



# Regional Capitals Australia

---

ANNUAL STATEMENT // 2016





<b>Message from the Chair</b>	2
<b>The Year in Review</b>	
• Key Activities	4
• Stakeholder Engagement	5
• Media Engagement	7
• Achievements	8
<b>Who We Are</b>	
• Membership	10
• Governance	11
<b>Looking Forward</b>	
• A Plan to Grow Regional Capital Cities	12
• Growing Regional Capitals Australia	12
<b>Financial Overview</b>	
• Message from the Treasurer	13

## MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

---

As the new Chair of [Regional Capitals Australia](#) (RCA), I am pleased to share with you what has been accomplished this past 12 months and our focus for the upcoming year. RCA is now moving into its fifth year as a national alliance of local government councils working to build strong regional communities.

Our work this past year demonstrates how RCA has become one of the 'go-to' bodies on regional development issues, shifting the national conversation around urban policy to include regional capital cities.

Regional capital cities are experiencing the beginning of a new era in urban policy. For the first time regional capital cities have been included in national urban policy with the Turnbull Government's launch of the Smart Cities Plan.

---

*The Smart Cities Plan will drive economic growth and create new jobs in regional Australia*

---

On launching the plan, the Assistant Minister for Cities and Digital Transformation, the Hon Angus Taylor MP stated:

*"The Smart Cities Plan will also importantly target jobs growth for regional cities and outer metropolitan centres. Our regional cities need a strong platform for coordinated investment and planning."*

The Minister for Regional Development, Senator the Hon Fiona Nash stated:

*"Regional cities make a massive contribution to the national economy, and there is more room to grow. The Smart Cities Plan will drive economic growth and create new jobs in regional Australia."*

Funding for urban policy was also tipped in the favour of regional capital cities, with two of the three City Deals announced to-date going towards RCA members. A City Deal represents a new paradigm in urban policy and will be the platform that allows cities to shape their own economic destinies by working with the private sector and all levels of government to deliver infrastructure projects.

During the last 12 months, we also saw the role of regional capital cities recognised by Australia's leading authority on infrastructure. Seeing the potential of our members, Infrastructure Australia called on state and federal governments to ensure our cities are treated as 'national economic assets' and to plan accordingly in the nation's first long-term infrastructure plan.

Prior to the federal election, the Senate Standing Committees on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport released their interim report on their inquiry into the 'future role and contribution of regional capitals to Australia'. More on their findings can be found in this document.

It is clear we are gaining support from key members of parliament that are willing to listen and share our vision for improving regional Australia. But, we still have work to do. We still must change public perception that regional Australia is just the 'bush'. Regional capitals are 'cities' providing housing, essential services, employment, business and education to four million Australians and an additional four million in surrounding towns.



*Mayor Shane Van Styn Chair,  
Regional Capitals Australia  
Mayor, City of Greater Geraldton*

## MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

---

If we want strong regions, we must ensure that we have strong regional capital cities. This means channelling policy and funding to bridge the gap in education, skill levels, access to first class health services and connectivity.

Many of the successes we've had this past year were due to the strong leadership of our former Chair, Deirdre Comerford. A big thank you goes to the work she did to help RCA pursue its agenda in the lead-up to the federal election. I also want to thank the Executive Board and our members for the role you've played in advancing the objectives of RCA. The world of local government is always changing, but your contribution to RCA has remained the same. I would also like to welcome our new Deputy Chair - Cr Col Murray, Mayor of Tamworth Regional Council. We look forward to having Cr Murray bring his passion, leadership and experience to the table.

Thanks to your support, RCA will continue to use our evidence-based policy platform to highlight the gap between regional and metropolitan cities, but also focus on growing our membership base to ensure we continue to be representative of all those living in regional Australia.



Mayor Shane Van Styn  
Chair, Regional Capitals Australia



*Geraldton foreshore*

## KEY ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

### Creation of RCA Policy Priorities

Using feedback from a membership survey, RCA created three key policy positions on:

- **Infrastructure** for better economic outcomes and social amenity;
- **Communications technology** for better domestic and international connectivity; and
- **Education and skilled pathways** to enable jobs of the future and ensuring that regional Australians do not get left behind.

