## Ararat Rural City logo

# Review of DEDJTR

# A Submission by Ararat Rural City

This submission is in response to the Review of DEDJTR and addresses issues raised in the Terms of Reference.

##  Identify best practice, evidence-based policy directions to foster regional growth and job creation. This will include:

## Identifying the major economic, social and demographic issues facing regional Victoria. This analysis should include but not be limited to:

Recent research confirms that much of non-coastal regional Australia is experiencing significant economic, physical, demographic and cultural decline. This decline is not only an Australian phenomenon but can be found in other industrialised countries such as the United States and Canada as well as throughout Europe (Amato and Amato 2000; Bible and Brown 1981; Forth 2000; Galston and Baeher 1995; Holmes 2002). Australian Bureau of Statistics data provides clear evidence of the nature, extent and location of decline in non-metropolitan regional Australia. With decline has come the emergence of depressed regional communities evidenced by high levels of welfare dependence, lower than national and state average income levels, the loss of essential services as well as more visible indicators of decline such as unsaleable houses, closed businesses and the generally decaying state of local infrastructure (Baum et al. 1999; Bell 1995; Bray 2000; Hugo 2001; Lloyd et al. 2000; National Economics 2000; National Economics and Australian Local Government Association 2002).

Within Australia’s traditional wool-wheat areas regional decline is most evident in the smaller centres with a population of less than 4,000, while overall, larger regional centres (over 10,000) tend to be stable or growing (Baum et al. 1999). What is significant is that many declining smaller country towns are located in agricultural regions, which have experienced relative prosperity over the past decade. It also needs to be emphasised that many Australian country towns with populations of 4,000 or less are not experiencing significant decline (Baum et al. 1999; Department of Infrastructure 2000; Kenyon et al. 2001; Stimson et al. 2001). Those that have stabilised or growing are, in the main located on the eastern seaboard or on the fringe of the major metropolitan or regional population centres or have high scenic amenability that is attractive to new residents seeking alternative lifestyles. Those that are declining tend to be concentrated in the inland rural areas and are towns, which still rely heavily on local agriculture to generate wealth and employment. (Baum et al. 1999;Bell 1995; Bray 2000; Department of Infrastructure 2000; Hugo 2001; Lloyd et al. 2000; Stimson et al. 2001)

## Industry profile – key sectors, strengths and weaknesses etc.

## Education and training participation and attainment levels

Although there is negative net migration in all age groups of significant concern is the loss of youth in the 18 year old to 24 year old age bracket. The loss of youth and their subsequent non return is generally as a result of moving to undertake tertiary study and although some of the movers return (as evidenced in the net gain of 25 to 34 year olds) the rate of return is very poor. This type of population drift is not unique to Ararat Rural city and reflects the experience of most regional cities and areas in Australia that do not have a fully operational University and TAFE campus. Outward migration of Ararat residents tend to move to correlates with the loss of 18 to 24 year olds with the greatest loss of residents being to the Regional cities of Ballarat, Geelong and Bendigo which have active Universities that target attracting students from Regional Areas. There is also a perception amongst youth that moving to a large Regional city provides better social, and work opportunities whilst still being close to home.

An opportunity exists to increase participation and completion rates within regional areas by providing the option of face to face training in a TAFE setting locally. Having an operational TAFE campus provides an aspirational opportunity for local students to remain engaged and undertake training to fill critical skills shortages in Regional Victoria.

