive to live anywhere else but within 50km of the coast where there are public transport, housing, job, health services and education alternatives. We have seen at what cost we allow this to happen in Australia this summer – floods that affect capital cities (Brisbane and surrounds) highlight poor planning, poor decision-making in many facets of city life.

In Broken Hill the flow on impact is high priced insurance for home and contents, businesses, vehicles and other property items, and acceleration in the price increases of basic goods and services that compose the cost of living – electricity, fresh food, petrol, freight – beyond what would normally be expected.

Being located 1,200km west of Sydney, without the constant noise of city streets, the smell of transport exhaust fumes, or the background gibberish caused by 24x7 media services, it is very clear to us that it is time for policy-makers to stand back and take stock of what problems have been caused by allowing, no, forcing the flood of people to the coast for the last several decades, without thinking through the risks.

From our perspective, there are policy settings that could have been adjusted to encourage populations to remain in rural areas. Policies have in the past been used to increase populations, eg families have been encouraged to have more or less children depending upon baby bonus payments, more immigrants can be welcomed to the country to fill skills shortages. Policies, combined with decades of poor decision-making concerning infrastructure and services, have forced regions like ours to shrink, lose businesses and people. Ultimately, with fewer voters in our region, there is less care amongst the organised political parties and the bureaucracy. Maybe this is a tad cynical and too simplistic, but the people in this region think this and say it often. Every member of the RDA Far West NSW committee is in receipt of these comments on a regular basis from people in our community. This matter is no longer an 'undiscussable' matter. We believe that the lack of support for our region in particular requires deep, serious consideration followed by prompt action to stem the people losses. In short, Australia needs to ensure policy is sensible and best fit for country, and not aligned with the number of votes.

The time is overdue to make policy adjustments to encourage people to relocate to less-populated parts of the country, and give financial incentive to those already there to remain. We agree that there are no 'silver bullet, simple single solutions' (p. 36) to these matters. For this reason we have a number of tailor-made suggestions that we feel are appropriate for our region.

We offer our region as a place to pilot test these creative, evocative yet relevant-for-region solutions. If successful, they may be adapted more broadly.

Following the National Forum of Regional Development Australia in Canberra, 3-4 March 2011, which was attended by Chairs and CEOs of the 55 RDA entities throughout Australia, it is clear to the RDA Far West NSW that the messages in this submission could be applied to many of the rural and remote locations throughout Australia. In particular, we are referring to the vast low-density population areas of remote South Australia, Queensland, the Northern Territory and Western Australia, the 86% of the country with 2.3% of the people. We all talk to one another and many of us have similar issues in our small towns. Many of our small towns can accommodate thousands of more residents which could inject new skills, social capital and community capacity into these areas. Infrastructure is under-utilised, vacant housing may exist in many cities (it certainly does in Broken Hill) and there is a pressing urgency in many of these locations for innovation and economic diversification (pegged to the National Broadband Network, for example).

In relation to Indigenous Australians, their so-called 'distinctive demography' (p. 37) is indeed a reality, especially in our region. One critical issue of note is that the demography, like the valley by valley approach being taken to address water issues in the Murray Darling Basin, requires a region by region approach to address the existing and emerging trends and concerns. In the RDA Far West NSW region, our Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people have expressed many views about how to deal with emerging issues of relevance to sustainable

populations, economic participation, health solutions and many other ideas on suitable solutions to local problems. Few agencies appear to listen or dare to suggest or recommend change to existing programs even though these have clearly failed. Perhaps change may upset the applecart or perhaps innovative change is too 'courageous' and, as the television character Sir Humphrey Appleby may say...

"It is axiomatic in government that hornets' nests should be left unstirred, cans of worms should remain unopened, and cats should be left firmly in bags and not set among the pigeons. Ministers should also leave boats unrocked, nettles ungrasped, refrain from taking bulls by the horns, and resolutely turn their backs to the music."

The NSW Far West region has not seen innovative change to policies for years – the same old problems exist and the same solutions are wheeled out, just with different names and different delivery agents. The only people to benefit are those who can supply goods and services in line with strict terms and conditions of Government funding programs – consultants, hotels, airlines and hire car companies.

On the national scale, the issues paper similarly notes concern about our nation's geographic concentration in urban centres on the coast where 87% of the people are located. Our national leaders have expressed concern about this trend for decades - no policies are addressing the matter. The problems are now at crisis point and creating the complexity as noted in the issues paper. We don't need to imagine a tsunami through the Port of Brisbane or Mascot Airport, or an earthquake at Lucas Heights to understand the critical risks to the current population distribution.

We agree the time is now to make a difference and our region – Far West NSW – will continue to stir the hornets' nests and suggest policies that, if trialled and tested and proven satisfactory, will help to dissolve some of the impacts of unthinkable events.

Of the key issues raised in the issues paper, the following are salient for Far West NSW.

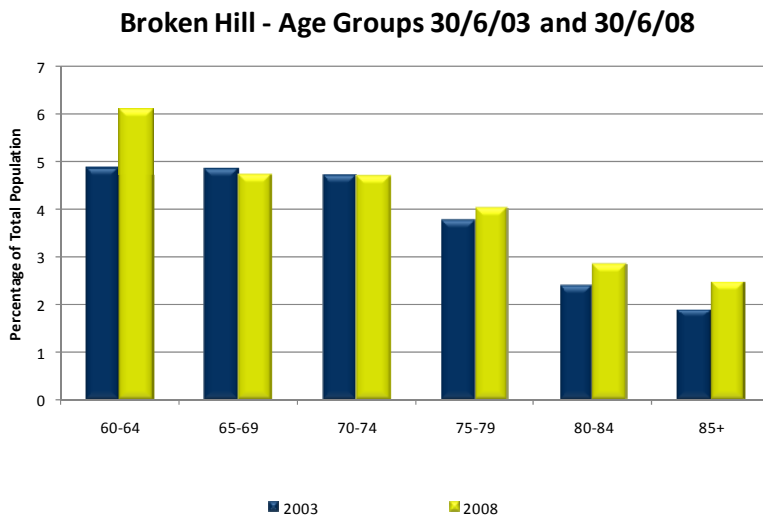
Ageing

The ABS data below, Graph 1, highlights rapid ageing in Broken Hill. These trends have serious impacts on our local Councils (Broken Hill City Council and Central Darling Shire Council) to continue to deliver adequate services to their citizens. It is a fact that most utilities and rates bills are discounted for pensioners – but the reality is that the cost of service provision has not decreased. Far West NSW has one of the highest median ages in NSW at 42.5 years, while the lowest median age was in Sydney at 35.5 years, and generally, the lowest median ages of many local government areas were in and around Sydney. High median ages were seen on the mid north NSW coast where retirees tend to relocate. The Advisory Panels need to understand that people in Far West NSW who can do so, physically and financially, are relocating – which is our region's loss. But those left behind are facing reduced health services as they enter a time in

their life cycle when the need for medical care increases (frequency of contact with health providers, and range of medical issues).

In Broken Hill, in 2009, ABS data shows that welfare and pension payments were received by 32% of the population (excluding payments relating to family, baby bonus). This compares to 32% in 2006. This is a serious issue for our region – the percentage is not changing in five years – what is changing? The base calculations show that the overall population is still shrinking. In 2006, the population was 20,131; in 2009 it was 19,960.

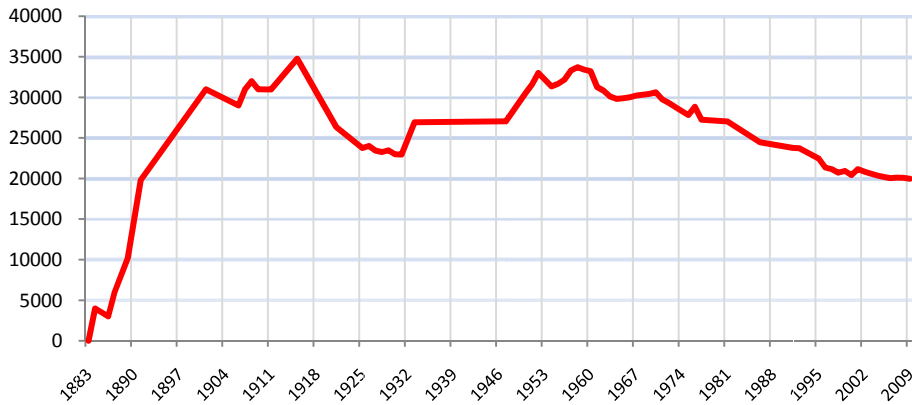
Graph 1 – Ageing Population in Broken Hill, NSW



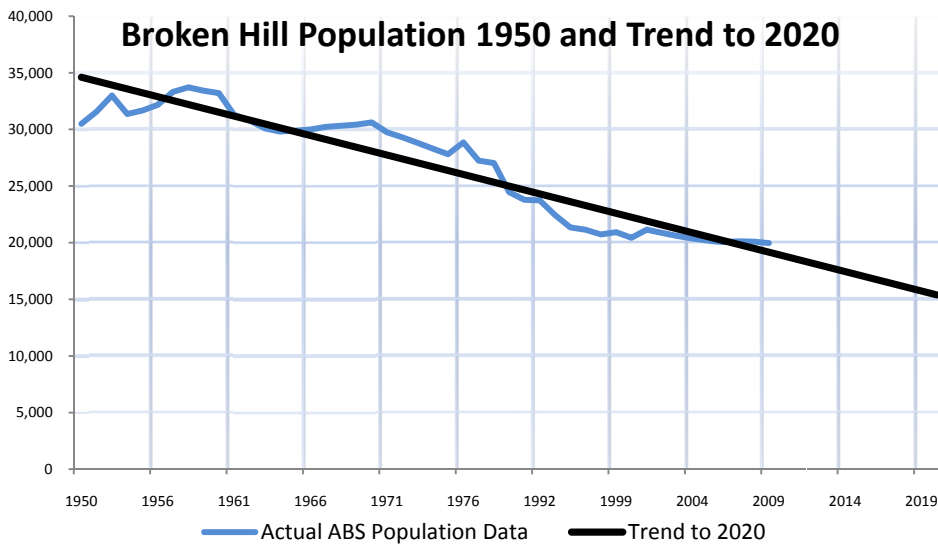
In fact, so serious is the population decline in Broken Hill that we graphed it for the period from 1883 to 2009. This is in Graph 2. ABS data has been used. The most significant times in the last 100 years' and 50 years' mining cycles can be clearly identified, reflecting periods of high recruitment, retrenchment, industrial automation, plus the impact of the declining resources. In Graph 3 we plot the trend line since the 1950s. Much of the remaining older population in Broken Hill are long term residents and many of them no doubt former miners.

