



# Regional Capitals Australia

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ANNUAL STATEMENT // 2015





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Mayor Deirdre Comerford  
Regional Capitals Australia Chair  
Mackay Regional Council Mayor

## MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

This year has been a watershed year for [Regional Capitals Australia](#), with great strides made towards our goal of building a nation of strong, sustainable and well-planned regional capitals and connected communities.

It has been an exciting first few months as Chair, welcoming three new members from my own state of Queensland to bring RCA's total membership to 30.

A warm welcome goes to Townsville City Council, Rockhampton Regional Council and Bundaberg Regional Council, and our two newest New South Wales members, Cessnock City Council and Coffs Harbour City Council who all see the value of forging a strong, united voice for our cities.

I would like to thank previous Chair, Cr Rod Kendall, for his excellent steadfast leadership and passionate advocacy for RCA over the past year.

Creating vibrant regional capitals requires not only an investment in infrastructure and services but an investment in thinking. This year has seen RCA working with all levels of government to keep the momentum of regionalism moving forward, building our evidence base and pushing our case wherever we found the opportunity.

2015 started with the exciting news that the Senate voted for an Inquiry into the 'future role and contribution of regional capitals to Australia'.

This was the result of considerable advocacy and engagement with the Senate Standing Committees on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport and was fantastic news for our alliance.

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*Our mission is to provide a formal platform to champion the continued growth and sustainable development of regional capitals around the nation.*

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RCA capitalised on the significant opportunity for our membership to illustrate to the Federal government the untapped economic potential of our cities, our unique characteristics, and why effective planning and policy must consider the strategic role regional capitals

play in a growing Australia and developed a comprehensive submission and presenting the key findings at the first public hearing in Geelong on August 21.

In March, regional capitals from across Australia gathered in my home city, Mackay, Queensland for RCA's second national conference, Regionalism 2.0. The event featured some of Australia's top critical thinkers, innovators and researchers in regional and urban development policy, sparking vital conversations about regional capitals' role in Australia's future and putting regional capitals on the national policy agenda.

It is becoming increasingly clear through our analysis and ongoing definition of our policy positions that regional capitals are too big to ignore, and the continued absence of informed and specific policy to guide the development of regional capitals can only diminish Australia's prosperity if left unaddressed.

**The time for our federal policy makers to act is now.**

We have a lot of work ahead of us as we approach the federal election, and members can expect to be called upon to contribute to the policy positions being put forward in our 18-month campaign.

I look forward to working with you.



Mayor Deirdre Comerford  
Chair, Regional Capitals Australia

Key activities and achievements

**Reform of the Federation White Paper**

On November 18, 2014 RCA was involved in a workshop at the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet in Canberra to provide feedback on the Reform of the Federation White Paper with the Department project director, David deCarvalho.

Members learned more about the project and identified opportunities to showcase the critical role regional capitals play in delivering services to regional Australia and driving economic growth.

**Getting the message out**

In 2014 Regional Capitals Australia put together a [professional video](#) to showcase the importance of regional capitals and the benefits of joining the alliance. RCA representatives also spoke at the NSW Country Mayors' Association and other events to broaden regional capitals membership.

**Senate Inquiry into role and contribution of regional capitals**

After extensive advocacy by Regional Capitals Australia, on 11 February 2015, the Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee inquire into "[The future role and contribution of regional capitals to Australia](#)".

Through ongoing engagement with the Federal Government, RCA worked hard to ensure this Inquiry was passed in the Senate. In April 2015, Regional Capitals Australia made a submission to the Inquiry.

[Our submission](#) addressed the lack of policy representing regional capitals and highlighted the need for consistent and guaranteed funding and investment to ensure regional capitals live up to their full social and economic potential.

Our submission provides an overview of:

- Demographic trends and changing roles of regional capitals
- Current funding to regional capitals
- A better funding basis
- Investment challenges and opportunities
- Impact on the changing environment
- Policies and incentives for growth



Cr Mathew Dickerson, Mayor Dubbo City Council;  
Cr Michael Neoh, Mayor Warrnambool City Council;  
Cr Rod Kendall, Mayor Wagga Wagga City Council



RCA membership video



Cr Rod Kendall, Mayor Wagga Wagga City Council;  
Mayor Deirdre Comerford, Mackay Regional Council;  
Rachael Sweeney and Catherine McGovern, RCA Secretariat at Geelong public hearing

Key activities and achievements

**ACELG Report: Local Government Growing Regional Australia**

The report [Local Government Growing Regional Australia](#) was officially launched at the Regional Capitals Australia (RCA) conference Regionalism 2.0 in Mackay, Queensland in March 2015.