## Inter- and intra-regional transport connectivity

Currently Ararat is serviced week days by three train services to Melbourne via Ballarat, and an additional five coach services that terminate in Ballarat, and can connect with trains to Melbourne. Approximate travel times from Ararat are:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | To Ballarat | To Melbourne |
| Coach | 1 hr 20 min | 3 hrs 38 min |
| Coach/Rail | 1 hr 30 min | 3 hrs 30 min |
| Rail | 52 min | 2 hrs 10 min |
| (VLine 2015) |  |  |

Regional Rail Link is a landmark infrastructure project designed to remove major bottlenecks in Victoria's rail network. It will do this by untangling metropolitan and regional tracks as they travel through Melbourne's west into the heart of the city. This will allow the Ballarat line to run one additional service during peak times, and to run faster services to Melbourne. The provision of more services and decreased travel times opens up opportunities for residents in Ararat to commute to Ballarat for shopping, higher education or employment, and to Melbourne for shopping, sport, or cultural activities. Although this could be seen to also threaten Ararat’s economy, better public transport links will also encourage new residents to move to Ararat and commute to Ballarat or the western fringe of Melbourne, and attract workers from Ballarat to Ararat to meet skills shortages.

It is also essential is the need to consider intra-regional connectivity particularly within smaller townships and communities which have increasingly ageing populations. The extension of rail passenger services to Stawell, Horsham, Hamilton and Portland would assist connect and grow the entire region including potentially attracting new residents from Melbourne or large regional centres.

## ICT/broadband capacity

The NBN is Australia's first national wholesale-only, open access communications network that is being built to bring high speed broadband and telephone services within the reach of all Australian premises.

The NBN will utilise the most appropriate technology for a given location, with the aim of improving ways for you to connect with one another. The plan is for every home, school and workplace in the country to have access to the NBN.

The NBN is expected to deliver significant benefits to regional and rural communities by providing fast and efficient telecommunications. This will have implications for education, telecommuting, online health, entertainment, and business solutions. The breaking down of the digital divide will enhance the attractiveness of Ararat as being a potential community to relocate to.

Businesses and the community in Ararat Rural City are dependent on having fast and reliable communications linkages with the outside world.

21st Century farming practices involve the use of sophisticated technology that often requires internet connectivity to transfer large amounts of data. The use of advanced technology contributes to increased yields and output whilst lowering costs and increasing productivity.

Local and export orientated businesses are developing a greater reliance on using the internet for order placement, sales, and marketing. The increased use of Cloud technology enhances opportunities for businesses in Ararat Rural City to compete effectively in an increasingly globalised marketplace.

The health and educational sectors will continue to increase their use of technology to access and deliver highly specialized services. Technology also enables elderly or disabled residents and residents of the smaller townships and rural areas of Ararat Rural city remain connected with their local and wider communities as well as providing an opportunity for businesses to operate from sites outside of the main population centers.

Undertaking a broad, ‘first principles’ examination of what the evidence tells us about how to drive regional growth, with examination of key policy levers including: transport, infrastructure and planning; innovation and industry policy; trade and investment facilitation; education and training; and measures to foster a sound business environment such as regulation settings.

Economic performance of regions is not attributable to any single factor. The view of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Standing Council on Regional Australia is that regional growth is dependent upon a range of factors related to:

* Human capital (particularly education and skills);
* Sustainability (economic, environmental and social) and population growth;
* Access to markets (international, national and regional);
* Regional comparative advantage and business competitiveness; and
* Cross-sectoral cooperation, intergovernmental partnerships and integrated planning

The major key propulsive sectors in the Ararat (RC) Region have been identified as:

* Sheep, Grains, Beef & Dairy Cattle
* Electrical Equipment Manufacturing
* Public Administration & Regulatory Services
* Health Care Services
* Meat & Meat Product Manufacturing

Ararat is fortunate in that it still retains a vibrant manufacturing sector although both Federal and State Government policies have contributed to difficulties in competing with imported products.

The Ararat Economic Strategy has identified a number of drivers to grow the economy over the next 15 years:

* The Western Highway Duplication
* Development of additional passenger rail services including high speed rail,
* The NBN,
* Exporting to the rapidly growing Asian Middle Class, and
* Mining and Renewable Energy

## Consider current regional strategic and related planning models and the evidence regarding the effectiveness of various models.