Graph 2 – Long Term Trend in Broken Hill’s Population – 1883 to 2009

Broken Hill Population 1883 to 2009



Graph 3 – Population Trend in Broken Hill – 1950 to 2020



Graph 3 does not have to continue its downward trend. If we are fortunate, the mining industry will continue to survive and sustain the population at 20,000.

However, we cannot continue to put our future in the hands of commodity cycles for finite resources.

The RDA Far West Committee supports economic diversification to add more substance and alternatives to the local economy. We believe we can turn the trend line upwards with policy-setting interventions that are designed specifically for our region.

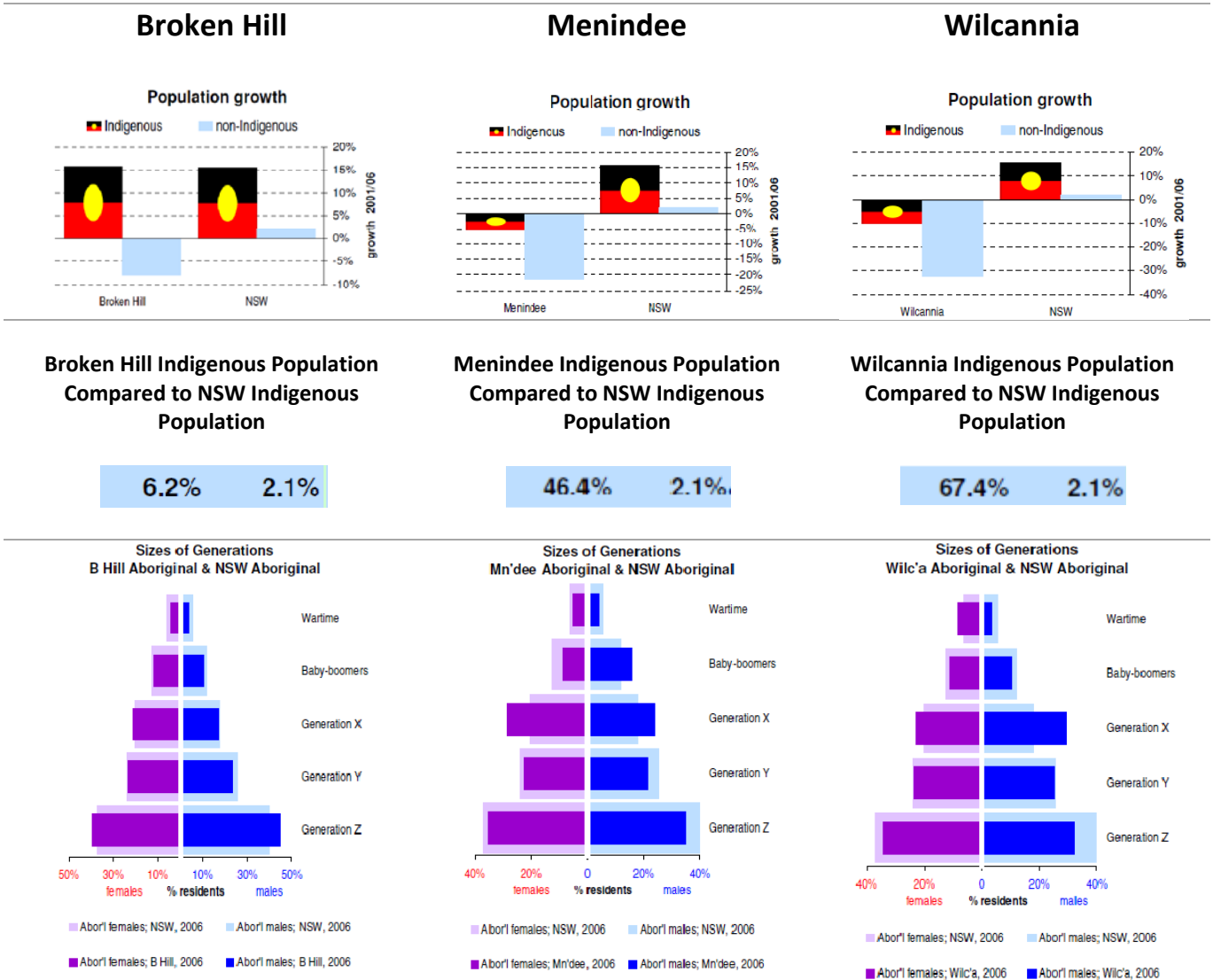
Indigenous Population

Broken Hill, Wilcannia, Ivanhoe and Menindee have significant populations of Indigenous Australians, relative within these communities to non-Indigenous, and compared to NSW overall. Table 1 data reflects population changes between the Census taken in 2001 and in 2006 for three of these centres. This data is well out of date and the trends are indicative only. Of critical concern is the very high level of welfare distributed in these communities, since job opportunities are limited and unemployment is very high, see Table 2.

In Broken Hill and in the Far West NSW Unincorporated Area, unemployment amongst all is 8.2%, three points above the national average. In Central Darling Shire, unemployment is 13.9% (Source: Small Area Labour Markets, September Quarter 2010). Indigenous unemployment in Menindee in 2006 was 42% when across NSW it was 19%. The reality is, many of the aboriginal people in the region want jobs and want to make a difference, they want to participate economically, and they want healthy, happy lives.

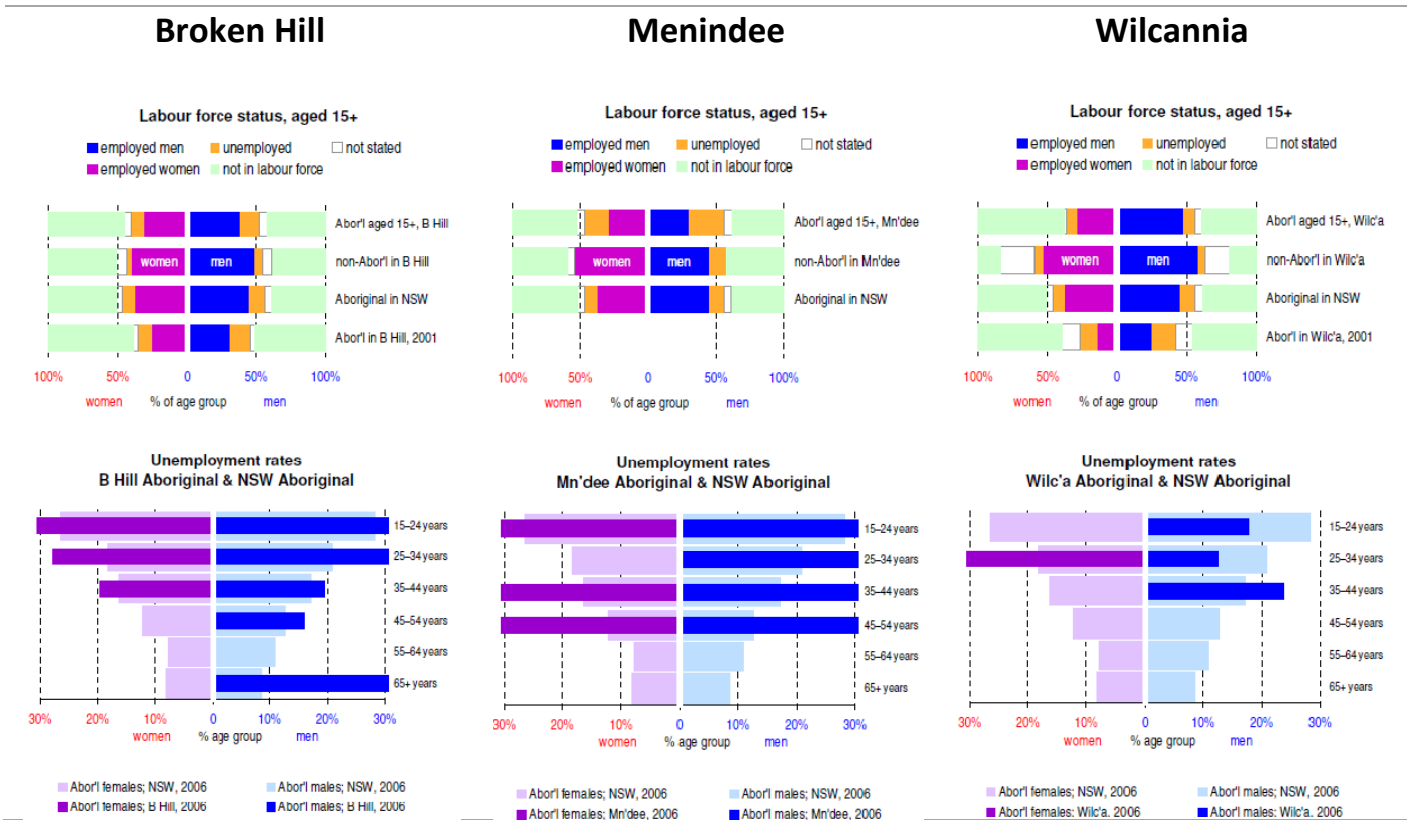
The current policies, and possibly the current attitudes and assumptions of decision-makers, located 1,000+ km away to the east, do not support the aspirations of Indigenous Australians. Table 2 highlights the unemployment data from 2006 in the Far West NSW region, but again, this data is well out of date and is indicative only. Anecdotally, however, the current unemployment situation amongst Indigenous people in the region has not changed since 2006 and is likely to have worsened.

Table 1 – Indicative Indigenous Statistical Data, Far West NSW Region, 2001-2006



Source: Community Portraits, Aboriginal Affairs NSW

Table 2 – Unemployment Rates, Far West NSW Region, 2006.



Source: Community Portraits, Aboriginal Affairs NSW

Social Inclusion

The young aboriginal people, aged 15 to 34 years, who are referenced in Table 2’s lower section on unemployment, will have no future job prospects in the next four decades, if the leadership in the RDA Far West NSW region lets the status quo win. Similarly, without change agents forcing economic diversification in our region, the prospects for non-aboriginal people in our region are likewise limited.

The RDA Far West NSW Regional Plan has the following vision:

Far West NSW will be economically diverse and prosperous, socially inclusive, environmentally sustainable, innovative and creative.

To facilitate the vision, to include people throughout the region in this vision, we note there must be

- (1) Acceptance of the need for real changes in the region;
- (2) Significant shift of social attitudes, comfort zones;
- (3) Need for new skills to meet new aspirations and;
- (4) Recognition of the need for enabling technology (eg the National Broadband Network).