The research, conducted in partnership between RCA and the Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government (ACELG) explores the factors underpinning strong and sustainable regional capitals and regions, and the vital role played by local government in this crucial national issue.

The report found that a new way of thinking about regional economic development focuses on tapping under-utilised potential in all regions to enhance competitiveness. Regional economic development can also be more effective when the approach works closely with other sectors and governments. This contrasts with the top-down, centralised approaches of the past that emphasised subsidies and compensation for regional 'disadvantage.'

The report includes case studies of the regional capital councils of Geelong (VIC), Geraldton (WA), Mackay (QLD), Wagga Wagga (NSW) and Launceston (TAS) that outline key ingredients for ongoing positive growth of regional capitals and their surrounding regions.

**Regionalism 2.0 Conference**

On March 26, 2015 at the Mackay Entertainment and Convention Centre, Queensland, RCA held its second national conference: Regionalism 2.0: Nation Building through strong capitals and connected communities.

The event attracted Mayors, CEOs, councillors and RDA staff from regional capitals nationwide, featuring some of Australia's top critical thinkers, innovators and researchers in regional and urban development policy.

Conference sessions included: 'the Rise of Regional Capitals', 'Regional Capitals of the future', 'Connecting regions to the world through new markets and world class infrastructure', and "The Great Debate" - National Broadband Network and technology: where do regional capitals stand in a digitally connected future?"

The feedback from this event has highlighted the value in the membership getting together to share their insights and learn about the best way forward.



Senator Matthew Canavan; Dr Robyn Morris, ACELG; the Hon Julie Collins, Shadow Minister for Regional Development and Local Government



Anthony Schinck, CEO City of Ballarat; Su McCluskey, (former) CEO Regional Australia Institute; Trent Williams; General Manager External Affairs NBN Co



The Hon. Julie Collins MP introduces a video message from the Hon Anthony Albanese, Shadow Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, Tourism and Cities

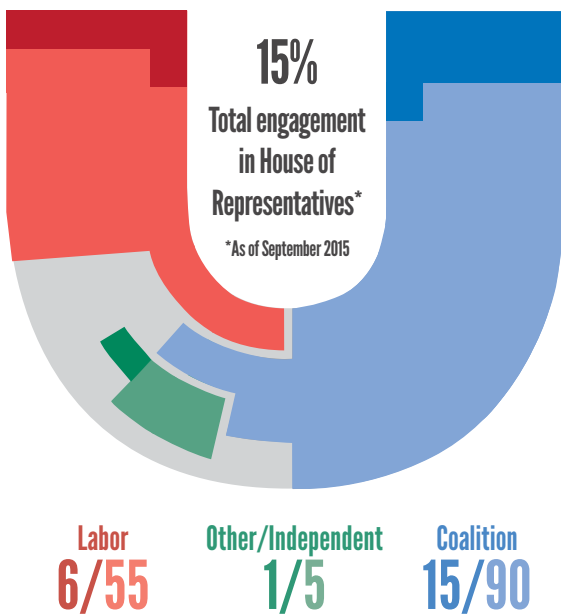
Key activities and achievements

Stakeholder Engagement

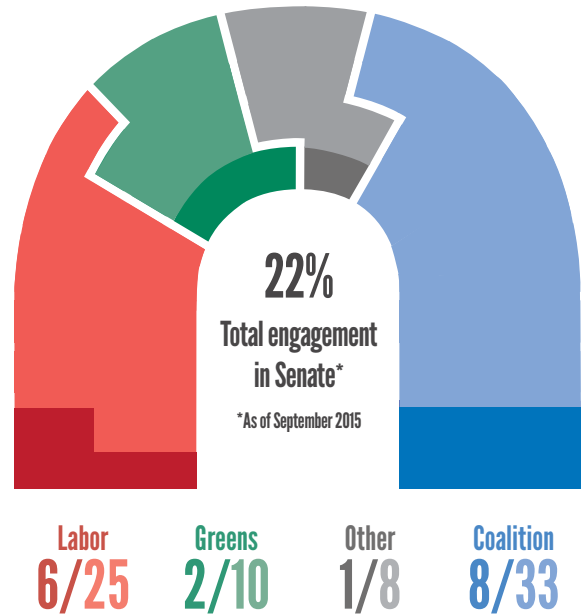
During the past financial year, the RCA Secretariat engaged with 15 per cent of members in the House of Representatives and with more than 20 per cent of Senators in the Upper House, in addition to meeting with over 30 ministerial advisors and chiefs of staff.

