



GOVERNMENT AGENCY RELOCATION TO THE HUME REGION

FINAL REPORT
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Prepared for
Hume RDA

Independent
insight.



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION	III
2. DECENTRALISATION	1
2.1 Society wide impacts of decentralisation	1
2.2 Impacts on the destination region	2
2.3 Impacts on the relocating agency	3
2.4 Successful decentralisation	3
2.5 Decentralisation examples	5
3. THE HUME REGION	7
3.1 Hume’s economic specialisation	8
3.2 Location and transport	10
3.3 Regional centres	12
3.4 Higher education institutions	14
3.5 Workforce, housing and office markets	16
3.6 Regional living	18
4. AGENCY REVIEW	20
4.1 Agriculture sector	21
4.2 Back of office functions	23
4.3 Victorian Government agencies	24
4.4 How the Hume region can assist with a move	25
5. KEY MESSAGES	26
5.1 Relocation to the Hume Region	26
6. NEXT STEPS	288
6.1 Settle regional approach	288
6.2 Finalise key messages	288
6.3 Identify and map stakeholders	29
6.4 Brief regional champions	29
6.5 Engage central decision makers	29
6.6 Support regional champions	29
6.7 Communicate with broader community	30
6.8 Review and refine approach/ key messages	30

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1: LABOUR PRODUCTIVITY: CAPITAL CITIES AND REGIONS	1
FIGURE 2: KEY IMPERATIVES FOR ATTRACTING SKILLED PEOPLE IN REGIONAL AUSTRALIA	4
FIGURE 3: FORECAST POPULATION BY LGA AT 2036, HUME REGION	7
FIGURE 4: PROJECTED POPULATION AND EMPLOYMENT GROWTH, HUME RDA	8
FIGURE 5: EMPLOYMENT SIZES, LOCATION QUOTIENTS & AVERAGE ANNUAL GROWTH RATES FOR SELECTED INDUSTRIES, HUME REGION	8
FIGURE 6: HUME TRANSPORTATION ARCS	10
FIGURE 7: AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION IN SOUTH EAST AUSTRALIA	11
FIGURE 8: TRAVEL TIMES FOR ALBURY-WODONGA, SHEPPARTON, AND WANGARATTA	12
FIGURE 9: ALBURY-WODONGA EMPLOYMENT BY INDUSTRY, 2016	13
FIGURE 10: WANGARATTA EMPLOYMENT BY INDUSTRY, 2016	14
FIGURE 11: SHEPPARTON EMPLOYMENT BY INDUSTRY, 2016	14
FIGURE 12: UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE FACULTY OF VETERINARY AND AGRICULTURAL SCIENCES	15
FIGURE 13: WODONGA TAFE	15
FIGURE 14: SHEPPARTON LAW COURTS FOLLOWING COMPLETION IN 2018	17
FIGURE 15: LIVEABILITY REGIONAL CITIES AND MELBOURNE COMPARISON	18
FIGURE 16: VIEW FROM THE ATO ALBURY OFFICE	20

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1: KNOWLEDGE INTENSIVE WORKERS	16
TABLE 2: POTENTIAL AGENCY CANDIDATES: AGRICULTURAL SPECIALISATION	22
TABLE 3: POTENTIAL AGENCY CANDIDATES: BACK OF OFFICE FUNCTIONS	23
TABLE 4: POTENTIAL AGENCY CANDIDATES: STATE GOVERNMENT	24

1. INTRODUCTION

SGS Economics and Planning (SGS) has been commissioned by the Hume RDA to provide advice on the potential relocation of a Commonwealth Government agency into the Hume Region.¹

SGS notes that decentralisation of government agencies has some sound reasoning to it. Decentralisation can:

- Help spur economic development and employment in the destination city, as well as boost morale for the local population.
- Help spread the economic benefits of having a stable government employer in town and marginally mitigate the diseconomies of scale our large cities have, such as traffic congestion.
- Enable a government agency to be closer to its stakeholders and better draw on the skills and experience it may be missing out on from being located in a capital city.
- Allow workers to take up the lifestyle benefits afforded to those who live in regional areas, including access to nature, lower stress, and cheaper cost of living.