The objectives of this framework were to highlight the potential of regional capital cities to:

- increase population;
- increase productivity; and
- increase liveability.

These policy positions have been used to gain support and influence federal decision makers to shape policies and funding for regional capital cities. Our policy positions have been extremely successful during our delegation meetings with Ministers and Members of Parliament from the Coalition, Opposition and independent parties.

### Conclusions to Senate Inquiry

From 21 August 2015 to 4 March 2016, the Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee held an inquiry into the 'future role and contribution of regional capitals to Australia' during five public hearings in:

- Geelong, Victoria - 21 August 2015;
- Launceston, Tasmania - 25 September 2015;
- Geraldton, Western Australia - 28 October 2015;
- Townsville, Queensland - 16 February 2015; and
- Canberra, Australian Capital Territory - 4 March 2016.

The Senate Committee received 85 submissions from local governments located in and outside of regional capitals, Regional Development Australia committees, peak bodies, universities, community organisations and individuals representing the interests of regional Australia.

The Senate Committee released an interim report due to the double dissolution of both the Senate and House of Representatives for the 2 July federal election. The Interim Report draws conclusions (not recommendations) that notably reflect RCA's key messages in relation to:

- A lack of a national policy context for Australia's regional capital cities
- Regional capital cities being crucial to developing and maintaining strong regions across Australia
- Regional capital cities being service hubs that provide access to health, education, employment and social and community infrastructure



RCA policy statements



RCA report on conclusions in Senate Inquiry

- Regional capital cities having increased levels of 'liveability'
- Many regional capital cities growing faster than the national average
- Regional capital cities having challenges in attracting investment, lower levels of educational attainment and higher unemployment
- Regional capital cities struggling with infrastructure needs that are compounded with inflexible government grant funding.

RCA will provide recommendations to the relevant committee when the matter is re-referred in the new Senate, and we will continue to work with our political leaders to deliver powerful and innovative regional capital cities of the future.

## STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

### Canberra Delegation Meetings

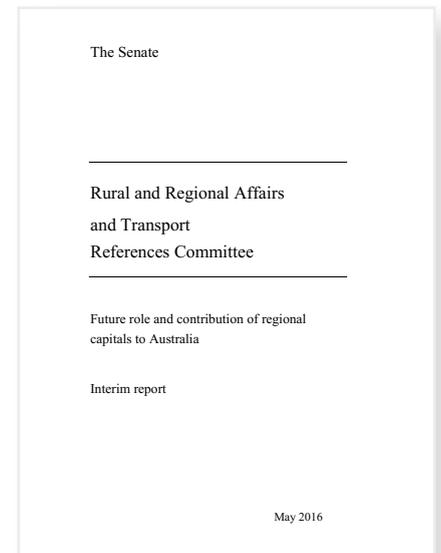
In the past financial year, RCA had more than 55 meetings with Ministers, MPs, advisors and influencers responsible for urban policy and regional development, including:

- The Hon Angus Taylor MP, Assistant Minister for Cities and Digital Transformation
- The Hon Barnaby Joyce MP, Deputy Prime Minister and Leader of the Nationals Party
- Senator the Hon Fiona Nash, Minister for Regional Development, Local Government and Territories, and Regional Communications
- The Hon Anthony Albanese MP, Shadow Minister for Cities and Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism
- The Hon Julie Collins MP, Shadow Minister for Regional Development & Local Government (now Ageing & Mental Health)
- The Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development
- Infrastructure Australia
- The Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet
- The Regional Australia Institute
- Regional Universities Network

The work of engaging our stakeholders has been a driving force in shaping regional development policy and securing funding specifically for regional cities.