In the midst of the social inclusion comments, we digress briefly to highlight work which supports the approach to change being taken by the RDA Far West NSW. Tomaney's (2010) paper on placed-based approaches to regional development¹ provides some inspiration for how regions can help themselves, with central government support. From this paper, we have derived support in the following key concepts.

KEY CONCEPT I

- Identify and mobilise endogenous potential of the region – ie encourage growth through local regions drawing on internal resources

ie Exploit local assets

KEY CONCEPT II

- Note the role of local/regional institutions in facilitating the regional economies – stable and lasting institutions are critical to economic development though they are likely to vary in nature between regions (whilst remaining within national context)

ie Facilitate change with local people and structures (empower locals)

KEY CONCEPT III

- Regional development policy should not just be about greater growth as measured by GDP but also about reducing inequalities; mobilising resources in lagging/peripheral areas may constitute a valid recipe for both greater overall growth and lower territorial polarisation, and may be necessary for the achievement of national wellbeing

- *[Further note: EU paper on "GDP and beyond" – GDP does not measure environmental sustainability or social inclusion; the EU is piloting an environmental pressure index and is looking at the feasibility of wellbeing indicators; plus there are other endeavours underway to assess alternatives to traditional GDP measures]*

ie Measure social, environmental health as well as economic growth

¹ Tomaney, J, 2010, *Place-based approaches to regional development: global trends and Australian implications*, Australian Business Foundation.

Unless these concepts are truly appreciated by Federal and State Governments the Far West region of NSW will struggle to progress initiatives and will continue to demand a disproportionate quantity of public welfare.

We also note that these concepts are yet to be reflected in public policy and grant funding opportunities. It is critical for our region that we can have a direct say in decisions that are being made about our region.

We no longer want to be passive observers – we want to be actively involved in the solutions and decisions about which solutions to which problems are most suitable.

Tomaney's concepts are foundation, touchstone attributes of RDA Far West NSW's strategies and plans and are reflected in how we have developed our change strategies (the regional plan) and the very difficult task ahead that we face in terms of bringing the Canberra- and Sydney-based policy-setters along with us.

By way of background and for the information of the Advisory Panels, we applied Tomaney's thinking to the processes deployed locally to develop our strategic plan. Our planning and strategy setting processes reflect the following notions from Tomaney's paper:

- Bottom up approach (fresh approach, data/evidence formed basis of change)
- Locally-designed and owned strategies
- There is a clear aim to improve the quality of human capital in region over time
- Innovation is vigorously promoted, pursued and relevant over time
- "Patient" investment funds are targeted – 'home-grown' sources identified, developed
- Endogenous asset use promoted rather than exogenous investments & transfers
- Growth opportunities exploited rather than consequences of decline ameliorated
- Human capital, innovative capacity improvements directly link to infrastructure quality, quantity
- Potential scale economies to be derived from local government cooperation, reform
- Local competitiveness focused on sustainable development, clever resource management

Key concept III, for obvious reasons, is extremely important to us as our regional strategies embody generational change, ie slow change. The existing economic hurdles are high (eg the local market has shrunk, higher energy and transport costs). Economic growth will be slow and fully at the mercy of national or global economic trends. There is a compelling case to firstly renew the social and environmental health of our region and relax on economic performance – economic arguments too often kill a good idea as short term returns are favoured always over long term sustainability.

In short, it is a grave concern among many in leadership positions in Far West NSW that the social and environmental health of this region has been allowed to suffer and become degraded, without tailor-made, public policy intervention that will reverse current trends, and

without consultation with key leaders. This is a key reference to the second dot point on page 46 and the dot point on top of page 51. The last two dot points on page 51 are significant for RDA Far West. Delay is not an option for this region, and we hope that the brief statistical presentation in this submission encourages you to realise the urgency in change for this region.

General Data

In researching background statistics in our region during compilation of the RDA Far West NSW Regional Plan, the data in Table 3 was presented to profile key centres in the region. Some data presents the affirmative case for living in regional centres (eg cost of median monthly mortgage or rent is lower), while other data supports the negative case (eg jobs are scarce, lower income can be expected). It would appear that financial incentives support people living in the Far West of NSW if they are paying off a house but encourage people to leave the region for jobs or higher incomes.

Historically, Broken Hill and surrounds are associated with mining. As we have seen, the city of Broken Hill housed 35,000 people around WWI, when mining activities were booming. Yet, in the 1800s, agriculture was the leading economic pursuit in the region, though remnants of the Darling River's paddleboat transport system for wool bales are now hard to come by. The Kinchega Station woolshed on the Darling River near Menindee, now included in the Kinchega National Park, has some preserved elements. In the 1880s, the discovery of lead, silver and zinc in the region changed the economic fortunes, not just in this region, but in many other parts of Australia. Over the years a combination of drought, climate change, over water allocation, and more drought, has lessened the contribution of agriculture and pastoral activities to the local GDP. Mining dominated the economy all through the 20th Century and for now, is continuing to do so in the 21st Century.

Mining's economic returns to the region, however, dropped off significantly in the last 50 years and the direct impact of this on the Broken Hill population over the last century reflects this. Early in the 1900s during times of high mineral exploitation, the population soared above 30,000, peaking at 34,700 by around 1915. In the 70 years until 1970, Broken Hill's population averaged 29,500. In the last 50 years, however, the population has declined due to economic downturns, redundancies, industry automation, price impacts and other cycles. Since 1970, Broken Hill's population has averaged 23,500. The ABS puts the population at 19,960 at present.

Table 3 – Social Characteristics, Far West NSW

	Broken Hill	Wilcannia	Menindee	Australia
Median Age (of persons)	42	31	42	37
Born Overseas (of total population)	4.5%	2.5%	6.5%	22.2%
English Only (spoken at home)	91.6%	91.7%	95.4%	78.5%
Median Individual Income (weekly)	\$334	\$275	\$317	\$466
Median Family Income (weekly)	\$829	\$630	\$637	\$1,171
Single Parent Families (of total families)	20.5%	22%	20.5%	15.8%
Average Household Size (persons)	2.3	3.2	2.1	2.6
Living in Houses (of all occupied dwellings)	90.9%	83.9%	87.6%	74.8%
Living in semi-detached dwellings	2.8%	7.0%	0.0%	9.2%
Living in flats or units	4.0%	0.0%	3.3%	14.2%
Dwelling fully owned (of private occupied)	48.9%	26.6%	45.1	32.6%
Dwelling under purchase	25.2%	5.5%	14.1%	32.2%
Dwelling rented	17.8%	53.8%	33.3%	27.2%
Median Mortgage (monthly repayment)	\$650	\$477	\$650	\$1,300
Median Rent (weekly)	\$110	\$87	\$50	\$190
Rented/Real Estate Agent (of total rented)	26.4%	0.0%	0.0%	50.5%
Rented/Housing Authority	9.4%	16.8%	12.7%	14.9%
Rented/other Landlord	58.2%	79.4%	80.4%	31.6%
Employed full-time (% of labour force)	55.2%	49.0%	57.1%	60.7%
Employed part time (% of labour force)	28.4%	28.6%	20.4%	27.9%
Stated Unemployed (% of labour force)	9.0%	10.6%	15.0%	5.2%

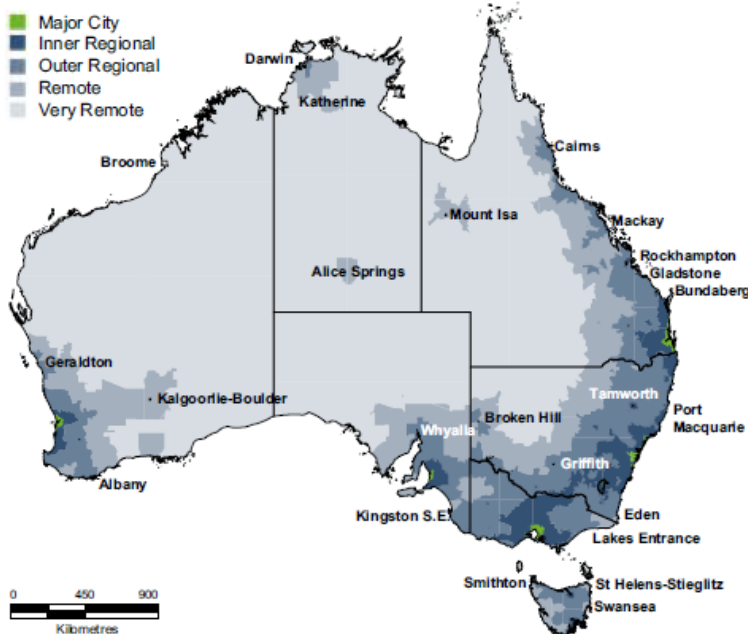
(Source: ABS, Census QuickStats, 2006)

A summary of more recent regional data is in Table 4. Our region has 0.1% of the nation’s population and 2% of the nation’s land area. Most of the region is classed as “remote” or “very remote” Australia (see Figure 1).

Table 4: Far West NSW – Overview

	Broken Hill City	Central Darling Shire	Unincorporated Area	Source
Population (National no. 21,955,256)	19,960	2,019	752	ABS 30/6/09
Unemployment 30/9/10 (National rate 5.3%)	8.2%	13.9%	8.2%	DEEWR 30/9/10
Land Area (National 7.7m km ²)	170 km ²	53,509 km ²	93,284 km ²	ABS 30/6/09
Population receiving welfare payments	31%	31%	29%	ABS 30/6/09
Newstart Allowance recipients >365 days (%)	57%	78%	n/a	ABS 30/6/09

Figure 1 Remoteness Classes in Australia, 2006



Source: BTRE, 2008

In 2008-09 Broken Hill had the second largest population decline in Australia after Mt Isa (and excluding the regions in Victoria affected by bushfires, ABS data). This was due to more than 400 redundancies at the Perilya Ltd mine in Broken Hill at the time of the global financial crisis. BITRE data shows that between 2002 and 2007, Central Darling Shire, classed as very remote Australia, saw its population decrease by 3.2%. But as we know from detailed analysis of our region, the decreases observed over many decades are much higher. It is nevertheless useful to look at Table 5 to gain some comparative perspective of the extremes in population increases and decreases experience in Australia during recent years.

