



## NSW Inland Forum

Albury | Armidale | Bathurst | Dubbo | Orange | Tamworth | Wagga Wagga

# Regional Cities New South Wales

Workshop Report

2 August 2018

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## Introduction

The Inland Forum of New South Wales (NSW) wanted to understand the interests and opportunities of establishing an alliance between Mayors and CEOs/General Managers of 16 regional cities in New South Wales. These cities reside outside of the expanded metropolitan areas of Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong, have distinct regional catchments, and share similar opportunities and challenges for growth and investment.

The following councils were invited to attend a planning day by virtue of having a distinct city identity that provides services to a broader regional catchment:

- Albury
- Armidale
- Bathurst
- Cessnock
- Coffs Harbour
- Dubbo
- Griffith
- Lismore
- Maitland
- Orange
- Port Macquarie-Hastings
- Queanbeyan
- Tamworth
- Tweed
- Wagga Wagga
- Mid-Coast

## The Planning Day

To establish the areas of mutual interest and opportunity, a planning day was held in Sydney on 2 August 2018 to determine:

- 1 Elements that form a mandate for the establishment of a NSW regional city alliance
- 2 Governance framework requirements
- 3 Membership criteria
- 4 Elements of a high-level policy and advocacy agenda,
- 5 A recommendation from participants to move to form (or otherwise) the alliance.

### Preparation:

The workshop facilitator Rachael Sweeney, Director of Collective Position, issued a pre-workshop survey to participants to map each council's views on a possible alliance and an analysis of the current NSW Government policy settings and investment pipeline as it relates to regional cities. The findings from this analysis were used as a basis for discussions on the day of the workshop.



## Workshop Attendees:

The following Mayors and CEO/s General Managers participated in discussions on the day:

- Cr Denise Knight, Mayor, Coffs Harbour City Council
- Mr Steve McGrath, General Manager, Coffs Harbour City Council
- Cr John Dal Broi, Mayor, Griffith City Council
- Mr Brett Stonestreet, General Manager, Griffith City Council
- Mr Tim Overall, Mayor, Queanbeyan-Palerang Council
- Mr Adrian Panuccio, General Manager, Mid-Coast Council
- Mr David Evans PSM, General Manager, Maitland City Council
- Cr Peta Pinson, Mayor, Port Macquarie-Hastings Council
- Mr Craig Swift-McNair, General Manager, Port Macquarie-Hastings
- Mr David Sherley, General Manager, Bathurst Regional Council
- Cr Graeme Hanger OAM, Mayor, Bathurst Regional Council
- Cr Greg Conkey OAM, Mayor, Wagga Wagga City Council
- Mr Peter Thompson, General Manager, Wagga Wagga City Council
- Cr Reg Kidd, Mayor, Orange City Council
- Cr Kevin Mack, Mayor, Albury City Council
- Ms Tracey Squire, Acting General Manager, Albury City Council
- Cr Simon Murray, Mayor, Armidale Regional Council
- Ms Susan Law, CEO, Armidale Regional Council
- Mr Michael McMahon, CEO, Dubbo Regional Council
- Mr Paul Bennett, General Manager, Tamworth Regional Council
- Cr Col Murray, Mayor, Tamworth Regional Council



## Setting the Scene – Department of Premier and Cabinet

Mr Gary Barnes, Deputy Secretary-Regional New South Wales, Department of Premier and Cabinet gave an overview of the NSW Governments engagement and approach to regional NSW and the recently released “A 20 Year Economic Vision for Regional NSW” which outlined funding priorities with the bounty gained from the State’s sale of their share of Snowy Hydro.

Mr Barnes made it clear that the Government is ready to engage with an established regional city forum and would welcome the considered advice on policy and investments.

The group was then given a policy snapshot from Rachael Sweeney, Director of Collective Position covering the issues of Planning, Investment and Infrastructure and the Hub and Spoke model.

## Workshop 1 - Defining Success by 2030

To establish a shared understanding of the long-term objectives of a possible alliance, participants were asked: *What Would Success Look Like for a New South Wales Regional City Alliance by 2030?*

Participants agreed on the following indicators of **overall success** as:

- State government and community have recognised of the significance and benefits of regional cities,
- A seat at the policy table to advise state government on the formation and implementation of policies,
- The establishment of a population or settlement strategy that would prioritise population growth to regional cities,
- The alliance is known as having a clear point of difference from the other alliances in the regional developments space, and
- A strong network that offers collaboration, networking and collective benefit to all members.

Participants agreed on the following indicators of success in **state policy** as:

- A state ‘gateway’ budget process for investing in regional cities,
- Policy that facilitates local government as a partner in growing regional cities,
- A clear decentralisation policy,
- Special economic zones in regional cities, and
- Removal of prohibitive foreign investment barriers in regions.