However, it is important to note that the relocation of an agency from one place to another is not an unambiguously good thing. Primarily, the original location takes a hit in morale from workers leaving and the associated impacts on reduced economic activity. SGS notes that, for this report, we are not taking a whole of society perspective to relocation.

Decentralisation must be done carefully. The moving agency must be a good fit for the receiving region, and the scale of relocation must be appropriate.

In this report we explore these issues, finding that:

- A government agency that can leverage Hume's economic specialisation in agriculture, would do well to relocate to one of Hume's major centres: Albury-Wodonga, Wangaratta, or Shepparton.
- The housing, labour, office, and service markets in these cities could well accommodate an agency of around 100 to 400 staff moving into the area.

Finally, SGS distils the key messages to communicate the gains from decentralisation to the Hume Region to those in positions of responsibility in the Commonwealth and Victorian Public Service and elected officials.

¹ Cover photo: North East Water project manager Brad Willis watches as recycled water from the new Wangaratta dam irrigates oats and rye grass, from <https://www.bordermail.com.au/story/1663822/wangarattas-67m-dam-to-irrigate-crops/>

2. DECENTRALISATION

This section outlines the general merits and considerations of moving a government agency to a regional location. The key factors for a successful relocation are identified.

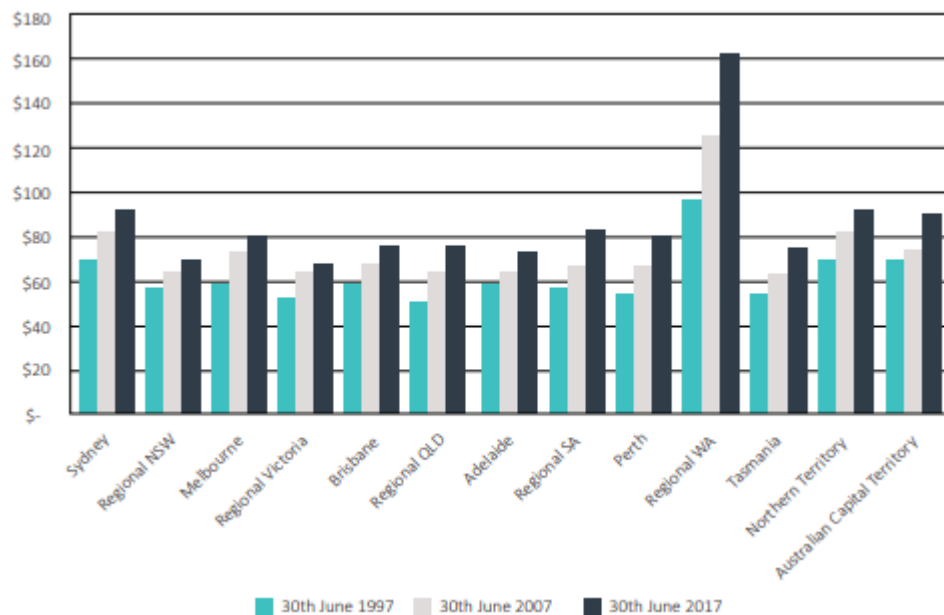
2.1 Society wide impacts of decentralisation

Population growth in Australia is increasingly concentrated in our largest cities, while smaller regional cities are often in decline. With this in mind, a growing need has been identified by government to redress the population, employment, fiscal and service imbalance between urban and regional areas.

One policy response to this imbalance is the spatial decentralisation of government agencies, whereby government offices are relocated from a capital city CBD to a regional location. The overall merit of these relocations is not clear. While decentralisation can offer indisputable benefits for the destination region, the ability for an agency to thrive in a non-CBD location is dependent on a range of factors and is far from assured.

With the rapid growth of cities placing increased pressure on rents, movement networks and infrastructure, the redirection of jobs to regional locations could possibly alleviate city growth pressures. However, as SGS labour productivity modelling has consistently shown, CBD locations are by far the most productive regions in Australia from a labour force perspective. This reflects the agglomeration effects afforded by CBD locations, such as specialised labour pools, shared infrastructure facilities, as well as the less tangible benefits of inter-organisational networks and knowledge spillovers. The chart below illustrates this, with labour productivity by capital cities and regions showing that in recent years capital cities typically outperform the regions.