The State of Victoria has implemented an approach to regional development organised around regional plans that are developed locally and endorsed by government, business and community leaders (Vision for Victoria Strategy, 2010). These plans have assisted the growth of cross regional linkages and have clarified synergies and issues across regions but have also highlighted the lack of funding available at a local level to implement change. The Central Highlands Regional Growth Plan is one of eight regional growth plans that have been prepared across Victoria. It provides a broad direction for regional land use and development as well as high level planning frameworks and the means to implement the strategic land use and infrastructure directions that are set out in the Regional Strategic Plans.

The Central Highlands Growth Plan has provide a co-ordinated and long term vision for the region and Ararat supports this regional and cooperative approach to strategic planning. It has provided certainty and direction for the regional development and highlighted Ararat's role as regional centre and it is essential that this is supported by strong planning, development and delivery in the regions.

The integration of planning and development at a regional level is essential and has ensured important projects like the Ararat Bypass Planning Study, Ararat Wind Facility and Ararat Arts Precinct have progressed with the support and assistance of a regional office which understands and supports the importance of the these projects to our regional economy.

Specific funding for key strategic and statutory planning projects has been essential to the future development Ararat and has been successfully delivered through the Rural Flying Squad on projects like the Grampians Triangle Planning Scheme amendment which has allowed for a rural zone review in a key tourism and agriculture precinct to drive future investment across two council areas. It is also hoped that support for the coordination of major projects like the Ararat Wind Facility and Western Hwy duplication could be accessed at a local level to ensure important investment is supported and facilitated.

## Confirming key priorities for each region and broad policy directions, possible actions, and recommendations for further work to drive regional economic growth.

Ararat Rural City endorses the priorities identified in the Central Highland Regional Growth Plan within a context that Regional Growth Plans are guidelines and not centralised mandated planning documents:

1. Plan for growth
2. Improve transport infrastructure and services
3. Raise the region’s profile as a tourist and heritage destination
4. Utilise the region’s strength in information and communications technology to provide better services to business and communities
5. Improve access to health services and tackle health inequality
6. Provide better access to education and training
7. Continue to foster leadership capacity within the region
8. A productive and resilient landscape

Developing export markets at a local level is fast becoming a role that local government is actively participating in. Ararat Rural city has spent over 20 years developing relations with China to develop cultural and trade opportunities for our community. The experience of Ararat reflects the success of developing networks in China where “The dynamism of the Chinese economy today is due to the relative autonomy of local communities in governing themselves and of local party heads in cultivating international economic relations. It is not all driven from Beijing by any means. Much of China’s success is due to the relatively autonomous behaviour of provincial heads”.

Sister relationships provide a forum within which friendly relations can develop—along with a greater understanding of social, cultural and political sensitivities—and a framework for companies to pursue business opportunities. As a Senate inquiry commented, “The committee considers that Chinese regionalism and provincial political autonomy offers great opportunities for Australian sub- national actors to form bilateral networks. Sister relationships provide social, political, and economic

benefits for both nations.” (Senate Standing Committees on Foreign Affairs Defence and Trade Completed Inquiries 2004-07 Chapter 18 - Political links).

The Victorian State Government provides limited assistance to businesses who are considering exporting to China through the Invest Victoria agency which has offices in Shanghai, Beijing, Nanjing and Chengdu. The Invest Victoria agency is primarily concerned with attracting investors to Victoria but is able to provide some market intelligence to Victorian businesses as well as matching investors to Victorian businesses. In addition, the State Government provides opportunities for business people to participate in trade delegations to major Chinese cities to gain a greater understanding of market conditions and opportunities. To a large extent the role of State Government is a macroeconomic rather than a microeconomic role and the microeconomic role is best undertaken by local players who have intimate knowledge of the products and businesses that operate within a municipality.