Table 5: Local Government Areas – Fastest Population Increases/Decreases 2002-07

Fastest increases				Fastest decreases			
LGA	State	Remoteness Class ^b	Average annual growth rate (per cent)	LGA	State	Remoteness Class ^b	Average annual growth rate (per cent)
Perth	WA	Major Cities	9.8	Laverton	WA	Very Remote	-6.8
Capel	WA	Inner Regional	8.2	Dalwallinu	WA	Remote	-5.1
Melton	VIC	Major Cities	8.0	Bourke	NSW	Remote	-4.1
Ravensthorpe	WA	Very Remote	7.9	Anangu			
Melbourne	VIC	Major Cities	7.8	Pitjantjatjara	SA	Very Remote	-3.5
Wanneroo	WA	Major Cities	7.2	Richmond	QLD	Very Remote	3.4
Weipa	QLD	Very Remote	7.0	Leonora	WA	Very Remote	-3.3
Wyndham	VIC	Major Cities	6.2	Central Darling	NSW	Very Remote	-3.2
Adelaide	SA	Major Cities	5.9	Coober Pedy	SA	Very Remote	-3.2
Thamarrurr	NT	Remote	5.9	Mullewa	WA	Remote	-3.2
				Blackall	QLD	Very Remote	-3.0

a. Table excludes LGAs with a population of less than 1000 in 2002. Population estimates for 2007 are preliminary.

b. The majority of each LGA's population fits within the stated Remoteness Class (ASGC 2006 boundaries).

Note: The ABS has broadened the categories of legislation used to define local government areas for statistical purposes to include the Indigenous Council areas in the states and the Northern Territory.

Source: BITRE analysis of ABS Regional Population Growth, Australia, 2006-07 (Cat. 3218.0).

In numerous cases, mining activities are responsible for significant impacts on these extremes. People move into a region for mining work (eg Ravensthorpe, WA and Weipa, Qld) and leave when the jobs cease to exist (eg Laverton and Leonora, WA).

Obtaining relevant, good quality, 'pre-analysed' data about the changes in population for our far west NSW region has been challenging as data can be creatively grouped over different periods to present different pictures. ABS Census data is too infrequent to reflect key events.

But it is worth reviewing the maps of the local government areas throughout Australia at <http://www.regional.gov.au/local/publications/index.aspx> which puts our region into at least

the NSW and national perspective for the period 1997-2006. The data from immediate border areas, ie in Queensland and Victoria, and many other inland areas of Australia, are relevant. The uninhabited inner-continent is clearly visible. Also, growth in the Mildura City region of between 10% and 20% in this period is visible. We are concerned about the distortion this creates for our region, particularly in the context of the Murray Darling Basin Plan discussions. Mildura's growth occurs 300km to the south of Broken Hill and little benefit accrues directly to the far west NSW region.

The ABS describes Australia's centre as the average latitude and longitude around which the population is distributed. At June 2009, the centre was 48km east of Ivanhoe, in Central Darling Shire. The centre has moved 12.1km north-west in the last five years – reflecting population growth in NSW, Qld and WA.

The irony is that such remoteness exists so near to Australia's key south-east urban centres.

It is this relative closeness to large population centres and the "very remote" tag for much of the Far West NSW region which makes some of our strategies and business plans plausible and achievable.

Demographic Change and Liveability

The long term population trend in Broken Hill is shown in Graph 2. The trend line is downward over 50 years, see Graph 3, reinforcing the key point on page 49 that population change is incremental, and this is alarming for our region. Yet Graph 3 also shows that 10,000 people were lost to Broken Hill between 1970 and 2000.

That is, a third of Broken Hill's population was lost in a third of a century.

In many instances over the last decade, it was indeed a single incident (silver bullet) that impacted on population in Broken Hill. There are several sharp peaks in Graph 2 that show steep, swift corrections in population, resulting in the loss, or gain, of thousands of people in very short time periods.

We need to attract people to live in the region for longer periods of time than, say, a two year mining job contract – people who work and pay taxes, who can contribute to the social capital, who can help populate school rooms and sports fixtures on weekends, who can make festivals and pageants successful when they buy local crafts and produce. Each family lost from this region equates to lost community capacity.

To address the declines in liveability, our region is focused on two critical industry developments that will excite and enthuse young people and families – **ecotourism** and **technology**.

Ecotourism is centred on the Ramsar listing of the Menindee lakes.

Technology is centred on film and creative industries skills in Broken Hill and across the region; the NBN is critical for this and the roll out of the NBN in this region is most urgent and should be done now for social inclusion and community capacity building reasons, as well as for economic benefit reasons.

The Indigenous population trends (pp 78-79) are well understood in our region – there is a growing Indigenous population, high birth rate amongst single mothers, high populations of young Indigenous people who drop out of school and who are unemployed and remain unemployed for long periods, high mortality among adults and generally, a shorter life can be expected. Indigenous housing is sub-standard, basic amenities not provisioned, communications and internet access are much poorer in Indigenous communities, and substance abuse and suicide are critical issues. A successful Indigenous citizen (with job, income) normally struggles to continue to be able to succeed due to peer and family pressures to behave non-productively.

Consultants from the east arrive to fix the problems – but there is low esteem, little support for many programs from the local Indigenous population as the programs have been developed remotely, by persons who have failed to achieve local ‘buy-in’ for change up front. [This is a sample of some of the sentiments that have been expressed by frustrated Indigenous persons in the region].

We send specialist health staff into some regions (eg Menindee, Wilcannia) without adequate infrastructure support – eg anecdotes about nurses needing to stand on the main street in Wilcannia to receive a signal on mobile phones to be able to call home to their family because the housing doesn’t have a fixed line. Poor standard housing is also contributing to the lack of liveability for those sent to the region to help the other problems noted above.

The future focus of social policy for Indigenous people in our region needs to change as indicated (p. 79) but a critical part of that change is engagement of Indigenous people in the solution. Our Indigenous people want to be active participants in the solution-development process, not passive recipients of services that arguably have limited success. The lack of involvement and the disgust at the continuing lack of involvement leads to racial tension, accusations and frustrations that can be comfortably ignored in Canberra and Sydney offices, but prove to be a real challenge for regional workers and visiting consultants to handle.

As noted on p. 83, Australians are willing to move. The centre of gravity of the national population is just inside the Central Darling Shire boundary close to the township of Ivanhoe. Ivanhoe itself is a poignant example of how government policy has contributed to its population decline. A former Shire Mayor has previously argued that a policy decision to close down the Ivanhoe-based rail maintenance activities resulted in the immediate loss of many families and the associated loss of other families and businesses, and associated local provision

of goods and services. Tibooburra in the far north west of NSW has a similar story – in this case it was closure of road maintenance activities. The centralising of most government services, the bulking up of supply contracts and other questionable decisions have led to threadbare goods and services provision in many key centres. Taking away business incentive and opportunity from the regions has significantly contributed to the Far West NSW diaspora and no doubt in other regions too.

It should not be surprising to the Advisory Panels, then, that in Broken Hill, the Federal Government's most visible bricks and mortar representation is now Centre Link. Centre Link's business is doing so well here they have recently finished building and moving into their new premises. There is a Medicare retail outlet too.

The chart on p. 85 of the issues paper would have been more interesting if the quality of its reproduction showed the rural trends. However, we know the reality even without the chart. The BITRE map in Figure 1 of this submission tells the story. This is reflected in the table on top of p. 87 of the issues paper. The exercise too often brushed quickly over is understanding why population declines. As we have pointed out already, in a small town it can be direct policy intervention (ie removal of maintenance gangs for rail or road), and in a larger city like Broken Hill, with a single focus on mining, it can be due to a global downturn (eg financial crisis, 2007-09) and lack of economic diversification.

On p. 90, the issues of relevance to our region are working vs resident populations (with FIFO/DIDO mining personnel and government service delivery consultants) and temporary indigenous populations (the length of the Darling River is a social route for Indigenous people in Far West NSW).

A clear opportunity for the city of Broken Hill would be to provide residential base housing for existing FIFO/DIDO workers from Sydney or Dubbo (where there is an existing daily air service, or an eight hour drive to Dubbo). The city of Dubbo houses a great contingent of health workers and consultants who visit the Far West NSW region in prolific numbers. Policy-setting by State and Federal Governments could insist that at least some of these jobs become located in Broken Hill.

The air and road access to our region, and maintenance of associated infrastructure, is critical to existing economic activities. However, the expansion and diversification of our economy will hopefully bring additional improvements (more key road routes will eventually be sealed, more small airstrips upgraded to handle improved tourist numbers, the Broken Hill City Airport may gain strong Government support as a strategic location on the Australian air routes and be granted funds for its overdue upgrade).

We are comfortable that the 5 p's of ageing are addressed by our strategies (pp. 95-96).

Population – our ecotourism and technology strategies attract new people to our region because we put opportunity for jobs and income back on the table. We need dedicated policy-

setting to help make the decision to return or relocate to Broken Hill easier. For example, fast-tracking the NBN to our region will signal existence of opportunity and potential, the Ramsar listing of the Menindee Lakes will provide a positive investment climate and create a boost for new business opportunity that the market place is expected to take on board.

Participation – the strategies put skills development onto the table in ways that will excite and enthuse the region’s youth, and in ways that older people can contribute. Many older people would like to continue to work in order to stay busy, keep health issues at bay, and to earn an income. Not so many can afford to live on a pension and also cover costs of their volunteer efforts for community endeavours.

Productivity – the film studio and precinct will attract the world’s best film makers, and our local businesses will step up and increase service standards and business excellence; our plans also aim to attract relevant ecotourism investment and associated micro-businesses. We contend we have two dynamic, commercially viable new economic sectors on the cusp on development in our region (ecotourism and technology) that, without direct policy intervention, may not receive opportunity to flourish.

Preparation – our older people still have much to offer our community, especially in creative industries, customer service, tourism ventures, mining and services; they seek to economically participate in the targeted new industries. We need to generate reasons for our population to stay in place, ie proactive engagement with our older people, give them choices in region.

Place – a few years ago retirement homes were the biggest building investments on the horizon in Broken Hill. People in outlying towns are fraught with despair about where they will be located in their future years and who will look after them. Critical questions like this in our region have no obvious answers. However, we hope that additional, diverse economic activity in our region, eg ecotourism and creative industries/technology projects, will facilitate solutions.

In respect of children and young people, and their importance to economic development in Far West NSW, we place importance on providing a healthy future for the growing number of Indigenous people in our region. For all our youth, we seek to ensure that we meet the needs and interests of all our young people with our targeted, planned generational change in economic diversification.

Without specific policy intervention in our region, to facilitate this change, we condemn our region’s young people to an uncertain future. Who will be in the region providing jobs in 15 years’ time? Will the region’s population be such that it can continue to sustain the services in health and education as now, or will these have been further whittled away by 2025? Will our youth stay in region or flock to the coast? Will they be as healthy as other Australians or will their life expectancy be 10 years too short (p. 79)?