FIGURE 1: LABOUR PRODUCTIVITY: CAPITAL CITIES AND REGIONS



Source: SGS Economics and Planning

There is no obvious net gain from moving jobs from one region to another which harms the original location while benefiting the receiving location. Consequently, the merit of government office relocation is not clear from a whole of economy perspective.

2.2 Impacts on the destination region

From the destination region's perspective an incoming government office can clearly generate a wide variety of benefits, though there are some disbenefits which should also be considered.

Employment

Following delivery of a decentralisation project, there will be greater employment opportunities in a region.

If the relocating agency requires recruitment to fill roles this would be a positive for the destination region if the skills mix of the region match those required and if there is slack in the labour market. If there is slack in the labour market, with suitable locals willing to work at the agency, then this would increase employment in the region.

However, in a tight labour market, the increased competition for labour may cause local businesses to experience labour shortages as staff leave to work for the new agency. This means there may be some downside risks for the regional destination. For example, studies have shown that government office relocation can have a negative impact on small businesses and entrepreneurship in the destination region, as existing enterprises must compete with the agency's better working conditions and higher wages (Le Goff 2006).

In short, the scale of a successful move depends on the slackness in and size of the destination region's labour market.

Economic activity

If the project successfully encourages people to move into the destination region, this will bring new economic activity, as a result of the additional wages spent in the region and their subsequent flow through the economy; benefiting local businesses.

Public investment in a regional area can also act as a catalyst for private investment, with the private sector attracted by the:

- Improvement to the region's image and
- Uplift in confidence given the long-term public commitment to that region.

The establishment of a major government office may be accompanied by public infrastructure spending and/ or public realm improvements, with associated improvements to accessibility and amenity.

If the relocation creates demand for additional commercial offices, then this could spur construction activity.

However, additional demand in the region may drive up prices of goods and services, causing existing residents to pay higher prices.

Again, the size of a move must be carefully considered so as not to overwhelm the destination region's economy.

Local confidence

Having the long term commitment of a government agency has impacts outside of what is economically quantifiable, such as the boost in confidence and morale this would provide to locals. Establishing an agency in a regional centre indicates that government sees a future for the area and is backing this with a tangible commitment.

2.3 Impacts on the relocating agency

From an agency perspective, strong drawcards for relocation to a regional area are the possible savings in operating costs. However, the quantity of these savings is hard to deliver and must be pitted against the costs of disruption and turnover inevitable in the move.

A more certain benefit of a move is the ability of the agency to better tap into the specialist skills and experience of people in the region. This is especially important if these local skills are well aligned with the needs of the agency.

Cost savings

Commercial rents are typically much lower in regional locations compared to capital city CBDs, including Canberra. This price differential is likely to persist into the future, so it can be *pima facie* expected that cost savings from lower rents could be achieved from a relocation.

However, with an agency moving into a regional area there may be a lack of supply of suitable office space. This could push up rents for incumbent businesses in regional areas. Or it may require new purpose-built building, which comes with additional costs and risks given the likely lack of depth in large scale office tenants in the destination region.

Another possible benefit are lower labour costs, with wages for white collar employment in regional areas typically lower than in city locations (which is connected to the lower labour productivity in regions discussed earlier). However, it is unlikely that a relocating agency would be able capitalise on this wage differential given the rigidity of public service workplace agreements.

Offsetting these cost savings are the costs involved with the relocation itself. There will be unavoidable disruption to work, and administration costs associated with finding and setting up (and possibly developing) new offices. Moving costs for existing employees who take up the move will also need to be funded.