Participants agreed on the following indicators of success in **state investment** as:

- Bi-partisan (ongoing) support for clear investment streams for regional cities,
- Separate discretionary funding stream for regional cities,
- Low interest loans and/or borrowing capacity for growth,
- State government will only allocate funding after consultation with the alliance, and
- Special infrastructure contribution.

The overall success of the alliance in 2030 would be the creation of: *connected, thriving and sustainable regional cities*.

The full list of success factors discussed can be found in Appendix A.

## Workshop 2 – Defining a Short-Term Agenda

Participants were also asked to identify the immediate actions a possible alliance could pursue to address the 2030 success factors. This included an activity to nominate the issues and opportunities of influencing government policy and investment as it relates to the development of regional cities. Participants were then asked to vote on the top five actions.

The most supported ideas were:

- 1 **Memorandum of Understanding:** establishing, through a formal agreement, a mechanism for the alliance to have a seat at the table and provide strategic influence on the state's policy and investment agenda.
- 2 **Snowy Hydro Funding:** providing a set of recommendations on how the government should invest the \$4.2 billion released in the NSW budget from the sale of Snowy Hydro project. The government has indicated that all of these funds will go to the regions and they will need guidance on how this money should be allocated. The group also anticipated that there would be streamlined funding mechanisms to enable regional cities to access this funding.
- 3 **Population Strategy:** due to ongoing debate of metropolitan congestion and rapid population growth, the group saw a great opportunity to have influence in developing a framework for growing regional cities under the banner of a state population strategy – the aim would be to develop a settlement plan directing people, infrastructure and business to regional cities.

- 4 **Regional Investment:** identifying a framework to identify how regional investment can be streamlined to be better facilitated in the regions.

## Workshop 3 – Defining a Proposed Structure

The final workshop was a group discussion that addressed the key components of a possible alliance structure. Based on earlier analysis of the structures of other regional city alliances at the national level and in the states of Victoria and Western Australia, there was strong agreement on the following items:

- **Formation:** the alliance to be known as Regional Cities New South Wales be formed.
- **Membership:** councils representing regional cities that had a clear service centre role (based on the analysis below) would be invited to be members.
- **Board Members:** the forum should be a Mayor and CEO/General Manager forum with alternates able to attend when the replacement is officially ‘acting’ in the Mayor or CEO/General Manager role/
- **Board Structure:** All member councils (Mayor and CEO/General Manager) will sit on the board. Voting will be by general consensus. Where general consensus cannot be reached a dispute resolution process will be activated.
- **Meeting schedule:** members agreed to meeting quarterly at a venue to be defined at a later date, noting that visits to each member city would be welcomed.
- **Working Group:** it was agreed that a working group to further define and evolve the structure and agenda of the alliance be established. Working Group members were nominated as:
  - Mr Craig Swift-McNair, General Manager, Port Macquarie-Hastings
  - Mr David Sherley, General Manager, Bathurst Regional Council
  - Mr Peter Thompson, General Manager, Wagga Wagga City Council
  - Ms Susan Law, CEO, Armidale Regional Council
  - Mr Paul Bennett, General Manager, Tamworth Regional Council

## Recommendations for Formation of Alliance

The following section outlines the recommendation in establishing a structure and agenda for Regional Cities New South Wales.

### Who is Regional Cities New South Wales (RCNSW)

RCNSW comprises Mayors and CEOs/General Managers of 16 large cities in regional New South Wales. These cities reside outside of the expanded metropolitan areas of Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong, have distinct regional catchments and share similar opportunities and challenges for growth and investment.

The RCNSW is dedicated to achieving real change in regional NSW through collective advocacy for policies and investments that positively impact the development of member cities. Regional cities are the heart of regional NSW and by improving infrastructure and liveability, regional cities can help to grow and support wider regional and rural communities.

While the member cities collaborate on shared advocacy and networking, it is understood that each regional city will as is required pursue competitive funding and investment opportunities.

### Joint Organisations

The RCNSW will have a clear point of difference from other local government alliances. This is particularly true of the NSW Joint Organisations (JO), which have been formally established by the NSW government on a geographic basis to develop plans and priorities for specific regions.

The RCNSW will be independent of the State Government and will not have a geographic basis and will focus on the commonality of developing policy and investment pipelines for the 16 regional cities as regional cities.

### The RCNSW Vision

Building a preeminent New South Wales through the development of connected, thriving and sustainable regional cities.



## Objectives

- Continue to play an important role in the development of strategies that benefit regional and rural New South Wales and inform government policy.
- Develop long-term policy positions that support and encourage the growth of regional New South Wales in its own right, that develop the regions as a viable alternative to metropolitan Sydney, and that encourage, enable and support government to deliver these policies.
- Improve the infrastructure and liveability of regional cities through development of quality services, amenities and transport networks in order to promote economic development in regional and rural communities.
- Encourage new industries and increase workforce capacity and employment opportunities in regional cities.
- Continue to build awareness of RCNSW within government, media, business and RCNSW communities.
- Maintain a reputation for well-considered and evidenced-based positions.