For this reason, the roll out of the NBN should not be left to economics alone. If one of the RDA's across Australia must be the last on the list of the 9½ year roll out program, then it must not be a region like ours, struggling to keep its youth in region.

In Canberra, at the March 2011 national forum of RDA Chairs and CEO's, the audience was told by Mike Kaiser, an NBN manager, that the roll out of the NBN can be facilitated by identifying and describing Telstra's assets and providing existing power infrastructure maps to the NBN Co, and also by skilling up people in region so that contractors have ready access to trained people. In short, to avoid being last on the roll out list and to avoid having the NBN rolled out in region in 2020, RDA's can facilitate speedier delivery by helping the NBN accumulate technical information as well as community engagement work.

This is an example of exactly the kind of policy intervention necessary to stop the population decline in our region. If Far West NSW is last on the NBN roll out list, we lose 10 years of the generational change program identified for now. That is, look again at Graph 3, and identify the potential issue we face by 2020. Another 5,000 people, on average, and in line with current trends, could be lost to this region by 2020 (assuming no mining boom in the interim). Without direct policy intervention and strong decision-making, this region may not be able to do very much with an NBN by 2020 – as by 2020 the population is highly likely to be the greater majority of baby boomers with another 10 years on them, while the likely occurrence of diaspora will see to the loss of youth, ambitious business people and professionals.

Broadband (high speed, high capacity) is of direct interest to youth. It provides them with mobility, entertainment, opportunity and social involvement. We already know now that the key jobs in 10 years' time are not yet known due to the rapid technological changes. The NBN project in the Far West of NSW underwrites our economic diversification quest; it will facilitate contemporary skills development, new investment in film, ecotourism, creative industries, and a host of other associated activities. Most importantly, the NBN project underwrites our region's health and education service delivery in the future. It opens opportunity for improved services, at less cost and in swifter time. The NBN delivers education opportunities to the youth in the region that currently don't exist.

Why does Government sanction that the Far West NSW region should compete with well-developed technology networks in the urban areas in highly populated coastal regions? Does this not perpetuate the problems that the Government is trying to unravel with a population strategy?

The type of policy intervention and strong decision-making that needs to be exhibited now, for a sustainable Australia, needs to be exerted in the roll out of the NBN. The unattractive sight of 55 RDA's jostling to be next on the list should not be allowed to occur. There are geographic areas of great need and we consider our Far West NSW region is one of them.

Tomaney (p. 12) says:

“...local and regional development policy should not just be about promoting greater growth, but also about reducing levels of inequality, and that mobilising resources in lagging and/or peripheral areas may constitute a valid recipe for both greater overall growth and lower territorial polarisation. More importantly ... tackling local and regional inequalities may be necessary for the achievement of national wellbeing.”

Also, on the same page:

“The European Commission ... has begun to examine the case for measuring progress “beyond GDP”.”

In pursuit of understanding the meaning of “beyond GDP”, on www.beyond-gdp.eu/ it was revealed that new indicators of success have been developed to be applied to countries. One of these is that of a ‘sustainable society’ – an indicator to be applied country-wide to ascertain if a society is sustainable. In the context of this submission, this and many other indicators in use by the EU, could be applied in Australia’s regions to compare relative results. We note with interest the definition of the sustainable society (used in this indicator) is a society:

- *that meets the needs of the present generation,*
- *that does not compromise the ability of future generations to meet their own needs,*
- *and in which each human being has the opportunity to develop itself in freedom, within a well-balanced society and in harmony with its surroundings.*

The five categories below, Table 6, identify the key components that constitute the sustainable society measure.

Table 6 – Components of the Sustainable Society Index

I Personal Development 1 Healthy Life 2 Sufficient Food 3 Sufficient to Drink 4 Safe Sanitation 5 Education Opportunities 6 Gender	III Well-balanced Society 10 Good Governance 11 Unemployment 12 Population Growth 13 Income Distribution 14 Public Debt	V Sustainable World 18 Forest Area 19 Preservation of Biodiversity 20 Emission of Greenhouse Gases 21 Ecological Footprint 22 International Cooperation
II Clean Environment 7 Air Quality 8 Surface Water Quality 9 Land Quality	IV Sustainable Use of Resources 15 Waste Recycling 16 Use of Renewable Water Resources 17 Consumption of Renewable Energy	

While Australia overall is considered to be a sustainable society by this measure, regions within Australia fall significantly short of expectations. The shortcomings of specific concern in our region are items in categories I (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6), III (10, 11, 12, 13), IV (15, 16, 17) and V (19, 20, 21) and many of these issues are captured in issue no 7, Social Inclusion, pp. 106-107.

As far as the NBN is concerned, the ongoing equal access to quality and diverse health and education services by the youth and others in our region is a major concern for our ability to maintain a sustainable economy into the future. See the map on p. 128 of the issues paper to assist in understanding the current education context for our region.

The second dot point on p. 123 of the issues paper cannot be achieved with substandard infrastructure, and specifically including the NBN. Jobs are essential to regional areas like Far West NSW, and this is why we see urgency in facilitating change via policy intervention and strong decision-making within Government. The region is currently a 'mining region' (p. 124) yet with so few mining companies in the region actually employing significant people, and the finite nature of mineral resources, the long-term mining link remains tenuous. Plus, as discussed previously, mass retrenchments can quickly cool the contributions of mining in the local economy, and as also mentioned previously, FIFO and DIDO is not just a mining phenomenon – it is currently used by Governments in delivery of many services in health and education via FIFO and DIDO consultants or staff who normally reside in Canberra, Sydney, Dubbo, or other urban, coastal centres.

We fully endorse the comments in respect of **tourism** and **technology**, and the need to achieve the 'inclusion dividend' through the involvement of Indigenous people in our region (p. 125). The RDA Far West NSW has developed specific strategies to capitalise on its arts and heritage resources. There is a strong local desire to successfully obtain a Ramsar nomination for the Menindee Lakes system to add scientific weight to the ecotourism aspirations. We have completed preliminary assessments of the ecological facts and discovered that the Menindee Lakes meets all nine criteria of the Ramsar Convention. The Indigenous involvement is fundamental to local regional success in ecotourism and many of the tourism products are intricately linked to Aboriginal art and culture. We have existing models of how this tourism can be packaged and marketed to maximise the involvement of local people.

In this section, our main point of difference with the issues paper concerns infrastructure. We believe that, apart from the NBN, our tourism and technology projects are free of excessive capital costs to upgrade existing infrastructure.

However, we acknowledge that over time the need to upgrade infrastructure will arise but by this time the dividends of increased economic activities in the region will support the commercial case for such upgrades.

The infrastructure needed to support these developments, we contend, will flow more naturally based on commercial realities, given the touchstone projects we flag as critical to our future economic development initiatives

– Ramsar listing of Menindee Lakes (ecotourism);
– world class film studio and tourist precinct in Broken Hill (technology/art/creative industries);
– and the enabling, supporting policy interventions we seek from Governments to address our specific needs in our region. The critical enabling projects are:

- (a) provide financial incentives for individuals to relocate to our region (zone rebate pilot study);
- (b) provide seed funding for businesses tailored to meet our region's needs (granting of 'DGR' status to the Broken Hill Community Foundation);
- (c) form an alliance in Far West NSW to unite councils and the Unincorporated Area of NSW to benefit directly from collaboration, economies of scale;
- (d) specifically package incentives in the Far West of NSW directed at attracting investment in relevant industries that are suited to leverage the ecotourism/technology capabilities (by definition mining would not be included, but local horticultural endeavours would be included) – direct policy intervention and strong decision-making is necessary to support the economic incentives we want to put on the table;
- (e) various other supporting projects.

As can be seen, significant policy turnarounds are demanded by the RDA Far West NSW region in order for us to fulfil our vision for the area.

We ask that these enabling projects not be dismissed without a fair hearing!

Again, leaving the roll out of the NBN in our region to chance, based upon our ability to provide to NBN Co current infrastructure data, is far too uncertain and unpalatable. We need the strongest possible support from Government decision-making and purposeful, dedicated policy intervention.

This addresses dot point 2, section 3.11.6 on p. 134.

We believe that we can best deliver regional development in Far West NSW through enhanced environmental sustainability (Ramsar listing protects ecology of the Menindee Lakes against requirements of an internationally recognised treaty), enhanced economic productivity (the NBN is leveraged by film studio, tourist precinct, technology enabled new businesses in creative industries and flow on links to ecotourism) and enhanced liveability (fully engage our youth, our Indigenous, our older populations, retain existing businesses and professionals, maintain existing health, education and other social services).

We note with interest the second last dot point on p. 135 whereby HECS debt can be muted as incentive for professionals to relocate to remote areas. This is already being tested with medical professionals (www.doctorconnect.gov.au). We have a flagrant response to suggestions that only doctors or lawyers need to be reimbursed for their decisions to be located in these remote areas – why stop there?

Many of us in remote areas struggle to continue to live and work in the regions. There are complex positives and negatives to the argument, but we are curious about the need to discriminate on an occupation by occupation basis. We also need builders, bricklayers, gasfitters, teachers, and many others.

That is why we suggest the zone rebate pilot study. Zone rebates are administered by the Australian Taxation Office and are relevant to individual tax payers. Instead of applying, unfairly, incentives to doctors and lawyers, why not fairly apply the zone rebate in a meaningful way across residents in the Far West NSW region (pilot study) and witness the real impact and effectiveness on how well a region could be repopulated and reinvigorated.

This may help with the last dot point (p. 135). People may be more inclined to ‘stay in place’ if there is ongoing social and community amenity, quality health services and recreation facilities in their town. Over the last decade in Broken Hill, anecdotally, we all know people who left the region due to lack of ‘things to do’. If we build up our communities again, some of the retirement issues would surely take care of themselves.

The idea of ‘working ‘from a distance’ electronically’ and the FIFO/DIDO issues (p. 135) can be easily reversed so that people reside in regional cities like Broken Hill – but tough and targeted policy intervention is essential. The RDA Far West NSW believes the modelling of impacts of a pilot zone rebate scheme that offers significant and substantial tax benefits to the taxpaying residents of Broken Hill, Wilcannia, Menindee etc, will quickly cause renewed interest in relocating to our region. Moreover, the targeted industries and professionals can be more readily targeted. Our residential-based mining community is one of the few remaining in Australia (refer to dot point top of p. 137), and perhaps piloting a case study in Broken Hill could be good for other selected regions in future years, where there is no incentive to establish towns or communities, and where FIFO operations inevitably gain a strong foothold.