Moreover, an “inevitable brain drain” from the agency is likely, as key employees unwilling to relocate will cause a loss of knowledge, skills and experience (NSWBC 2013: 2). This also generates additional costs associated with redundancy pay-outs and the replacement of staff within the destination area (Le Goff 2006). In a recent effort to move the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA) from Canberra to Armidale, the authority lost over 50% of its staff (a loss of 110) since announcing the move.²

On the ground exposure

If the decentralised agency is a good fit for the area, the quality of its work may be enhanced. Being closer to on the ground happenings in regional areas may enhance how an agency performs its function.

If a region has a specialisation that aligns with a government agency or department, then being in the region will allow the agency to more easily draw on the region’s specialist skills and knowledge. For example, an agricultural agency locating in an agricultural region as opposed to a capital city, will be closer to some of its key stakeholders which will make consultation and collaboration easier. Additionally, there is a readily available workforce with specialist expertise and experience for the agency to draw on.

2.4 Successful decentralisation

Clearly a successful and sustainable decentralisation is far from assured. Some of the factors which determine a successful relocation as identified by the Select Committee on Regional Development and Decentralisation (SCRDD) are:

- The relocation should boost the local economy and contribute to the economic base

² <https://www.abc.net.au/news/rural/2018-11-20/chemical-regulator-staff-refuse-to-go-bush-senate-hears/10515406>

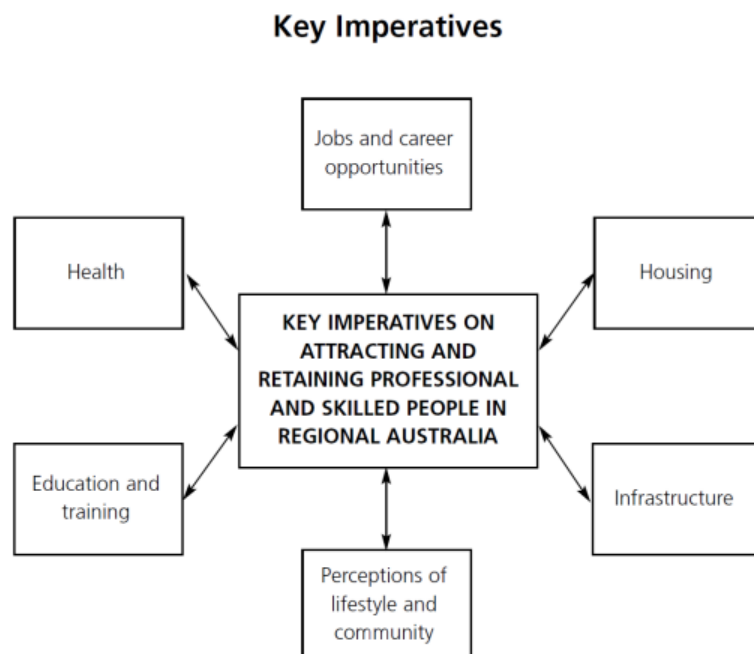
- The region should be compatible with the Commonwealth agency in terms of function or services
- The relocating agency should be relatively independent or specialised so not to impair interactions with partner departments or agencies
- The agency should not rely on daily interaction with public officials in other locations (i.e. Canberra)
- There should be an availability of a workforce with relevant skills and experience in the receiving town
- There should be adequate and appropriate office space in the receiving region
- There should be adequate transport connections to other parts of Australia to allow the agency to operate
- Host towns should have an adequate population.

Tied into this, for employees to want to make the move, there needs to be opportunities available for themselves and their families:³

- A pool of job opportunities: the attractiveness of a location depends on not just the job which the employee would move for but the other opportunities which exist in the region, both for the employee in the future, and their spouse
- Amenity of the area: schools for children, access to health facilities, open space and nature, recreation and entertainment.

Similar themes were picked up by the Standing Committee on Regional Development’s report on attracting and retaining skilled people to regional Australia. These are summarised in the figure below. Throughout our report we apply these principles in formulating what a successful decentralisation to the Hume region would entail.

