Hon Jaala Pulford

Minister for Regional Development

8 Nicholson St

East Melbourne

Vic 3002

10/4/2015

Dear Minister Pulford,

**RE: Letter of Support from Northern Mallee Leaders Advisory Committee for Review of DEDJTR Regional Service Delivery Model and Strategic Directions for Regional Policy.**

The Northern Mallee Leaders Advisory Committee acknowledges the important role that DEDJTR (notably Regional Development Victoria) has played in successfully developing economic growth through impacting and investing in projects like the Northern Mallee Leaders community leadership program. More details about the program can be found at www.nml.org.au

Victorian Regional Community Leadership Programs (VRCLP) now has evidential material to support assertions which indicate that community leadership programs bring in $13 million per annum across Victoria. This impact investing enables development and strengthening of our community leaders, through capacity building of their skills and knowledge, which in turn contributes to ensuring vibrant and sustainable rural and regional community and economy. #

As a community based organisation, Northern Mallee Leaders strongly believes in the importance of building not only advocacy skills in our region but for our region.

Northern Mallee Leaders is an annual community leadership program, with 23 participants in 2015, that is designed to enhance the skills and networks of participants to build the future leadership capacity of the region. A volunteer advisory committee of 13 community members supports the program.

It is a key aim of the Advisory Committee to enhance the geographic reach of this unique program and to expand the skills and capacity of those participate in the program and see these skills enhance our community.

The local Regional Office of Regional Development Victoria has played a major role in the success and effectiveness of the Northern Mallee Leaders Program.

A Regional Office of Regional Development Victoria goes some way to addressing the costs directly associated with travel and brings the important services that Regional Development Victoria provides directly to our town. Community organisations such as ours are far more likely to access the services that Regional Development provides if the office is located in our local area.

# Our Region

Many of the participants in the program each year are from small rural communities located in the vast Mallee region of Northern Victoria.

Often distance and cost prevents local people seeking out learning opportunities. Our region is known for its high level of disadvantage and poor social indicators.

Student retention rates are well below the state average and significantly below the average for Melbourne.

Significantly, Year 12 graduates from the Northern Mallee take up university study at a much lower rate than their city counterparts. Mildura Rural City Council Year 12 or equivalent 33.6%, Regional Victoria 39.0% and Melbourne 59.3%. Mildura Rural City Council - Post Schooling Qualifications 2011, Bachelors degree Mildura 6.2%, Regional Victoria 8.1% and Melbourne 14.8%. \*

Mildura Rural City Council has a unemployment rate of 6.6% in 2011, versus Regional Victoria 5.2% and Melbourne 6.6%. \*

The Northern Mallee area has been hit hard by a downturn in agriculture and commodity prices, manufacturing industries are moving away or closing down due to a wide range of factors and this also contributes to a higher rate of unemployment.

An illustrative example was reported by the Mallee Catchment Management Authority in their 2011 Irrigation Status Report, that of the four pumped irrigation districts in the Sunraysia Region, Merbein had the highest area of irrigable land dried off from irrigation at 41%. \*\*

Mildura, in particular is also seeing the average age of its population grow as young people move away to pursue further opportunities and an older demographic makes Mildura a growth area for those over 65.

## References:

# VRCLP Position Paper - http://www.vrclp.com.au/files/8014/0919/0523/VRCLP\_Position\_Paper.pdf

\* Mildura Rural City Council - Social Indicators Report 2012 - http://www.nmcp.org.au/userfiles/Mildura%20Social%20Indicators%20Report%202012%20Final.pdf

\*\* http://www.malleecma.vic.gov.au/news/local-growers-start-to-bring-land-back-into-production

Yours Sincerely,

Signature of Rebecca Wells, Chair

Rebecca Wells – Chair of the Northern Mallee Leaders Advisory Committee