We urge the Advisory Panels to seriously consider this prospective enabling incentive that could help address many of our region’s critical issues in a reasonably rapid timeframe. This incentive is specifically tailored for our region, the city of Broken Hill in particular, which has a 120+ year history of continuous existence. It may not suit other mining towns where city infrastructure and facilities are not so grand and cherished.

This is a specific incentive that warrants consideration as a matter of urgency given our region suffers the prospect of unrelenting population losses in the future, without non-mining alternatives to boost economic growth.

We specifically seek urgent consideration of this incentive, given the problems identified in dot point 6 (p. 136). The experience of Ravensthorpe does not compare to the similar issues that have been experienced in Broken Hill. The crushing loss of citizens due to retrenchments and the rapid inflows of population due to excessive recruitment have been graphed and understood in our region (Graphs 2 and 3). Finite resources inevitably force a population trend line down if the economy is singly focused on mining. After celebrating mining in our region for 120+ years, we understand the inevitability of depletion of resources. Government now can make direct policy interventions for the benefit of our region, which support development of alternative industries, ie focused on ecotourism and technology. It does not have to be like Ravensthorpe in each mining community, every time the commodities market takes a dive. Planning and preparation, like we are attempting to do in Far West NSW, should help reduce the shock of such dramatic cycles.

Productivity and Prosperity

The critical comments we make support the vision and directions on p. 168. Every dot point on the page is relevant to our region. The vision is critical for our region as currently our society cannot be comfortably described as 'confident' given so much policy intervention and tough decision-making is necessary to provide that peace of mind. If projects we describe as enablers are not supported by Governments (eg DGR status for the Broken Hill Community Foundation, zone rebate enhancements to attract individuals to region), then our future is far less than confident. We need the support of dedicated, purpose-built policy and strong Government decision-making to turn the vision of RDA Far West NSW into a reality. We subscribe to a tailor-made policy application in our region as past policies have not worked, and some have clearly failed.

We echo the logic presented by the Advisory Panels concerning productivity and prosperity. We specifically note that we believe we have a clear and viable response to address the population growth projections (ie nil) seen in the map on p. 183. This is not the projection we want and we believe we are sitting on several multi-million dollar new industries in our region. Indeed, early modelling of ecotourism in the future Ramsar-listed state of Menindee Lakes, and detailed sensitivity analysis of the film precinct, supports these views. Our suite of projects and plans transcend political party lines. They can offer a real alternative for our region – all we need is policy intervention and strong decision-making.

We seek opportunity to talk further with interested parties about our change strategies, so that we can put life behind these inert words. Whilst we have an interest in the national population strategy, we are clearly focused on our region's survival and prosperity. We contend that our region may form the basis of future case studies and modelling for other regions in respect of how to more appropriately distribute the population across the nation. However, in the first instance, we require immediate growth in the population in our region, and our strategies and projects are designed to quickly achieve this. This supports the comments re economies of scale, p. 192 and the multi-speed economy, p. 196, the environment (chapter 8, pp. 230-235).

Sustainable Development

The critical issues for us in this Panel Report are:

- Acknowledgement of the pressures of population growth on the environment and society; and,
- Acknowledgement of the need for appropriate measures to ensure sustainability.

We feel our region has a sensitive and practical approach to ensure the best outcomes for our environment and its sustainability within the context of economic growth. We understand our environment is fragile and has population limitations. Our regional growth strategies do not involve huge tourism resorts or millions of visitors per year through film studio gates. Rather, our regional growth strategies reflect the making of tiny footprints in our sand as we take a journey on a sustainable growth path that sets up alternative industries to mining.

Appendices attached – sample proposals

1. The DGR status proposal description (regional enabler)
2. The Far West NSW Alliance proposal description (regional enabler)
3. The zone rebate proposal description (regional enabler)
4. The Menindee Lakes Wetlands Project proposal description (ecotourism diversification)
5. The Far West CITIES proposal description (creative industries diversification)

<p>Title:</p>	<p>1. BHCF – Attain ‘DGR’ Status [Broken Hill Community Foundation – Attain ‘Deductible Gift Recipient’ Status]</p>	
<p>Consultation:</p>	<p>RDA Far West Inc (NSW) Detailed consultation with BHCF Chair Vince Gauci, RDA Far West NSW Committee (resolution of the committee, dated 24 June 2010, “<i>That RDA Far West NSW pursue possibility to assist BHCF with obtaining DGR status</i>”).</p>	
<p>Proposal Description</p>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Deductible gift recipient” (DGR) status is a specific treatment of money under federal taxation law that, if successful, enables the recipient, for example the Broken Hill Community Foundation (BHCF), to fund raise for contributions to its capital fund, offering contributors a tax deduction. • The BHCF is a local philanthropic entity that encourages economic and social sustainability of Broken Hill and the Far West region of NSW. Its board of directors are all volunteers. It has successfully raised capital over the years but would be more successful with DGR status. The BHCF, though, is aware that it has successfully raised capital because the cause appeals to contributors, for instance they may be former residents keen to support Broken Hill’s sustainability. • If the BHCF had more funds to invest in the region, there will be more expansion and growth in local business, more businesses established and more jobs created. This region lacks sufficient, dedicated funds to facilitate growth in this area. Credit via banks and finance agencies is tough and in many small business categories it is simply not available. • This is a complex issue and more detail on this can be provided upon request. • A key objection to prior requests for the attainment of DGR status is that “everyone will want it”. To circumvent this issue, which naturally puts Government off such generosity, we are proposing that the Government allow BHCF to have DGR status for a capped time period. In this case, the next 10 years. We recommend this timeframe based on the fact that the BHCF has proved it is a worthy and genuine cause with 10 years of experience in attempting to raise capital funds in a volatile market without DGR status. The demonstrated past experience shows that some support is now essential in order to meet future objectives in the BHCF’s commitment to sustainable economic development in Far West NSW. • Another prior objection is that DGR status is to be available to “charities”. The Far West NSW has experienced such a decline in population over the years that, of the remaining residents, about a third are welfare dependent. There is an economic argument for this region that suggests assisting the regional economy by assisting the BHCF makes financial sense as in the longer term there will be benefits like decreasing funds being assigned to welfare recipients in the region (less unemployed). • In short, an amendment to the relevant tax law in Australia is required to grant BHCF the status of DGR for a capped period of 10 years. At the end of this term, the BHCF and Government could review the performance of the two 10-year periods and perhaps use the data for future planning and roll out of similar community and economic development fund models in targeted areas, eg other mining communities which face mining redundancies, or specific parts of the Murray Darling Basin where irrigation does need to be pared back to promote other less water-intensive industries. 		
<p>What are the key outcomes of the proposal?</p>		
<p>The granting of DGR status to the BHCF for the capped period will help the BHCF achieve its objectives and in turn it will promote the RDA Far West NSW regional goals and business plan activities. The proposal will facilitate economic growth and employment generation. Specifically, key outcomes include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solution to a business investment barrier could be resolved 	<p>RDA FAR WEST NSW BUSINESS PLAN 2010-11, ACTIVITY 4, 14, 21, 26, 27 OUTCOME #5 IMPROVED COMMUNITY AND</p>	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investment is promoted in the region (new small business, new jobs) Diversification of investment in region can be encouraged <u>Government can test drive a community-driven investment funding model for future economic development in targeted regions of Australia.</u> 	<p>ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT</p>
<p>Key Milestones</p>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Stakeholder communications and consultations COMPLETED 2010 Presentations to Federal Ministers ASAP DURING 2011 The BHCF's DGR status to be approved and delivered in the 2011-12 Federal Budget through the necessary amendments to federal tax law By MAY 2011 	
<p>Proposal Cost</p>	
<p>Micro View There are no direct costs associated with this proposal that cannot be met by BHCF and RDA Far West NSW.</p> <p>Macro View Federal Government may forego revenue from a tax deduction offering, though this revenue can hardly be considered foregone when it does not exist without the deduction in place. This is a circular argument that should not affect the decision of Government to support DGR status for the BHCF. The 10 years' experience of the BHCF in attempting to raise capital without DGR status has confirmed that many sources of funds contributions have already been exhausted in the absence of further incentive. The greater cost of not having the DGR status is that the BHCF remains under-capitalised to fund business startups, to address the social and economic transition from a predominantly mining based economy to a more diverse economy, and the ongoing loss of human, social and intellectual capital from the region and increase in welfare dependency.</p>	
<p>Risks and Sensitivities</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Based upon previous experiences in seeking this request from Government: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Government will assume there is a key risk that the DGR status will be required "forever". The BHCF is happy to endorse a capped period to enable it to meet capital fund-raising targets. This means the DGR status expires 10 years into the future. This will enable the BHCF capital fund aspirations to be increased over this period. Government will assume there is a risk that "everyone" will seek DGR status and that Government will be inundated with requests. The key to the BHCF's eligibility for the DGR status is the demonstrated past 10 years of attempting to raise capital funds in the face of the harshest reality that faced the region at the time – the closure of the local Broken Hill mine. The Government could legitimately advise all future entities seeking DGR status to likewise demonstrate similar periods (ie 10 years) of proactive engagement of contributors for such causes prior to consideration for eligibility. The Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal (FRRR) is an organisation with a DGR status. The BHCF acknowledges that FRRR serves a great purpose and indeed, the BHCF has benefitted from FRRR assistance. However, it is a Melbourne-Bendigo centric organisation and it does not guarantee local community input into its funding decision-making and in many grant funds' qualifying terms, the population base of Broken Hill precludes its eligibility for assistance as its population is greater than 10,000. Most grant funds are packaged into insignificant amounts. Also, FRRR makes it clear they will not guarantee that funds will be directed to particular geographic areas. For these and other reasons, FRRR is not the answer to rural or regional renewal in Far West NSW. 	