FIGURE 2: KEY IMPERATIVES FOR ATTRACTING SKILLED PEOPLE IN REGIONAL AUSTRALIA



Source: Attracting & Retaining Skilled People in Regional Australia: A Practitioners Guide, February 2004

³

https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Former_Committees/Regional_Development_and_Decentralisation/RDD/Final_Report/section?id=committees%2Freportrep%2F024136%2F25544

2.5 Decentralisation examples

Decentralisation has been something politicians have talked about for decades. However, there are only a few examples of lasting agency decentralisation at the Commonwealth level:

- The Grains Research and Development Corporation has established offices in Adelaide, Perth, Dubbo, and Toowoomba. Its head office remains in Canberra.
- The Australian Securities and Investment Commission was established in Traralgon in the 1990s. Around 800 employees work from the Traralgon office.
- The Australian Taxation Office established a regional office in Albury, NSW in the 1970s. This office has around 1,000 employees.⁴

Decentralisation of agencies has been more prevalent at the state government level. Some examples include:

- The NSW Department of Agriculture moved from Sydney to Orange in 1992.
- The NSW Government moved the Department of Primary Industries from Sydney to Orange in the early 2000s.
- The Victorian Transport Accident Commission moved to Geelong in 2009.
- The NSW Office of Local Government moved to Nowra.
- The NSW Department of Mineral Resources moved from Sydney to Maitland.
- The Western Australian Department of Water moved from Perth to Mandurah.
- Work Safe Victoria is currently relocating from Melbourne to Geelong.

These examples demonstrate that, while decentralisation is rare, when it has been done well it has been a sustainable and lasting move.

4

https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Former_Committees/Regional_Development_and_Decentralisation/RDD/Issues_Paper/section?id=committees%2freportrep%2f024094%2f24935
<https://www.weeklytimesnow.com.au/news/opinion/decentralisation-regional-australians-need-careers-and-jobs/news-story/bee9a8c22c1d68d8dfda16b2313ef9fb>

CASE STUDY: TAC MOVE TO GEELONG

Over 2006 to 2009 the Transport Accidents Commission (a Victorian Government Agency) moved its headquarters from Melbourne to Geelong (which then had a population of around 175,000). The move is widely regarded as a success and resulted in a new purpose built office in Geelong for around 650 TAC employees.

The functions identified to move to Geelong were primarily claims management roles as well as legal, finance, and projects and technology. These roles do not typically require daily contact with Ministers or other agencies located in Melbourne.

Staff considering a move were provided with extensive support including:

- Financial support for staff covering the costs of moving as well as redundancy and retention payments
- A dedicated team for employee support during the move. This team ran a program of information sessions and was available to provide ad hoc advice to staff
- Tours of Geelong for staff to get to know the area and the local offer
- A pilot office set up to allow staff to see what it is like the work in the region

A purpose built building allowed for a refreshed office environment for TAC staff and helped entice a move. This investment also boosted the local construction industry, with an estimated 850 jobs created and an addition \$59m injected into the economy over the move period. The move stoked demand for housing in Geelong with 200 TAC employees formerly located in Melbourne purchasing homes in Geelong.

The move is acknowledged as a success with around 50% of TAC's Melbourne staff choosing to stay with the organisation during the move with an additional 200 staff recruited from local areas. TAC made a conscious effort to maintain "corporate know-how" by planning for the event of many staff choosing not to relocate to Geelong. To aid this, TAC had a knowledge transfer program in place to ensure a transition of knowledge as staff left the organisation.

The relocation did not present any major operational changes in the way TAC performed its business, with client satisfaction of TAC's work remaining high during and after the move.

The move was part of a broader program of creating a public service hub in Geelong and signalled the government was able to deliver on its rhetoric of investing in the regions. It gave those outside Geelong the confidence to invest for the long term and it boosted morale for those in Geelong.