*The Hon Barnaby Joyce MP, Rachael Sweeney, RCA Project Manager and Cr Col Murray (Tamworth Regional Council)*



*Senate Inquiry Interim Report*



*Peter Bettess (General Manager of Planning and Tourism, City of Greater Geelong), Cr Rod Kendall (Wagga Wagga City Council), Senator the Hon Fiona Nash (Minister for Regional Development, Local Government and Territories, and Regional Communications), Cr Peter Long (City of Karratha), Mayor Shane Van Styn (City of Greater Geraldton)*



*Cr Rod Kendall (Wagga Wagga City Council), Mayor Shane Van Styn (City of Greater Geraldton), Senator the Hon Matt Canavan (Minister for Resources and Northern Australia), Cr Peter Long (City of Karratha), Peter Bettess (General Manager of Planning and Tourism, City of Greater Geelong)*



*Chris Hanger, Director, Office of Regional Development, NSW Department of Industry; Cr Col Murray, Mayor, Tamworth Regional Council, Cr Matthew Dickerson, Western Plains Regional Council; Tracey Squire, Director, Economic Development and Tourism Group, AlburyCity Council*



*Keynote speaker Senator Bridget McKenzie during a Regionalism 2.0 media interview*

## Regionalism 2.0 Conference

RCA held its third annual national conference on 8 April 2016 at The Cube in Wodonga. The event attracted mayors and CEOs, councillors, researchers, educators and speakers who are leaders in multiple facets of regional policy.

Keynote speakers included Senator Bridget McKenzie (Senator for Victoria) and the Hon Julie Collins MP, Shadow Minister for Regional Development, Local Government and Employment Services.

Attendees also heard presentations from:

- The Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development
- .id Consulting
- The Regional Australia Institute
- The Regional Universities Network
- Centre for Regional Development – University of Western Australia

RCA looks forward to seeing you at the next conference as we explore ways to further engage with members and regional stakeholders, and bring together community leaders and innovators to shape new regional development strategies.



*The Hon Julie Collins MP, Shadow Minister for Regional Development and Local Government*



*The Hon Julie Collins MP (Shadow Minister for Regional Development & Local Government), Mayor Shane Van Styn (City of Greater Geraldton), Senator Bridget McKenzie (Victoria)*



*Jack Archer, CEO, Regional Australia Institute*



*Dr. Fiona Haslam-McKenzie, Centre for Regional Development - University of WA*



*Jonathan Cartledge, Australian Sustainable Built Environment Council (ASBEC) Cities Task Group*

## Networking Breakfast

RCA also hosted its fourth annual RCA Networking Breakfast on 22 June 2016 at the National Convention Centre in Canberra. This year's keynote speaker was Dr Leonie Pearson, Leader of Major Research Projects at the Regional Australia Institute. Dr Pearson was a lead researcher for the recent *Deal or No Deal? Bringing Small Cities in to the National Cities Agenda* report that was published in April 2016 and presented on the benefits of City Deals and criteria to help regional capital cities successfully win bids for investment.



RCA's annual breakfast returned to Canberra in June, with a keynote address by the Regional Australia Institute's Dr Leonie Pearson

## MEDIA ENGAGEMENT

### Communications

RCA has successfully engaged key stakeholders using the power of the news media to influence the conversation about regional capital cities. We've used media releases, newsletters, member alerts, social media and our weekly publication *The Week That Was* to amplify our message about the need to clearly identify a role in national policy for regional capital cities.

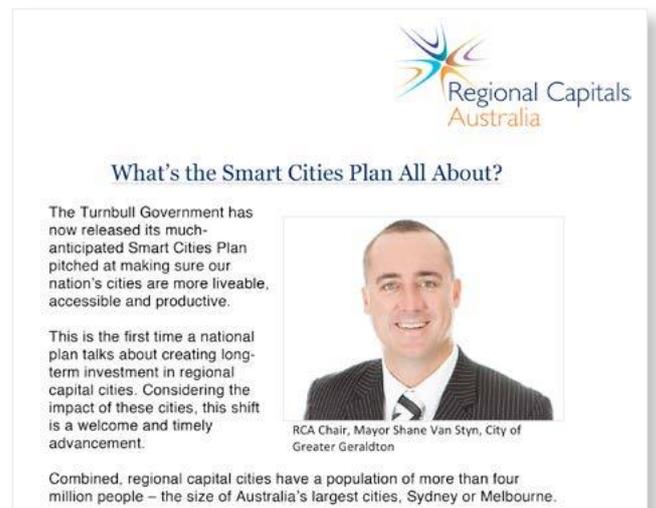


### The Week That Was

Media Highlights from Regional Australia



Regional capitals were put in the media spotlight as part of RCA's communications strategy



## ACHIEVEMENTS

### Inclusion of Regional Cities in Smart Cities Plan

RCA took advantage of a new focus on cities policy in the federal government's portfolio to influence how national policy should address regional cities. Our advocacy work in Canberra secured a place for regional capital cities in national urban policy for the first time.