RCA and its members are committed to ongoing involvement with peak bodies representing research, industry, business, local government and education.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ENGAGEMENT



SENATE ENGAGEMENT



Canberra Networking Breakfast



Mayor Ian Carpenter; City of Greater Geraldton; Bruce Anson, CEO Warrnambool City Council; Mayor Deirdre Comerford, Mackay Regional Council (RCA Chair); the Hon Julie Collins MP, Shadow Minister for Regional Development and Local Government; Cr Michael Fraser, City of Wodonga; Patience Harrington; CEO City of Wodonga; Cr Michael Neoh, Mayor Warrnambool City Council

On Wednesday, June 17 at the National Convention Centre, Canberra, coinciding with the ALGA National General Assembly, RCA's annual networking breakfast offered attendees a chance to hear directly from government and engage with their regional capitals colleagues from across Australia.

A keynote address was delivered by Assistant Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development, the Hon Jamie Briggs MP, who called for, among other things, "more innovative ways to fund infrastructure and consider more efficient road pricing mechanisms."

In her speech, new RCA Chair, Mayor Deirdre Comerford also highlighted the need for better infrastructure funding to promote regional capitals' productivity and liveability.



The Hon Jamie Briggs MP, Assistant Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development

## RCA's policy approach

### Refining the policy position

The RCA 2015 membership survey conducted in April this year returned 19 responses, of which 10 were CEO/General Managers and 9 were Mayors. The Board then revisited the essential mission of RCA during a full-day strategy meeting in May, to redefine Regional Capitals Australia's priorities in the lead-up to the next election.

The overwhelming majority of respondents (almost 95%) agreed with the current RCA mission to 'Provide a formal platform to champion the continued growth and sustainable development of regional capitals around Australia.'

Members also ranked RCA objectives in order of importance:

1. Partner with the Australian Government on the development of policy, planning, strategies and investment decisions as they relate to regional capitals
2. Advocate for appropriate federal funding to invest in the services and infrastructure in regional capitals
3. Provide high-level advice on issues, trends and other developments affecting regional capitals that can inform and assist an Australian Government response
4. Identify opportunities and impediments to the sustainable development of regional capitals and develop innovative solutions to manage them
5. Bring strategic alignment between national stakeholders responsible for regional development, urban policy and population growth.

Respondents were asked to identify the level of importance of various federal policy areas to their region, and the vast majority of respondents (95%) listed infrastructure investment as very important, followed by regional development (78%) and communications.

From this survey, the RCA board recommended that positions on the top three policy areas for the alliance, as well as 'asks' of government, be created:

1. Infrastructure investment
2. Regional economic development, jobs, skills and education
3. Communications and technology

In addition to the three position papers listed above, the RCA Board has also recommended that three regional capitals capability statements be developed:

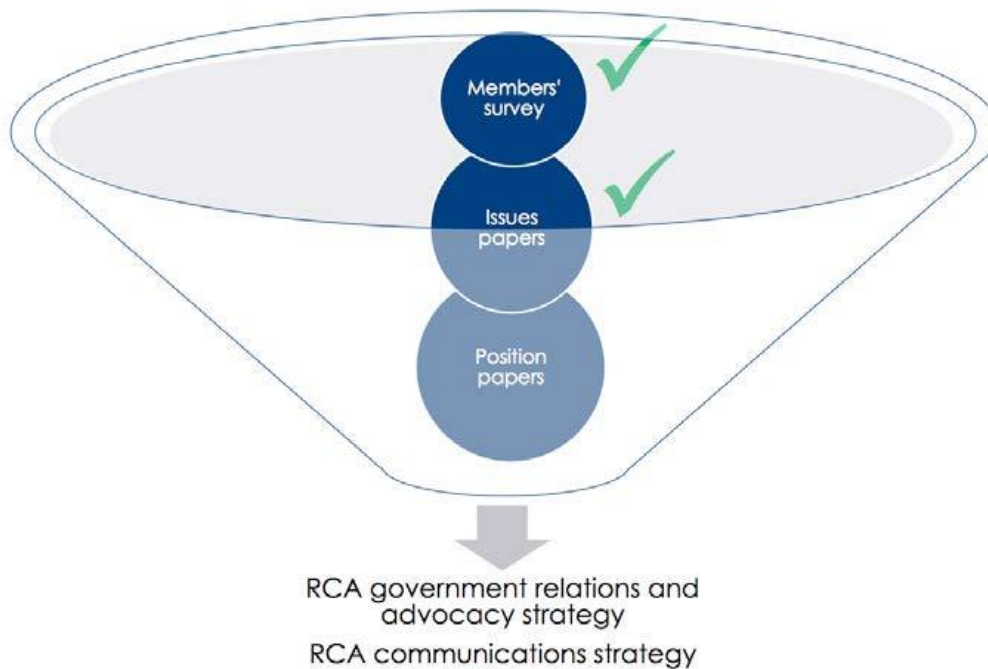
4. Population
5. Productivity
6. Liveability