Source:

<https://www.premier.vic.gov.au/worksafes-new-headquarters-officially-open/>

<https://www.aph.gov.au/DocumentStore.ashx?id=3af2c2be-0724-42d7-9aa4-8d1b6f70976c&subId=509097>

<http://www.tac.vic.gov.au/about-the-tac/media-room/news-and-events/2009-media-releases/tac-relocation-a-major-boost-to-geelong-economy>

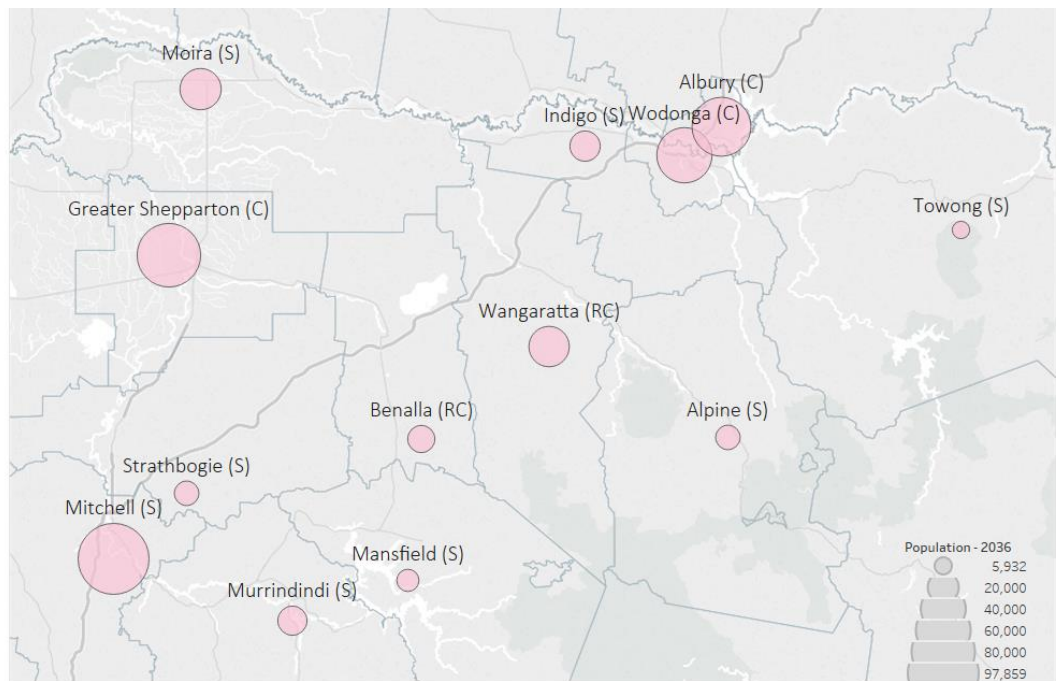
3. THE HUME REGION

This section provides an overview of the Hume region prior to assessing the scale and type of decentralisation that could feasibly occur.

Hume is a region with a social and cultural fabric and heritage to match its natural beauty. Renowned for world-class wines and gourmet food, the region is woven together by the Goulburn, Broken, Ovens, Kind and Kiewa Rivers – all vital to sustaining a rich natural, social and business environment. The Strathbogie Ranges represent the gateway to Victoria’s high country and are integral to the region’s popularity for nature-based tourism and cycling.

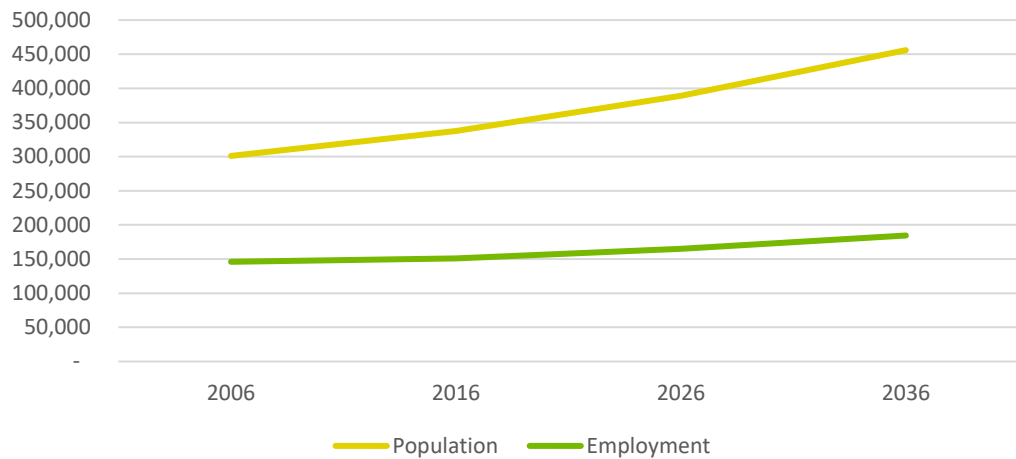
The Hume region consists of 12 local government areas, with the most significant concentrations of population in Shepparton, Albury-Wodonga, Wangaratta and Mitchell. Forecast populations at 2036, which are shown in Figure 3, highlight that while all LGAs will experience some population growth, the most significant population centres be the Mitchell Shire and the established Regional Cities.