On 29 April 2016, Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull and Assistant Minister for Cities, the Hon Angus Taylor MP announced details of the Smart Cities Plan – the Australian Government's vision for both metropolitan and regional capital cities.

The policy clearly included a role for regional capital cities with the plan stating:

*The Smart Cities Plan is not just for our capital cities, or just for our CBDs. It is for cities of all sizes and for all parts of cities.*

*We need to plan for the future of regional cities, maximising their unique advantages and supporting their long-term growth.*

(Smart Cities Plan, p.5)

The announcement of this policy and funding scheme is not only a major milestone for regional capital cities, but also for Regional Capitals Australia.

### Regional Capital Cities to Receive First 'City Deals'

To improve productivity and liveability of capital cities and regional centres, the Smart Cities Plan includes a new funding mechanism: 'City Deals'. This program will bring together government and the private sector to deliver major infrastructure projects that will drive economic growth in cities.

As part of our ongoing engagement with federal stakeholders, RCA strategically advocated for regional cities to be included in the first round of the City Deals program to reiterate the economic impact regional capital cities have on Australia's economy.

Two RCA members – Townsville and Launceston – have been nominated as the first cities to participate in this program with funding commitments at \$100 million and \$150 million respectively. The focus of the funding has been towards infrastructure projects aimed at revitalising CBDs, bringing in new businesses and creating hubs of entrepreneurship to generate economic growth.

The only other City Deal announced was for Western Sydney. The '2 of 3' funding of regional City Deals signals the beginning of a new era for regional capital cities in national urban policy.



Photo credit: AUSPIC

*“As Regional Development Minister, my vision is to help build the regional communities our children and grandchildren either want to stay in or come back to.”*

*“Regional cities make a massive contribution to the national economy, and there is more room to grow. The Smart Cities Plan will drive economic growth and create new jobs in regional Australia.”*

- Senator the Hon Fiona Nash, Minister for Regional Development and Regional Communications



Photo credit:  
Assistant Minister  
Angus Taylor Office

*“The global lesson is that cities collaborate to compete. There's a great incentive here for everyone to work together. The Smart Cities Plan will also importantly target jobs growth for regional cities and outer metropolitan centres. Our regional cities need a strong platform for coordinated investment and planning.”*

- The Hon Angus Taylor MP, Assistant Minister for Cities and Digital Transformation

## RCA Joins the Regional Universities Network

In June 2016, RCA signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Regional Universities Network to develop an action plan for the coordination of activities, including communicating messages and policy, related to improving skills and education for young people and residents living in regional Australia.

By bringing strategic alignment between major national stakeholders, RCA will be able to provide a greater platform to champion the educational requirements and future job prospects for students living regional capital cities.

## Regional recommendations in Australian Infrastructure Plan

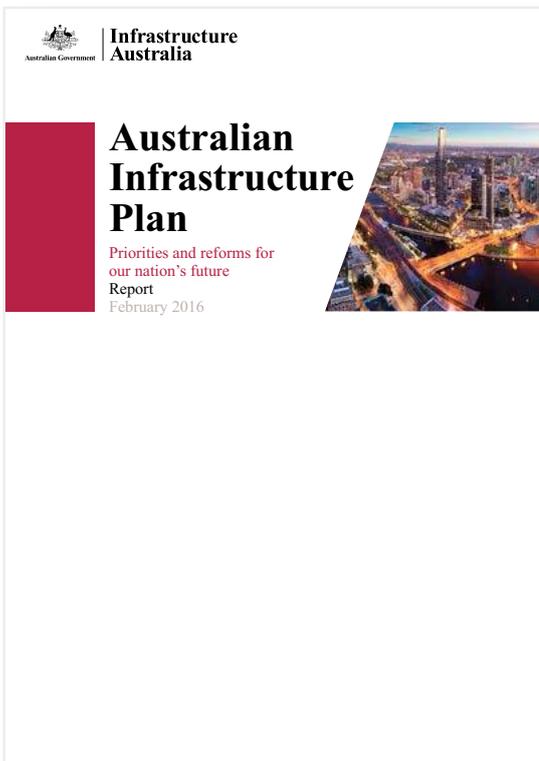
In February 2016, Infrastructure Australia published its first long-term Australian Infrastructure Plan that “sets out the infrastructure challenges and opportunities Australia faces over the next 15 years” and the solutions needed to drive productivity and enhance our standard of living.