The Victorian State Government in 2012 released the Engaging China – Strengthening Victoria Plan which emphasises the importance of local government international relations:

“International local government relationships are an important aspect of China’s global engagement and many councils across Victoria have sister city or friendship city arrangements with Chinese counterparts. A more coordinated approach to China engagement by the State Government and Victorian councils would help maximise the benefit to the State of these respective China relations” (Engaging China – Strengthening Victoria, 2012).

In a 2014 report on the Jiangsu Victoria Sister State Relationship, the Victorian Government stated:

“The establishment of international relationships is local governments’ best mechanism to support business access to overseas markets and sister-city relationships have proved to be precursors to the development of stronger economic partnerships over time.’ (Victoria Jiangsu Regional City Alliance, Government of Victoria, 2014).

## Identify the approach to regional service delivery best able to deliver regional growth and job creation. This will include:

Increasingly across Australia but to a larger extent internationally, place based approaches to regional development are being applied and or considered by Government when addressing complex issues such as land use planning, water management, and economic development. This approach devolves a greater role to local and regional institutions emphasising bottom-up, locally designed and owned strategies aimed at promoting growth potential in all local economies. It stresses the importance of integrating policies for land-use, infrastructure and business support. It places a particular emphasis on ‘soft’ factors of development such as high-level skills and innovative capacities of firms and public sector organisations and especially the role of inter-firm networks in contributing to growth.

Federal and State Governments are seeking to organise economic development strategies in partnership with business and community actors at a local level. These place-based approaches devolve greater responsibility to local and regional institutions emphasising bottom-up, locally designed strategies aimed at maximising the growth potential of local economies. The State of Victoria has implemented an approach to regional development organised around regional plans that are developed locally and endorsed by government, business and community leaders (Vision for Victoria Strategy, 2010).

## Reviewing key functions in DEDJTR (notably Regional Development Victoria, including the domestic Victorian Government Business Office network; Agriculture Services and Biosecurity Operations; regional transport planning and investment facilitation; and the structural arrangements in place to drive tourism in regional Victoria),regional planning arrangements; and across Government (where appropriate).

Federal and State Governments are seeking to organise economic development strategies in partnership with business and community actors at a local level and RDV has successfully filled the role of a conduit between the State and local government. These place-based approaches devolve greater responsibility to local and regional institutions emphasising bottom-up, locally designed strategies aimed at maximising the growth potential of local economies.

A role that RDV can continue to develop is to ensure that input is given to appropriate decision makers in Government in relation to the effect that policy can have on regional and rural areas. This can often occur as the result of policy changes by another area of government. A recent example that has affected AME Systems who are based in Ararat where changes to the bus contracts in Melbourne to 3 year contracts has resulted in cheap overseas buses being imported into Australia at the detriment of locally made buses that AME provides wiring for. Careful consideration needs to be undertaken in looking at unintended collateral damage that a change of policy may have or Regional Victoria.

## Having regard for the Government’s election commitments for regional service delivery (e.g. establishment of new Regional Business Centres and Regional Cities Clusters)

Current regional service delivery is very much based on a hub and spoke approach with the hubs being large regional centres such as Ballarat or Geelong. To be fully effective and to provide localised service, Regional Business Centres need to be rolled out to smaller regional cities. If funded the provision of Regional Business Centres could be delivered by Local government utilising existing connections and networks.

Regional Cities Clusters can be developed using a number of approaches including:

* + Population: e.g. Regional Capitals, 10,000 to 30,000 residents etc.,
	+ Geographic proximity: e.g. Ararat and Stawell
	+ Similarities based on economy or community indicators: e.g. Coastal cities.

Any Regional City Cluster must recognise that Cities often have loose membership of a number of clusters and careful consultation needs to occur with cities to ensure that the clusters are an appropriate fit for the cities.