FIGURE 3: FORECAST POPULATION BY LGA AT 2036, HUME REGION



Source: SGS Economics and Planning using Victoria in Future (VIF)

FIGURE 4: PROJECTED POPULATION AND EMPLOYMENT GROWTH, HUME RDA



Note: Includes Albury City

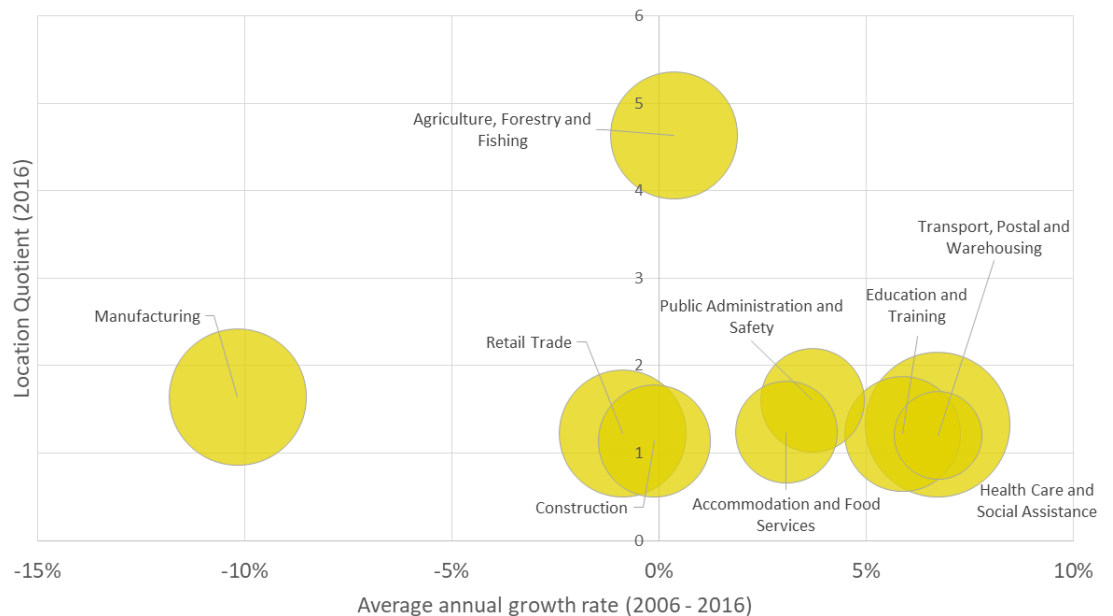
Source: SGS Economics and Planning using ABS and VIF

3.1 Hume’s economic specialisation

Agriculture, and its related industries of transport and manufacturing, is the key specialisation for the Hume region.

The location quotient figure below shows that agriculture is a clear stand out as major employer (size of the bubble), a regional specialisation (the vertical axis) and a growth industry (the horizontal axis).

FIGURE 5: EMPLOYMENT SIZES, LOCATION QUOTIENTS & AVERAGE ANNUAL GROWTH RATES FOR SELECTED INDUSTRIES, HUME REGION



Source: SGS Economics and Planning using ABS

Note: Bubble size indicates number of jobs at 2016.

This specialisation around agriculture is further capitalised on with several tertiary institutions having campuses in the area with specialisations and centres of excellence related to the agricultural sector.