Infrastructure Australia endorsed many of RCA’s positions by stating regional cities (centres) should be “national economic assets” and for state and territory governments to deliver long-term regional infrastructure plans.

RCA is calling on the Australian Government to commit to Infrastructure Australia’s recommendation of developing long-term regional infrastructure plans that will grow regional capital cities (regional hubs) through funding programs such as City Deals.



Dr Caroline Perkins, Executive Director,  
Regional Universities Network

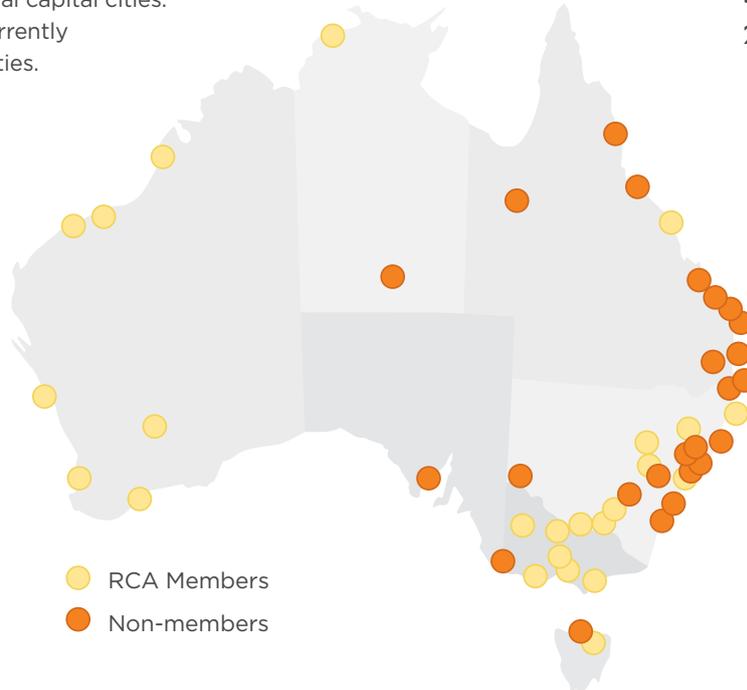


Many of RCA’s policy positions were endorsed in the first long-term Australian Infrastructure Plan published in February 2016

## MEMBERSHIP

Australia is home to 50 regional capital cities.  
RCA's current membership currently includes 29 regional capital cities.