### Process and structure

The creation of issues and position papers are part of a consultation process that will feed directly into Regional Capitals Australia's (RCA) strategy and advocacy with federal policy stakeholders, and help position regional capitals ahead of an expected mid-2016 federal election.

#### Issues Papers



Based on the RCA 2015 membership survey responses, issues papers were circulated on 27 July, 2015 for member feedback.

Comments on the draft were overwhelmingly positive, and many members provided additional sub topics for emphasis within the separate subject areas such as:

- Greater emphasis on the way in which discretionary infrastructure spending processes are perverted by the political process
- Focus on funding infrastructure to promote liveability, acknowledging the role of amenity in attracting jobs and workers to regions
- Education policy, funding, and early intervention strategies for students and greater availability of professional degrees, recognising the significant costs preventing regional students from seeking tertiary study

All feedback was carefully evaluated and incorporated into position papers circulated mid August for a final draft at the beginning of September.



### Regional Capitals Australia Current Members

Australia is home to 50 regional capitals. Regional Capitals Australia's membership currently includes 30 regional capitals.

## MEMBERSHIP



Albury City Council  
Cessnock City Council  
City of Wagga Wagga  
Coffs Harbour City Council  
Dubbo City Council  
Gosford City Council  
Orange City Council  
Tamworth Regional Council  
Palmerston City Council  
Bundaberg Regional Council

Mackay Regional Council  
Rockhampton Regional Council  
City Council of Townsville  
Launceston City Council  
Horsham Rural City Council  
Greater Shepparton City Council  
Ballarat City Council  
City of Wodonga  
Greater Bendigo City Council  
Greater Geelong City Council

Latrobe City Council  
Rural City of Wangaratta  
Warrnambool City Council  
City of Albany  
City of Bunbury  
City of Greater Geraldton  
City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder  
Shire of Broome  
City of Karratha  
Town of Port Hedland

## New members in 2014-15

### Coffs Harbour City Council, NSW

Coffs Harbour's population in 2014 was just over 70,000 and has been on a steady rise in recent years. The Gross Regional Product for 2013-14 was \$4 billion. The areas of greatest employment are in the services sector, with the three most popular sectors being health care and social assistance, retail trade, and accommodation and food services.

Coffs Harbour sees the work with Regional Capitals Australia as important to increasing the Federal Government's understanding of the role of regional cities like Coffs Harbour in the economic and community development of the nation.

### Townsville City Council, QLD

With Townsville's location at the centre of North Queensland, Townsville has an attractive lifestyle and natural attractions without sacrificing the benefits of the city.

Townsville has a population of some 190,000 and rising, making the region the largest urban centre in northern Australia. The city is set to become home to over 300,000 people by 2030. Growth has been sustained by diversified industries including minerals processing and mining services, defence, government, tourism, tropical research and education.

Townsville is keenly aware of the need for a collective voice to forge a positive alliance with both the State and Federal Governments. While Townsville has all the ingredients for success, the need to attract investment and create jobs is an issue that affects us all.

Townsville sees the Regional Capitals Australia alliance as a powerful and unique voice acting on behalf of Australia's diverse regional cities, encouraging the move away from the previous 'state capital-centric' focus.

### Rockhampton Regional Council, QLD

The Rockhampton region is home to over 83,400 people and leverages off a number of diverse industries thanks to our geographical position. Important industries include agriculture, forestry, fishing, mining and manufacturing.

Rockhampton operates as a large service centre with health and community services, education and retail as its major employers.