## Membership

Regional Cities New South Wales (RCNSW) is an alliance of 16 regional cities that represent the collective interest of regional cities across NSW. Our members work co-operatively on issues and projects of mutual interest that affect regional cities as well as the whole state of New South Wales.

The following councils have been granted the right to membership of RCNSW by virtue of having a distinct city identity that provides services to a broader regional catchment.

- Albury
- Armidale
- Bathurst
- Cessnock
- Coffs Harbour
- Dubbo
- Griffith
- Lismore
- Maitland
- Orange
- Port Macquarie-Hastings
- Queanbeyan
- Tamworth
- Mid-Coast
- Tweed
- Wagga Wagga

Membership excludes those councils that are located in the coastal development corridor from Newcastle in the North to Shellharbour in the South due to the existing high-level focus of the State Government on the development of these regions.

Changes to the above membership of RCNSW is by invitation only and Cities seeking to join must submit an application in writing. Membership will only be granted after unanimous approval of the RCNSW group and additional members will not be admitted during the first year of operation.

RCNSW members seeking to leave the group will need to advise RCNSW in writing and will be required to give 12 months' notice and pay the annual membership fee for that period. The member Councils will be represented by the Mayor and the Chief Executive Officer/General Manager.

## Governance

RCNSW will be governed by an unincorporated arrangement (Memorandum of Understanding) that is effective for a period of five years commencing 1 January, 2019.

RCNSW will allocate appropriate resources to fulfil the role of a secretariat that will work to an approved Strategic Plan, which will be reviewed annually. A standard membership fee of \$10,000 per annum will apply and voting rights shall be one vote per member Council in attendance.

The position of Chair and Deputy Chair will be subject to election in November and will Chair meetings for a period of two years.

## Executive Management Group

RCNSW's daily operations will be managed by an Executive Management Group (EMG) consisting of:

- RCNSW Chair
- RCNSW Deputy Chair
- CEO/GM of Chair's Council
- CEO/GM of Deputy Chair's Council

The EMG has delegated authority to:

- Approve expenditure on individual items/projects in accordance with the alliance's approved RCNSW Strategic Plan,
- Approve written correspondence on behalf of RCNSW,
- Approve media statements on behalf of the group, following circulation to all members,
- Nominate RCNSW members to attend delegations and political briefings,
- Instruct the RCNSW secretariat to perform tasks in accordance with the approved RCNSW Strategic Plan.

The EMG will hold monthly or as necessary work-in-progress meetings with the secretariat. Should external consultants be required to undertake work on behalf of or for RCNSW, the secretariat will ensure that all procurement/engagement processes are carried out in accordance with statutory requirements e.g. Local Government Act. A recommendation to appoint an external consultant will then be presented to RCNSW, who will be responsible for any appointment.

## Meetings

Meetings are held quarterly in February, May, August and November.

## Expenditure

Approval of major items of expenditure will be subject to agreement of the members. Should additional expenditure above the approved annual budget be necessary, approval will be required from a majority of RCNSW members.

The secretariat is responsible for the preparation of communications and advocacy documents required by RCNSW. All external documents will need approval from either the RCNSW Chair or the EMG before public release.

RCNSW's strategic plan will be reviewed annually and achievements will be measured by:

- The consistency of Policy announcements from Government and Opposition with the RCNSW Strategic Plan,
- The inclusion of RCNSW representatives on relevant working parties, committees or reference groups established by governments, peak bodies or other industry/sector organisations,
- Achievement of population growth, employment growth and liveability targets, and
- Level of media coverage achieved for issues identified in the approved RCNSW Strategic Plan.

## Strategy

### Over-Arching Objective

Establish RCNSW as the trusted authority and thought leader on regional cities in New South Wales.

*To promote RCNSW's aspiration to have a 'seat at the table' when views are being sought and decisions made by government regarding regional cities in New South Wales.*

### Enabler (Underpins All Objectives)

Strategically communicate with government, business, industry and RCNSW community stakeholders in order to obtain the best possible outcomes for regional cities in New South Wales.

*RCNSW is well-placed to influence the business and industry sectors to ensure the best possible outcomes are achieved for regional cities in New South Wales. Regular exposure to key business and industry leaders is crucial to RCNSW's success in this area.*

### Our Objectives:

1. **Memorandum of Understanding:** establishing, through a formal agreement with the New South Wales Government, a mechanism for the alliance to have a seat at the table and provide strategic influence on the state's policy and investment agenda.
2. **Snowy Hydro Funding:** providing a set of recommendations on how the government should invest the \$4.2 billion released in the NSW budget from the sale of Snowy Hydro project. The government has indicated that all of these funds will go to the regions and they will need guidance on how this money should be allocated. The group also anticipated that there would be streamlined funding mechanisms to enable regional cities to access this funding.



