



ANNUAL REPORT

2016 - 2017





ABOUT THE REGION

"The Orana region covers central and north western NSW, an area of more than 199,000 square kilometres, or 27 per cent of the state. Orana means 'Welcome' in Wiradjuri, the language of one of the region's indigenous populations. The region extends from the hilly western slopes of the Warrumbungle Ranges in the east, to the flat plains of Cobar and Bourke in the west, and north to the Queensland border. Orana encompasses the 12 Local Government Areas of Bourke, Bogan, Brewarrina, Cobar, Coonamble, Dubbo, Gilgandra, Narromine, Mid-Western, Warren, Walgett and Warrumbungles.

The region has an estimated population of 122,868 including 49,012 families and it draws 1.8 million visitors each year. Attractions include Taronga Western Plains Zoo, Macquarie Marshes, Warrumbungle National Park and the Wellington Caves.

Major industry includes agriculture, mining, tourism and manufacturing. Mining interests include gold, silver, copper, zinc and rare earths, contributing \$740M to the regional economy. Agriculture adds \$403M to the Orana, through the commodities of beef, wool, cotton and cereal cropping. The Orana region has a GRP of \$7.5M, with each worker contributing \$170,882.

With a vested interest in migration, telecommunications and addressing skills shortage, RDA Orana aims to assist the community by encouraging innovation, investment and sustainable growth. The vision is to have a clear identity, a progressive society and a community that encourages opportunity, making the most of strength and diversity in the population across the sectors of industry and employment, health and education and recreational services.



JOHN WALKOM, CHAIR

I have great pleasure in presenting this update of the RDA Orana region. I have been Chair of the RDA Orana Committee since 2009 and have observed many positive changes within our region in that time. Firstly, there has been huge investment in infrastructure to grow communities, with upward of \$1billion currently being poured into projects which will boost the towns and cities of our region. There has been population growth in the regional centres of Mudgee (7.9 per cent) and Dubbo (5.9 per cent) and despite decline in some of the smaller townships, there is a lot of energy and enthusiasm being geared towards tackling that trend. One of those is a business skills survey being conducted by RDA Orana focusing on industry sector, service provision, local workforce and training challenges. It has been developed with the future of the region in mind and it is an effort to evaluate the current state of the region and use this as a platform to make the most of the opportunities that present themselves.

Led by business and community representatives, RDA Orana is strongly focused on diversifying the economic base of the region, workforce planning and development, business investment, infrastructure and whole of government planning. RDA Orana connects directly with the region's business, industry and community to reflect the drivers and barriers. Regular meaningful engagement with our stakeholders assists us in facilitating long term development to secure a vibrant and sustainable regional economy.



MEGAN DIXON, EXECUTIVE OFFICER

There are many exciting opportunities occurring in the Orana region with expansion and development across many sectors.

Growth in the mining sector has led to employment, and development of carbon farming, bio-industries and renewable energy resources will provide opportunity to diversify our economy and bring new income prospects to the region. Further opportunities exist around tourism and transport for accessing new domestic and international markets. The focus now is to gauge the needs of business operators, address the gaps in telecommunications infrastructure and strengthen our ties with international markets in order to be the most innovative and accessible region that we can be.

HIGHLIGHTS

Investment has been made in various sectors with the view to capitalising on opportunities and securing growth and stability for the region. The projects we pursue now, the investigations we make and the collaborations we seek will all contribute to the ongoing strength and viability of Orana into the future.

PROJECTS

Two infrastructure studies were completed in 2016 which relate to the region's transport industry and future freight options. On the ground, the Orana Freight and Logistics Capability Study conducted by Urbis revealed that the **regional freight task is forecast to grow significantly over the next 20 years**, with an increase of 76 percent on current volumes expected by 2035. Across NSW, the freight task is expected to double by 2030 and triple by 2050.

The focus of the analysis showed the freight and logistics network which underpins the Orana region while also recognising the interconnectivity between the region and the broader state and national freight networks. Currently, the existing network is functional and does not constrain regional productivity or access to markets. However, without additional investment, the increased freight task may create new constraints and barriers in the network over time.