Title:	<h2 style="text-align: center;">2. Far West NSW Alliance</h2>	
Consultation:	<p>RDA Far West Inc (NSW)</p> <p>No consultation to date.</p>	
<p>Proposal Description</p>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The unincorporated area of NSW, Central Darling Shire Council and Broken Hill City Council (and possibly other councils in western NSW) attempt to achieve similar outcomes in the region and these activities can be more sensibly and efficiently aligned. • The vision for the economic diversification and growth in Far West NSW requires dedicated efforts, alignment of priorities. • Cost savings in some areas due to sharing or aligning of activities could be significant. • Elected representation may or may not be affected, but the current declining population in the area is causing an imbalance in current representation. Some parts of the region have more say than others. • No local authority in western NSW is profitable. Forming an alliance will help to achieve economies of scale. 		
<p>What are the key outcomes of the proposal?</p>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective and efficient use of resources • Fairer representation among the population • Absolute unity in regional priorities, goals • The best possible chance to achieve economic diversification, sustainable growth, and indeed all the regional goals for the Far West NSW region: <p>1. Broaden the economic base <i>Rationale:</i> Retention of existing industry and jobs is vital – but new investment will stimulate better use of under-used resources; a more stable workforce; broadening of the skills base; improved local goods and services; more sustainable community facilities; and the achievement of other economic, environmental and social objectives.</p> <p>2. Strengthen the infrastructure capacity <i>Rationale:</i> Although the region has key infrastructure in place, strengthening regional capacity to manage resources such as water and tapping into relatively new industries such as renewable energy and communication technology will enable the region to move forward – economically, socially and environmentally.</p> <p>3. Develop creative industries <i>Rationale:</i> A two-tiered approach to creative industries is required: (1) support to encourage the growth and sustainability of participants in existing creative industries such as art, tourism and film, and (2) attraction and development of ‘new’ creative industries with an emphasis on technological advancements.</p> <p>4. Improve the quality of life <i>Rationale:</i> A greater balance of service delivery is required across the region to address issues identified in unemployment data, demographics and social profile data – acknowledging that addressing these issues will have a positive impact on other regional issues and challenges.</p> <p>5. Engage the community</p>	<p>THE LOGIC WITHIN THE RDA FAR WEST NSW REGIONAL PLAN 2010-2020 AND RDA FAR WEST NSW BUSINESS PLAN FULLY SUPPORTS SUCH AN OUTCOME</p>	

Rationale: A socially inclusive region will seek to reduce disadvantage and increase participation in jobs, education, training and community activities. To achieve this, knowledge and information needs to be shared – and partnerships developed – so all sections of the community are engaged in the process.

Key Milestones

This proposal entails a broad conversation among all the key players in Far West NSW **TO BE COMMENCED AND CONCLUDED DURING 2011**

Proposal Cost

Micro View

There could be initial expenditure involved in alignment of policies, processes and systems.

Macro View

Savings from economies of scale could be derived longer term.

Risks and Sensitivities

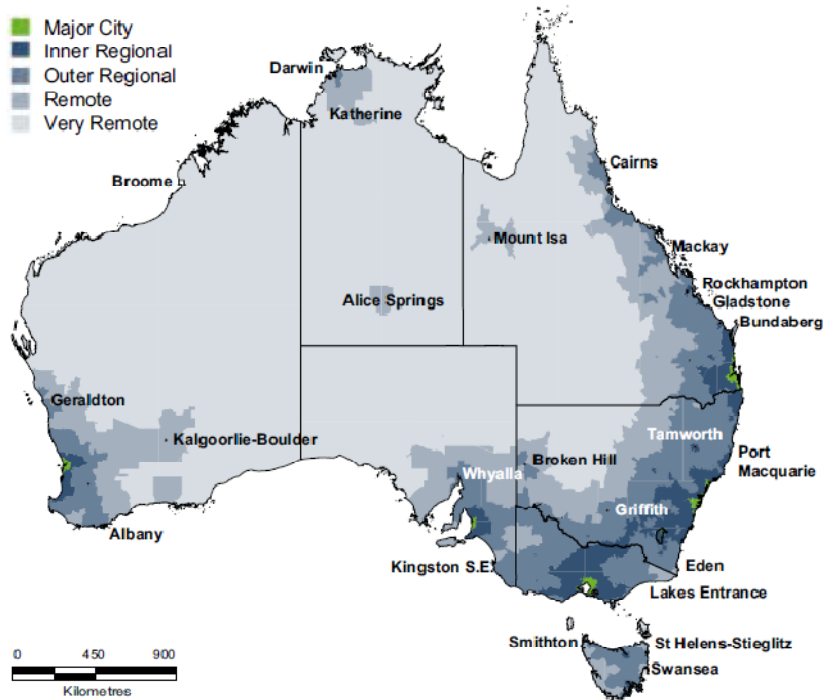
- Local political opposition. The argument for change is compelling given reduced population, inability of existing rates incomes to cover costs of service provision.
- Agreement on regional priorities will be difficult to obtain. This is unlikely as all parts of the region have expressed common themes in priorities to RDA Far West NSW during consultation in 2010.
- State and Federal political opposition. Why oppose something that makes sense, particularly if local leaders express support for it. Clearly if there is no local support then the proposal is canned.

Title:	3. Zone Rebate	
Consultation:	<p>RDA Far West Inc (NSW)</p> <p>Information was provided to The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment and Workplace Relations during its inquiry into regional skills relocation, dated 16 April 2010. This issue became popular in the media and was picked up by ABC Radio in regional NSW at the time, and also Desert Knowledge Australia in an online/teleconference hook-up linking many people across the nation. Broad support for the fundamental concept exists in regional Australia. There was a follow up interview following this submission, then a Federal Election, then complete silence. We raise this matter again as a solution to urban over-crowding, skills relocation.</p>	
Proposal Description		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult and costly to recruit and relocate necessary skilled and professional people to Far West NSW. • The population decline in Far West NSW has been over many decades. All our region's towns are in decline for various reasons, and long term downward trends are reflected in ABS data: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Broken Hill – due to ongoing mining boom-bust cycles, closure of Government services ○ Tibooburra –ever since RTA road gangs removed in the 1980s* ○ Ivanhoe – ever since Rail maintenance gangs removed since the 1980s* ○ Menindee and Wilcannia – ever since the Darling River started to dry up* • Unemployment is very high in our region Broken Hill nominally 8% or higher, depending on time of year; Wilcannia and Menindee in double digits, and over 20% amongst Indigenous population; data is variable, depending on when counts are performed and depending on how well data is reflected of reality. • With more unemployed and older people in our region, there is urgency to attract new residents to our regions – people who are able to work or start businesses in areas demanded by the region. • New families and younger people are urgently needed in our region to 'pick up the baton' where the current fatigued community leaders and volunteers are no longer able to continue contributing as they did in past years. This problem is common across our whole region. • The ZONE REBATE is already in place and in use by the ATO. It can be amended to reflect current data on remoteness and isolation that is in use by BITRE and compiled with data from the ABS (see Figure 1 at the end of this proposal). • The BITRE map shows in shades of grey the VERY REMOTE, REMOTE and OUTER REGIONAL areas that may be more deserving of consideration these days for a Zone Rebate. We suggest population change and density and distance from cities assist with definition of areas appropriate for a significant zone rebate. • Already, the Government targets doctors to regional and remote areas (see www.doctorconnect.gov.au). It is plain discrimination not to treat other skilled workers and professionals to the same areas. Where is the site for electricians, builders, plumbers, carpet layers, bricklayers, graphic artists, IT specialists? <p>*Community consultation general comments – precise years or timings may not be accurate.</p>		
What are the key outcomes of the proposal?		
A relevant Zone Rebate meets the top three goals contained in the RDA Far West Regional Plan – (i) Broaden the economic base, (ii) Strengthen the infrastructure capacity, and (iii)	RDA FAR WEST NSW BUSINESS PLAN 2010-11,	

<p>Develop creative industries, and it would also assist in achieving goals (iv) Improve the quality of life and (v) Engage the community. Without financial incentives, we cannot hope to rebuild the communities in our region. An annual tax incentive, that is significant, will assist.</p>	<p>ACTIVITY 20 OUTCOME #5 IMPROVED COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT</p>
<p>Key Milestones</p>	
<p>Suggest BITRE and the ATO collaborate to identify the size of the rebate for the bottom three shades of grey to attract significant zone rebates, but, since the outcome of such a clever-come-outrageous plan is unpredictable, submit the Far West NSW region, including the unincorporated area, BHCC and CDSC, to a test or pilot project over a set period of time, say three years. This could signal early successes and unresolved or unexpected matters prior to wider roll-out. TO BE COMPLETED AND IMPLEMENTED AT FEDERAL BUDGET 2011-12</p>	
<p>Proposal Cost</p>	
<p>Micro View Example: Australia's population is 22,560,586*. Assume 90% of this population is probably in the BITRE MAJOR CITY or INNER REGIONAL areas. 10% left is 2.26m. Assume three-quarters are not paying tax as they are children, students, retired, disabled, unemployed, mums or dads at home. If one-quarter is earning and paying tax, then there are about 560,000 possible persons in line for the BITRE area Zone Rebates. If say, \$50k was the incentive, which is not unreasonable compared to the offering for doctors, then cost to Federal tax revenues is \$28m. This would be relatively insignificant to the benefits gained by removing 560,000 people from cities. Also, there would be savings in regional and rural areas due to more jobs being formed and less welfare for unemployed or early retirement because there are no other options. The cost of this proposal in effect could very well likely net out to nil. However, some financial modeling should verify this – Treasury and ATO people could do this, ie no extra fees for consultants should be necessary. * http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/0/1647509ef7e25faaca2568a900154b63?OpenDocument</p> <p>Macro View Over time, the impact of a \$50k zone rebate which is significantly higher than the current miniscule amounts could be increased or decreased. [Note, the \$50k is the type of start figure suggested to make it significant and to get it to sell itself.]</p>	
<p>Risks and Sensitivities</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Gold-rush-like' behavior is exhibited as people flock to sensitive, vulnerable remote locations. There is room for only so many people in the Far West NSW region. Broken Hill could absorb another 10,000 people. However, Tibooburra could welcome only another few hundred. This is also the same for White Cliffs, Wilcannia, Menindee and Ivanhoe. There should be annual reviews to adjust the rebate to reflect needs. ABS census data is too infrequent. Jobs data and other metrics measured more frequently could be used. • Jealousy among targeted skills, professions. Local RDA committees are well equipped to identify needs via local consultation. • Modeling reveals \$50k to little or too much. Adjust the rebate to reflect the amount necessary to repopulate targeted inland areas like Broken Hill. The pilot program area can rectify inefficiencies. 	

FIGURE 1 BELOW IS SOURCED FROM “ABOUT AUSTRALIA’S REGIONS JUNE 2008” PUBLISHED BY BUREAU OF INFRASTRUCTURE, TRANSPORT AND REGIONAL ECONOMICS. DATA USED BY BITRE IS SOURCED FROM THE AUSTRALIAN BUREAU OF STATISTICS

Figure 1 Remoteness Classes in Australia, 2006



Note: Christmas Island & Cocos (Keeling) Islands are part of Very Remote Australia. Other external territories are excluded from the classification.

Source: ABS Australian Standard Geographical Classification: Remoteness Structure, 2006.