3. **Population Strategy:** due to ongoing debate of metropolitan congestion and rapid population growth, the group saw a great opportunity to have influence in developing a framework for growing regional cities under the banner of a state population strategy – the aim would be to develop a settlement and investment plan directing people, infrastructure and business to regional cities.
  
4. **Regional Investment:** identifying a framework to identify how regional investment can be streamlined to be better facilitated in the regions.



## Appendix A: Workshop 1 – Defining Success by 2030

The following table summarises all of the **overarching success indicators** for a possible regional city alliance in 2030 as outlined by workshop participants:

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A seat at the table in developing policy</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Minister for regional cities</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Clear point of difference to other representative bodies/organisations</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Professional resources engaged to ensure quality of policy positions and presentations</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Strong collaboration with Regional Australia Institute</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Demonstrated benefits (financial/economic, social, environmental) delivered through advocacy</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• MOU with the New South Wales government on partnership commitment</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Every city being able to reach their potential</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Chair of Regional Cities NSW as state government representative to engage and influence cabinet decisions</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Regional growth outstripping metropolitan growth</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Strong regional city network collaboration</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Regional freight and air hubs</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Strong share knowledge economy</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• State settlement strategy (population target) (60/40 aspiration)</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Improved connectivity infrastructure</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• State policy informed challenges/opportunities</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lack of Sydney-centric attitude</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Reputation of regional city productivity</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Shared learnings from each other</li></ul>

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The following table outlines all the **policy success indicators** for a possible regional city alliance in 2030 outlined by workshop participants:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facilitator of local government - real partner not regulator</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Paradigm shift about how LG is seen</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Positive subsidies for housing/development</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Framework better reflects capacity to respond to governments</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Resources available for concept planning/business case</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Planning for local interests in growth and resources</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Policy – social cultural experiences</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Decrease unnecessary red tape</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase SEPPs to support investment</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Flexibility/nimbleness to ensure speed</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Differentiate regional requirement as opposed to metro</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Special economic zones</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus on hub and spoke development</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Transport policy to include regional connectivity (not just metro)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Remove existing barriers and complexity for foreign investment in regions</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social, education and health policies that encourage population growth</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Decentralisation planning with policy and funding</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regional health centres, state government policy required to support at a higher level</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>State planning which enable economic development</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Decentralised service delivery of state services that are appropriately funded</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Providing a mechanism for policy to create skilled staff for regions</li> </ul>

The following table outlines all the **funding success indicators** for a possible regional city alliance in 2030 outlined by workshop participants:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State revenue investment framework</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive subsidies for housing/development</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resources available for concept planning/business case</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bigger share of GST/Financial assistance grants</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funding used for decentralisation of government roles and services</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pro-active funding which is merit based and strategic</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• T-Corp policy in relation to borrowing for regional cities</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Firm commitment to fund policies e.g. settlement strategy</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bi-partisan buy in</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Big, transformational projects</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regional cities funded differently to metro</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Separate funding stream</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Non-marginal seat funding</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Service delivery- efficient, effective, timely, same as metro</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discretionary funding for regions</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low interest loans to fund growth</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Budget implemented using regional strategy</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Special infrastructure fund</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funding allocated only after consultation with our group</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transport infrastructure</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social infrastructure (sport/cultural/leisure/housing youth elderly, health, schools)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tourism development and promotion</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technology connectivity</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water infrastructure including dams and stormwater harvesting</li> </ul>



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- Funding to support business relocation
  - Gateway processes for investing in regions
  - Increase in secure water (for irrigation) in the regions
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## Appendix B – Defining a Short Term Agenda

List the top opportunities a regional city alliance would seek to solve

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### Short Term Actions

1. Establishing a Memorandum with the New South Wales government that outlines the way in which the alliance can have a seat at the table in designing policy and funding
  2. Formulation of recommendations for investment priorities from the Snowy Hydro funding
  3. Identifying a framework for prioritising regional city growth in a NSW population strategy
  4. Identifying a streamlined and effective regional development funding process
  5. Strategic player in agenda and priority setting
  6. Having a legislated seat at the table
  7. Identifying a secure funding model for regional cities
  8. Establish ourselves as an equal/legitimate partner to state government
  9. Developing a State election platform for regional cities
  10. To address collective regional city economic development
  11. A collective vote for the regions
  12. A collective for the regional community
  13. Lifestyle promotion to support attraction of workers
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## Short Term Actions

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14. Joint promotion of regional investment opportunities to overseas investors and visitors

15. Removing rate capping

16. Identifying the growth opportunity services centre

17. Doing, adjusting, redesigning policy

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## For more information:

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