Rockhampton Regional Council embraces the movement towards creating sustainable and innovative cities within capital regions. Becoming a part of RCA will allow Rockhampton to join the conversation and connect councils facing similar challenges in the current economy. It also provides a platform to share ideas and to advocate for services that will encourage positive growth and reveal Rockhampton's true potential.

### Bundaberg Regional Council, QLD

Bundaberg is just four hours' drive north of the state's capital, Brisbane, and has a regional population of 95,000. Bundaberg has a strong tourism focus and is the southern gateway to the Great Barrier Reef, one of the natural wonders of the world. Our regional residents love sports and appreciate art, theatre and literature.

The regional economy contributes \$4 billion to the Queensland economy mainly through its agricultural pursuits led by sugar cane, macadamia nut and general small crop production.

With its volcanic rich soils and complementary climate the Bundaberg region is regarded as the salad bowl of Queensland. The macadamia industry provides an economic value in excess of \$110 million for the region.



### RCA Board and Governance

Regional Capitals Australia (RCA) is a nationwide Mayors and CEOs forum governed by a board of eight councils and lead by a Chair and Deputy Chair:

- Chair:** Mayor Deirdre Comerford, Mackay Regional Council, QLD  
**Deputy Chair:** Mayor Ian Carpenter, City of Greater Geraldton, WA  
**Treasurer:** Ken Diehm – CEO, City of Greater Geraldton, WA

### RCA Executive Board

State	Representing Local Government
Victoria	Cr Rod Wangman – Mayor, City of Wodonga Patience Harrington – CEO, City of Wodonga Cr Darryn Lyons – Mayor, City of Greater Geelong Kelvin Spiller – Interim CEO, City of Greater Geelong Cr Michael Neoh – Mayor, Warrnambool City Council Bruce Anson – CEO, Warrnambool City Council
Western Australia	Cr Ian Carpenter – Mayor, City of Greater Geraldton Ken Diehm – CEO – City of Greater Geraldton
New South Wales	Cr Rod Kendall – Mayor, Wagga Wagga City Council Phil Pinyon – General Manager, Wagga Wagga City Council Cr Mathew Dickerson – Mayor, Dubbo City Council Mark Riley – General Manager, Dubbo City Council
Queensland	Cr Deirdre Comerford – Mayor, Mackay Regional Council Dr Brett Heyward – CEO, Mackay Regional Council
Tasmania	Robert Dobrzynski – General Manager, Launceston City Council Ald Albert van Zetten – Mayor, Launceston City Council
North Territories	Ricki Bruhn – CEO, City of Palmerston Ian Abbott – Mayor, City of Palmerston

## Message from the Treasurer

During the 2014/15 financial year, Regional Capitals Australia undertook an unprecedented amount of work to promote regional capitals at a State and National level. This included the development of a [submission to the Senate Inquiry](#) into the Future Role and Contribution of Regional Capitals, the development of a [promotional video](#) on the role of Regional Capitals Australia, and numerous delegations to Canberra to lobby and advocate for policy change to facilitate regional economic growth and development.

These additional costs resulted in Regional Capitals Australia incurring a decrease in operating capability of \$44,475. With the commencement of the new financial year this decrease in operating capability has been recovered and Regional Capitals Australia has returned to an expected budgeted surplus.

Regional Capitals Australia has a strong financial position and sufficient financial resources to fund the annual budgeted expenditure.

Ken Diehm

Treasurer, Regional Capitals Australia

## Membership services

Below is an overview of the services provided to RCA financial members:

Service Description	Output
<b>Government Relations</b>	
Secretariat monthly meetings with Canberra Stakeholders	Meetings, report
Bimonthly Board delegations to Canberra	6 x Canberra delegations including briefing packs, reports
<b>Policy Reports</b>	
Federal budget analysis	1 media release, 1 early report on budget, 1 full budget analysis
Policy reports	Membership engagement x 5, desk top x 5
Annual statement	1 annual statement
Networking breakfast speech (Chair)	1 welcome speech
Annual conference speech (Chair)	1 welcome speech
<b>Secretariat</b>	
Secretariat board meeting coordination, government / stakeholder meetings, event management, administration	12x Board meetings, 6 days of Canberra based stakeholder meetings, 1 annual conference, 1 networking breakfast
<b>Communications</b>	
Weekly alerts, web management, traditional & social media engagement	48 weekly alerts, ongoing general web and social updates
Membership and media engagement	6 newsletters, 6 general media releases

## Contact:

For more information on Regional Capitals Australia, contact the Secretariat:

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Project Manager

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