Examples of localities in each remoteness class

Major Cities of Australia:
Melbourne CBD, Newcastle CBD, Fremantle, Surfers Paradise, Noosa

Inner Regional Australia:
Hobart, Wodonga, Bunbury, Tamworth

Outer Regional Australia:
Darwin, Whyalla, Cairns, Swan Hill, Gunnedah

Remote Australia:
Alice Springs, Mount Isa, Port Lincoln, Esperance, Kununurra

Very Remote Australia:
Longreach, Coober Pedy, Tennant Creek, Ceduna

Title:	4. Menindee Lakes Wetlands Project	
Consultation:	<p>RDA Far West Inc (NSW)</p> <p>Detailed consultation with the Menindee, Broken Hill communities (Councils, Indigenous Elders, National Parks and Wildlife, many others) via specific public meetings and presentations, media discussions, stakeholder meetings. A key project partner is the Lower Murray Darling CMA.</p>	
Proposal Description		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Ramsar listing in the Menindee Lakes area will identify the site as being a Wetlands of International Importance. Environmental water flows are supported under federal law. • Protection of the lakes' unique ecological character will see environmental improvements in region. A review of past studies reveals biodiversity meets criteria for Ramsar listing. • Ramsar listings generally provide a boost for eco-tourism. The Menindee community seeks to develop a "boutique town" which flourishes on environmental tourism. Social and economic benefits are tremendous. • Further assessment of unpublished research relating to cultural and geological values may support a case for World Heritage listing – there are potential links to the Mungo area. • This is a difficult project involving communications with around 18 stakeholder groups and organisations. All have been communicated with and are now regularly engaged. • More information is available – research, the RDA Far West commissioned report, etc. 		
What are the key outcomes of the proposal?		
<p>The Menindee Lakes Wetlands Project meets all five goals in the RDA Far West Regional Plan. It is a catalyst for stimulation of the economy of Menindee and the Far West region through new investment opportunities and business start-ups. Key outcomes associated with increased investment are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental restoration, preservation of the Menindee Lakes system, Darling River. • Quality of life improvements for Indigenous people in the Far West NSW region. • Sustainability of Menindee township, ensure services are available, economic diversity. 	<p>RDA FAR WEST NSW BUSINESS PLAN 2010-11, ACTIVITY 29, 30 OUTCOME #5 IMPROVED COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT</p>	
Key Milestones		
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Community Consultation (ascertain support) COMPLETED JULY-DEC 2010 5. Form Stakeholder Group COMPLETED 2010 6. Identify Interim Steering Committee COMPLETED 2010 (CONFIRM MENINDEE LATE MARCH 2011) 7. Perform Economic Valuation – "Future State" ASAP AWAITING CONFIRMATION TO PROCEED \$10K 8. RDA Far West/LMDCMA liaise (project needs, resources, timeline) UNDERWAY FEB-MAR 2011 9. DECCW Advice (process to proceed) BY MAR 2011 PERHAPS 10. Stakeholder Matrix (impacts & costs, high level) ASAP OR APPROX MAR 2011 11. Key Risks, Cost/Benefit Analysis PARTLY ADDRESSED IN ITEM 4; NEED TO PURSUE MAR-APR 2011 12. Communication with Stakeholders on costs/benefits/risks AIM FOR MAR 2011 MEETING, MENINDEE 		

13. Engage Project Officer to pursue stakeholder discussions on site boundaries **EOI DUE 11 FEB 2011**

14. Pursue grant funds to engage Project Officer **ASAP OR VIA GRANT PROCESSES MAY TO NOV 2011**

This project has moving milestones due to many stakeholders, resources constraints. No point documenting milestones beyond these fundamentals at this point.

Proposal Cost

Micro View

Item 3 – Interim Steering Committee – RDA Far West NSW has allocated \$6k for costs

Item 4 – Economic valuation by AEC Group is \$9.8k (Funds obtained – Fed Govt for MDB works)

Item 5 – LMDCMA may be able to divert some resources to assist in interim

Item 7, 8 – May require quote once the economic valuation is finished, say \$10k if same firm

Item 10, 11 – PO role is 6-12 months and could require up to \$150k (CDSC will provide office – other operational costs like phone, vehicle, PC will be funded via lease/hire)

Macro View

This project has the ability to invigorate economic activity and job creation in Menindee thereby relieving many social issues like unemployment, youth engagement, community sustainability, welfare dependency reduction, skills development and retention. Outcomes are based on social and environmental needs, and not just the pure economics of the “Future State” of Menindee due to a Ramsar listing.

Risks and Sensitivities

- The most critical risk is project rejection or lack of engagement by certain stakeholders due to lack of willingness to compromise. The key stakeholders likely to fall into this category are the Federal and State Governments who have commercial and operational interests. The treatment for this is open, transparent communication. In addition, the greater public good aspects of the proposal need to be constantly communicated amongst all stakeholders. Face to face discussions need to be facilitated, visits to Menindee to view the landscape and to envisage the future, speak with community members and so on are essential.
- Another risk is that scientific evidence fails to support a Ramsar listing at Menindee Lakes. The local community is convinced the science will meet DECCW’s/Ramsar Convention’s criteria and the RDA Far West has invested in a review of the science which supports the project and pursued consultation on this basis. However, DECCW will take a clinical approach and the outcome is as yet unknown. This risk can only be eliminated by DECCW.
- Loss of the key project driver (RDA Far West) too early is a project risk. The local Indigenous people need assistance and direction. They support the project but lack the project management and organizational skills and other resources to progress this complex and sensitive project. The RDAFW needs to continue to drive until the project picks up structure and resources.
- Lack of funds to engage the PO, or lack of ability to pursue other aspects of the project is a project risk. There are conflicting stakeholder interests within both Federal and State Governments. The project is easily snuffed by starving the project of funds and resources. The RDA Far West has no treatment in place for such outcomes and will continue to support the project in the best interests of the Far West NSW community until it becomes futile to do so.

<p>Title:</p>	<h2 style="text-align: center;">5. Far West CITIES</h2>	
<p>Consultation:</p>	<p>RDA Far West Inc (NSW)</p> <p>CITIES are Creative Industries and Technology Incubator Enterprise Sites. This project has full support within our region and is particularly relevant to the Indigenous community as a means to socialise and engage youth. A presentation to the Wilcannia Community Working Party gained support and agencies within the region noted how this project could be integrated with other projects. The project has also gained the interest of a top-four bank from a corporate sponsorship perspective (Indigenous support). Many Far West NSW region community organisations have expressed support for this project.</p>	
<p>Proposal Description</p>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This project is highly technology dependent, leverages the NBN, addresses social inclusion matters in the region, and forms a platform for the future diversification of the Far West NSW economy with significant commercial upside. Yet, guidelines from Government and philanthropic organisations consistently deny project funding for such a project because capital purchase of hardware and software is required, ongoing O&M funds are needed and technology experts need to be recruited. • The project itself runs on the direction of a steering committee (called the “Virtual Team”). The following information is extracted from the RDA Far West NSW 2010-11 Business Plan: • Far West CITIES Virtual Team Formed Promote development of skills in creative industries and other contemporary technologies, targeting youth. Create opportunities for the region’s people to become technologically competent through trade events, training and skills development programs, and/or exposure to creative industries success stories. • Far West CITIES Targeted Skills Identified Liaise with education institutions to develop programs and recreational events of relevance to young people, which may operate within the schools system or as special programs during holiday periods. Focus on skills most relevant for industries that are deemed suitable, new or targeted for the region, including those relevant to film, tourism, art (graphic and performing), software, digital media, sport, entertainment, general commerce. Support both formal/institutional and free-form/creative learning styles. For formal styles, facilitate links between potential project participants located in the region, and a variety of education service providers, eg registered training organisations, TAFE facilities, universities, specialist providers, any of which may be located within the region or outside the region. • Far West CITIES Infrastructure, Sites Identified, Confirmed Locate building and facilities throughout the region, identifying buildings which are vacant, available for use, appropriate for purpose. Sites need to be capable of being linked to online services, and need to be available for linking with each other building or site. • Far West CITIES Funds, Sponsors Identified, Pursued Target industry/technology leaders for support, leadership, mentoring services. Invite them to become benefactors of Far West CITIES to support the growth and development of creative industries in Far West NSW. Promote the Far West of NSW as the site for Australian and international creative industry companies to form clusters and hubs. 		
<p>What are the key outcomes of the proposal?</p>		
<p>The Far West CITIES meets the first three goals in the RDA Far West Regional Plan and delivers a number of outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A responsive, effective project team is established to drive and guide the development of creative industries. Flexibility is optimised via use of online collaborative tools consistent with the “geography is no barrier” regional theme. • The facilities promote development of identified skills, provide free-form learning styles and form 	<p>RDA FAR WEST NSW BUSINESS PLAN 2010-11, ACTIVITY – 45-48 OUTCOME #5 IMPROVED COMMUNITY AND</p>	

<p>links where possible to formal learning institutions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A number of building facilities are identified to house the project hardware and software. These are distributed throughout the region and can be accessed by any persons. • Increase potential for funding. 	<p>ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT</p>
<p>Key Milestones</p>	
<p>15. Form Virtual Team TO BE COMPLETED DURING 2011</p> <p>16. Recruit specialist project manager TO BE COMPLETED DURING 2011 BY THE VIRTUAL TEAM/STEERING COMMITTEE</p>	
<p>Proposal Cost</p>	
<p>Micro View Item 2 above, technology recruitment and other project set up costs are estimated at \$200k. The short term funding is not for project feasibility so much as it is seen as a means to employ Government funds in an alternative way, especially in Wilcannia. This alternative way has the approval of Indigenous people in the region.</p> <p>Macro View Given the Indigenous content of this project, it is felt that funds from relevant agencies could facilitate this project over the longer term, especially in Wilcannia, a so-called RSD site. It is a key focus of the Project Manager to secure funds and sponsorship from Government, philanthropic organisations and individual corporations. Critical links with universities and the Robinson College and TAFE in western NSW must be formalised for ongoing support. Since this project is geared to become commercially viable in the long term, early links with key technology businesses is critical. The funding over the longer term is expected to reduce as income is generated.</p>	
<p>Risks and Sensitivities</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No funds – no project. • No NBN – no project. • Driver is RDA Far West NSW at present. This project goes nowhere until a Project Manager is recruited. A feasibility study for the project is not required. It is assumed that the Project Manager will assess the potential of this project in full and report on costs and benefits to the steering committee. • Lack of community buy-in. This project is supported by the community, Indigenous leaders, education stakeholders, social welfare agencies, employment agents, many others. A ‘trial’ of how technology engages the disengaged has been held in Broken Hill during 2010 and the results were remarkable. We seek to liaise with that project proponent to help Far West CITIES become a success amongst our region’s youth. 	