## Recommending the mix of structural, governance, and strategic models for regional service delivery best suited to promoting long term prosperity in regional Victoria

RDV is actively involved with Marketing Regional Victoria to attract residents through the Regional Living Expo and Good Move Victoria. This role is a valuable role that should continue to be

supported but an opportunity exists to also to assist local government develop place marketing strategies to undertake place marketing through Visitor Information Centres that is not only tourism orientated but population attraction orientated. Marketing of Regions, Cities, and Towns in Australia, to attract financial and human capital is mainly a function of the Economic Development Units of local government. According to some analysts, there have been three “generations” of Economic Development Marketing, beginning with what has been termed “Factory Chasing”, moving on to “Target Marketing”, and finally “Product Development” (Kotler, Haider, and Rein, 1993).

Although the term “generation” is used, the three generations are not necessarily sequential or mutually exclusive. It could be argued that many older local government areas slip from one generation to another or operate conjointly in all of the generations in response to the goals and attitudes of the current council. Newer peri-urban areas and dormitory suburbs often base their economic growth purely on providing services to the expanding population and do not pursue factories or product development strategies, while some remote local government areas actively pursue factories (Ford, 2001; O'Connor, 2001).

## Place Marketing Strategies

The exception to the domination of marketing by Economic Development Units is the role of Visitor Information Centres. Although usually under the control of local councils, Visitor Information Centres are also involved in regional, state, and federal marketing strategies serving both public and private sector interests (Holcomb, 1999). Although the Visitor Information Centres are often the first contact point for potential residents, their orientation is almost entirely tourism-related, and a valuable opportunity to promote the local area, as a potential place to live, is lost.

Traditionally there has been a general tendency by local government marketers to rely on four main strategies to market place to their target markets (see next page). The strategies are: Image Marketing, Attractions Marketing, Infrastructure Marketing, and People Marketing (Kotler, Haider, and Rein, 1993). Although not mutually exclusive, traditionally each of these strategies was applied to different market segments, e.g., Infrastructure Marketing was used to attract industry, while Attractions were used to attract visitors or new residents. Within the last decade, in Australia and overseas, many communities now use these four main strategies within an overall approach of marketing lifestyle or quality of life.

A survey by the Victorian Employers’ Chamber of Commerce and Industry found that family reasons and lifestyle were the most important factors in people deciding to move to regional areas (Shaw, 2001). Quality of life indices have been developed and used throughout the United States and Europe over many years to assess and rank cities, towns, and regions in terms of their liveability.

Cities have used favourable rankings as a part of their marketing strategy to attract human and resource capital while lowly ranked cities have used the rankings to market themselves to government for extra assistance and special aid (Donald, 2001; Rogerson, 1999; van den Berg and Braun, 1999).Within the strategy of Quality of Life Marketing, some councils within Australia have developed innovative marketing strategies in an attempt to increase inward migration. The new approach to marketing of place now links the traditional marketing strategies of image, attraction, infrastructure, and people together to market the city or town as a total lifestyle package.

Regional Development Victoria have provided much needed support in assisting Ararat Rural City find funding opportunities for community infrastructure as well as assist local industry in making submissions for funding to assist expansion plans and job creation. The RDV staff are dedicated, hardworking and conscientious but are often hindered by changes in government policy (including changes of government), changing programmes, lack of human resources and large geographical areas. Often these factors lead to time delays which can have significant impact on industry who are working to a timeline set by competitive action and economic threats or opportunities. The time delays are also exasperated by the many layers of bureaucracy that any funding requests must navigate through often leading to frustration for RDV staff who are dealing with local government and industry who work to different time frames, particularly in the case of industry.

RDV has an emphasis of employment growth and creating sustainable regional and rural communities and this reflected in the assistance that can be provided to industry to assist with infrastructure and creating export opportunities but this is reliant on Councils having Economic Development Units or Community Development Units that are becoming harder to fund with diminishing resources and statutory obligations to be met. Any review of RDV should also consider whether Councils should have a statutory responsibility to ensure that they have appropriate staff to support RDV in a local capacity and if they do how those positions should be funded.

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