Some of the added pressures include road conditions, traffic congestion and accessibility.



PROJECTS (CONT)

The second study, also conducted by Urbis, was the Orana International Air Freight Feasibility Study. It found that an international air freight facility would be possible in the region, sometime in the future. The report showed that Dubbo City Regional Airport would offer the best location for the hub, given its level of infrastructure and facilities. However, some changes would be needed to bring it up to international standards as it would require investment in upgrading, particularly a cargo terminal, IT and customs facilities, including quarantine and border restrictions. Upgraded runway surfaces would also have to be installed to meet potential future needs.

Current major export destinations for Australian air freight include New Zealand, Singapore, Hong Kong, United Arab Emirates, Japan, USA and ASEAN markets.

SKILLED MIGRATION

RDA Orana sponsors applicants who possess skills needed in the region. Successful applicants and their dependants can live and work in specified regional areas of Australia for up to four years and meet requirements to apply for permanent residency.

To be nominated by RDA Orana, applicants must be on the current Orana occupation list and meet the points-based nomination criteria.

RDA Orana can also assist regional employers wishing to sponsor skilled workers into positions which cannot be filled using the local labour market under the Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme. In 2017, more than 100 skilled migration submissions have been received by RDA Orana with applicants from all parts of Asia, the UK and Africa. Their occupational backgrounds include nursing, engineering and mechanical.

PARTNERSHIPS

RDA Orana has positioned itself strongly with Federal and State Governments and has had significant input into regional policy and strategies to assist our communities. It has also worked hard to ensure the Orana is known not only at home, but abroad. These relationships will only continue to grow.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS CASE STUDIES

Since March this year, RDA Orana has been conducting a series of case studies investigating gaps in telecommunications infrastructure in the region.

The information gathered has revealed that there is a definitive divide between rural and metropolitan areas when it comes to availability, accessibility and costs.

The data collected also reflects the overwhelming frustrations of residents in these communities whose lack of service is unsatisfactory.

The areas covered by the case study are varied, with some participants in rural locations and others living closer to regional centres such as Dubbo and Mudgee.

The need for adequate telecommunications service is crucial in all areas.

Lack of service inhibits the ability to run successful businesses, which in turn affects family life and emotional wellbeing. The inability to contact emergency services during a crisis also becomes a life-threatening situation.



SNAPSHOT 2017

Infrastructure

Release of dual reports outlining key priorities for regional transport: Orana International Air Freight Feasibility Study. Orana International Air Freight Feasibility Study

Employment

Regional Skills Outlook study will help with identifying and investigating issues affecting businesses

Planning

Support of the Building Better Regions Fund to drive economic growth and build stronger regional communities into the future

Environment

With strong input from the local community, the Cobar Bio-Hub will contribute to the region's economy, development and sustainability

Partnerships

Continued support from Federal, State and Local Governments, with extended funding and firm commitment for future growth and opportunity.

Business

Affiliation with regional companies continues to blossom, with communications and support lending themselves to ongoing partnerships



PRIORITIES

Skilled recruitment attraction along with economic development opportunities will remain a key focus for RDA Orana. In that regard, the 2017 Regional Skills Outlook will help with identifying and investigating issues affecting businesses operating throughout the Orana region. This research focuses on key areas of industry including innovation, skills, labour and training needs.

Recommendations provided in this report will be used to develop strategies to address any shortfalls. The project aims to assess barriers, address labour issues and examine the skills of business owners with the projected outcome being to develop and present policy responses to State and Federal Government on issues around labour and training.

Inland Rail and positioning our region to take advantage of this billion project, also remains a key priority for the region, with an identified need for an organisation such as RDA Orana to work with our businesses, to ensure that they are ready to take advantage of the many opportunities that this project will present, from construction, through to commissioning.

Advancing the Cobbar Biohub and Solar Thermal Project, from feasibility to reality, also remains high on our agenda. RDA Orana will continue to work with the project proponents and its many stakeholders to work through issues, as they arise, with a view to realising this \$40M project within the next three years.