**50 Regional Capitals**  
**29 Members**



## AUSTRALIA HAS 50 REGIONAL CAPITAL CITIES

<span style="color: yellow;">●</span> <b>NSW</b> Albury	<span style="color: orange;">●</span> <b>NSW</b> Wyong	<span style="color: yellow;">●</span> <b>QLD</b> Rockhampton
<span style="color: orange;">●</span> <b>NSW</b> Ballina	<span style="color: yellow;">●</span> <b>VIC</b> Ballarat	<span style="color: orange;">●</span> <b>QLD</b> Toowoomba
<span style="color: orange;">●</span> <b>NSW</b> Bathurst	<span style="color: yellow;">●</span> <b>VIC</b> Greater Bendigo	<span style="color: yellow;">●</span> <b>QLD</b> Townsville
<span style="color: orange;">●</span> <b>NSW</b> Cessnock	<span style="color: yellow;">●</span> <b>VIC</b> Greater Geelong	<span style="color: orange;">●</span> <b>SA</b> Port Lincoln
<span style="color: yellow;">●</span> <b>NSW</b> Coffs Harbour	<span style="color: yellow;">●</span> <b>VIC</b> Greater Shepparton	<span style="color: yellow;">●</span> <b>WA</b> Albany
<span style="color: yellow;">●</span> <b>NSW</b> Dubbo	<span style="color: yellow;">●</span> <b>VIC</b> Wodonga	<span style="color: yellow;">●</span> <b>WA</b> Broome
<span style="color: yellow;">●</span> <b>NSW</b> Gosford	<span style="color: yellow;">●</span> <b>VIC</b> Wangaratta	<span style="color: yellow;">●</span> <b>WA</b> Bunbury
<span style="color: orange;">●</span> <b>NSW</b> Lismore	<span style="color: yellow;">●</span> <b>VIC</b> Warrnambool	<span style="color: yellow;">●</span> <b>WA</b> Greater Geraldton
<span style="color: orange;">●</span> <b>NSW</b> Maitland	<span style="color: orange;">●</span> <b>VIC</b> Mildura	<span style="color: yellow;">●</span> <b>WA</b> Kalgoorlie/Boulder
<span style="color: orange;">●</span> <b>NSW</b> Newcastle	<span style="color: yellow;">●</span> <b>VIC</b> Horsham	<span style="color: yellow;">●</span> <b>WA</b> Port Hedland
<span style="color: orange;">●</span> <b>NSW</b> Shoalhaven	<span style="color: yellow;">●</span> <b>VIC</b> Latrobe	<span style="color: yellow;">●</span> <b>WA</b> Karratha
<span style="color: yellow;">●</span> <b>NSW</b> Orange	<span style="color: yellow;">●</span> <b>QLD</b> Bundaberg	<span style="color: orange;">●</span> <b>TAS</b> Burnie
<span style="color: orange;">●</span> <b>NSW</b> Port Macquarie-Hastings	<span style="color: orange;">●</span> <b>QLD</b> Cairns	<span style="color: orange;">●</span> <b>TAS</b> Devonport
<span style="color: yellow;">●</span> <b>NSW</b> Tamworth	<span style="color: orange;">●</span> <b>QLD</b> Gladstone	<span style="color: yellow;">●</span> <b>TAS</b> Launceston
<span style="color: orange;">●</span> <b>NSW</b> Tweed	<span style="color: orange;">●</span> <b>QLD</b> Fraser Coast	<span style="color: orange;">●</span> <b>NT</b> Alice Springs
<span style="color: yellow;">●</span> <b>NSW</b> Wagga Wagga	<span style="color: yellow;">●</span> <b>QLD</b> Mackay	<span style="color: yellow;">●</span> <b>NT</b> Palmerston
<span style="color: orange;">●</span> <b>NSW</b> Wollongong	<span style="color: orange;">●</span> <b>QLD</b> Mount Isa	

## GOVERNANCE

Regional Capitals Australia (RCA) is a nationwide mayors and CEOs forum governed by a board of eight councils and led by a Chair and Deputy Chair.

**Chair:** Mayor Shane Van Styn, City of Greater Geraldton

**Deputy Chair:** Cr Col Murray, Tamworth Regional Council

**Treasurer:** Ken Diehm - CEO, City of Greater Geraldton

## Executive Board



*Craig Doyle, CEO, Mackay Regional Council; Ken Diehm, CEO, City of Greater Geraldton; Cr Mathew Dickerson, Western Plains Regional Council; Mayor Shane van Styn, City of Greater Geraldton; Mayor Ian Abbott, City of Palmerston; Mayor Anna Speedie, City of Wodonga; Mayor Kylie Gaston, Warrnambool City Council; Mayor Rod Kendall, Wagga Wagga City Council; Bruce Anson, CEO, Warrnambool City Council; Peter Bettess, General Manager Tourism and Planning, City of Greater Geelong*

State	Representing Local Government
Victoria	City of Wodonga City of Greater Geelong Warrnambool City Council
Western Australia	City of Greater Geraldton
New South Wales	Wagga Wagga City Council Dubbo City Council
Queensland	Mackay Regional Council
Tasmania	City of Launceston
North Territories	City of Palmerston

## A PLAN TO GROW REGIONAL CAPITAL CITIES

RCA is in a promising position to further tap into recent advancements in Canberra. We must continue to build our relationship with policy makers to ensure regional capital cities have a stated place in national urban policy.

RCA has made the following key policy recommendations to the Australian Government on regional development issues:

### *Regional Development Policy*

- A commitment to develop and fund a new federal regional development policy scheduled for creation in 2017 (as stated in the 2016 budget papers). This policy will define how regional capital cities can continue to grow both socially and economically in support of the wider region.

### *Building Better Regions Fund*

- Similar funding should be extended beyond 2017-18.
- A shift in focus to move from a disadvantage fund to one that aims to improve the productivity of regional Australia.

### *City Deals*

- A commitment to Infrastructure Australia's recommendation to develop long-term regional infrastructure plans that will grow regional capital cities (regional hubs).
- Ensuring that at least three regional capital cities from each state are named for the government's City Deals program (period 2016-19).

### *Connectivity*

- Mobile Black Spots: To prioritise regional capital cities in the next round of the Mobile Black Spot program.
- High speed broadband: A commitment to fibre-to-the-premises in all regional capital cities by 2025.

## GROWING REGIONAL CAPITALS AUSTRALIA

RCA has made great strides this past year in building a nation of sustainable regional capital cities. Our work in stakeholder engagement has led to a remarkable shift in thinking and policy that supports regional capital cities.

To further our mission in championing the growth of all regional capital cities around the nation, we need to move towards becoming the 'go-to' body on regional development issues. This also includes increasing our membership base to accomplish our objectives.

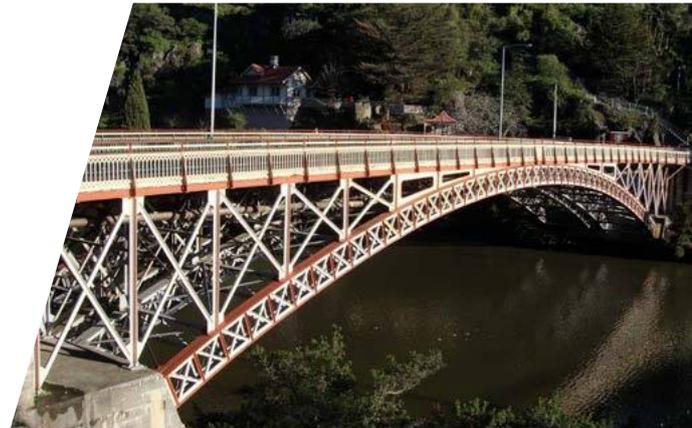
RCA currently has 29 members, with a possibility of 50 total regional capital cities to join our national alliance. In the next year, RCA will focus on building its brand with potential members and influential stakeholders to demonstrate our value in achieving tangible outcomes for regional cities.

As a member, you play a vital role in providing expertise, influence and access, in addition to contributing financial support. From attending delegation meetings in Canberra to being engaged with RCA on social media, your involvement helps to raise the social and political profile of the alliance.

Let's continue to work together and explore opportunities for growth so that we can build vibrant and sustainable communities for all in regional Australia.



*Warrnambool beachfront*



*Kings Bridge, Launceston*



*Geelong city*

### Message from the Treasurer

Regional Capitals Australia commenced the 2015/16 financial year with limited financial resources following costs attached to the Senate Inquiry into regional capitals.

It was agreed by the Executive Board to increase annual membership fees to offset such expenditure, and this in turn has enabled RCA to fund important policy research, position development and other initiatives promoting the development of Australia's regional capitals.

Regional Capitals Australia closed the financial year with an operating surplus of \$69,200 and has sufficient financial resources to fund its 2016/17 annual budgeted expenditure.

RCA is committed to the principles of transparency and accountability and audited financial statements can be found on our website when completed.

Ken Diehm

**Treasurer, Regional Capitals Australia**



*Ken Diehm, Treasurer,  
Regional Capitals Australia*

### Contact

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

Rachael Sweeney - Project Manager

Email: [Secretariat@regionalcapitalsaustralia.org](mailto:Secretariat@regionalcapitalsaustralia.org)

Phone: 03 9614 7302

Website: [www.regionalcapitalsaustralia.org](http://www.regionalcapitalsaustralia.org)

 [@regionalcapsaus](https://twitter.com/regionalcapsaus)  [www.facebook.com/RegionalCapitalsAustralia](https://www.facebook.com/RegionalCapitalsAustralia)