The manufacturing sector in the region forms part of the agricultural specialisation, with food processing and manufacturing a significant employer. A key example here is the SPC site in Shepparton while other new and innovative food manufacturing businesses have also established themselves in the area (for example Freedom Foods).

Following this supply chain, from primary agricultural production, to food processing and manufacturing, to the export of these goods from the region, Hume benefits from having nationally significant transport links to Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra.

The outlook for the industry is favourable with strong growth in demand for high quality food product in Asia, including fruit and dairy products, presenting an opportunity for agriculture and food manufacturing, as well as supply chain industries such as freight and logistics across the region.

This supply chain, stemming from the agricultural richness of Hume, indicates that a government agency which deals with the agricultural sector would do well to locate here, close to where the economic value is generated.

While agriculture and related industries is a clear specialisation for the region. There are a number of other sectors of emerging economic significance, these are covered below.

Defence

The Australian Defence Force and related industries have a strong presence in the region. The Army Logistic Training Centre is headquartered at Bandiana, outside Wodonga, and provides effective logistic training to a large proportion of the national army.⁵

The broader defence industries make a substantial contribution to the Albury Wodonga economy with employment across advanced manufacturing, communications and technologies.⁶ A key instance of this is BAE Systems, one of Wodonga's primary employers, which support defence through transport equipment manufacturing.

Resources and sustainability

The Hume Region is pursuing a number of significant initiatives to ensure sustainability in the use of scarce resources. This is an emerging area of strength for the region.

The Hume Renewable Energy Roadmap has recently been developed. The roadmap provides direction and community understanding for the transformation of the electricity system to renewable sources.⁷ Furthermore, there are already many active renewable energy communities across the Hume region, driving renewable energy projects.

The Connections Program is a nationally significant irrigation project to ensure a sustainable future for productive agriculture in northern Victoria. The \$2 billion project is progressing delivery of substantial gains to water efficiency, maximising the water available for productive agriculture.⁸

⁵

https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Foreign_Affairs_Defence_and_Trade/Defencetraining/g/~media/Committees/fadt_ctte/Defencetraining/Fourth_Interim_Report/c03.pdf

⁶ <https://www.defencemurrayriverina.com.au/defence-industry/>

⁷ <https://www.energy.vic.gov.au/renewable-energy/victorias-renewable-energy-roadmap/hume-renewable-energy-roadmap>

⁸ <https://www.connectionsproject.com.au/about#about>

3.2 Location and transport

While the transport industry is only a moderate employer in the Hume Region, the nationally significant transport corridors running through the area makes transport an important enabler of the agriculture and manufacturing sectors and is a key feature of the region.

FIGURE 6: HUME TRANSPORTATION ARCS



Source: https://www.rdv.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/1147794/HumeStrategy-2010-2020.pdf

The Hume region has a unique location at the centre of one of Australia’s most significant and busiest road transport corridors⁹; the Hume Highway which connects Australia’s two most populous centres of Sydney and Melbourne. Similarly, the Sydney-Melbourne rail corridor passes through the region. The centres of Wangaratta and Albury-Wodonga are directly adjacent to these corridors, while Shepparton is adjacent to the Goulbourn Valley transport corridor.

The Hume Highway has an average traffic volume of 16,700 vehicles a day with 4,200 of these, heavy vehicles, making it the second busiest intercapital road route in the country. The Hume Highway has seen significant investment in upgrades in recent years including bypasses and widening.

The inland rail project, which will upgrade the Melbourne to Brisbane Rail connection, will pass directly through the Hume Region. This project will increase reliability and reduce transit time for freight travel between Melbourne and Brisbane. With an expected completion date of 2025, this project will further solidify the Hume Region’s status as home to nationally significant transport corridors.¹⁰

These transport corridors underpin the region’s proximate location to Melbourne (3.5 hrs drive), Sydney (5.5 hrs drive), and Canberra (3.5 hrs drive); with these connections important for any potential agency located in the area.¹¹ Flights are also available from Albury-Wodonga to Sydney (1hr flight time), opening up international connections to the region.

In addition to the region being a nationally significant agricultural production centre itself, it is also relatively close to other major agricultural centres including: the Murrumbidgee Irrigation

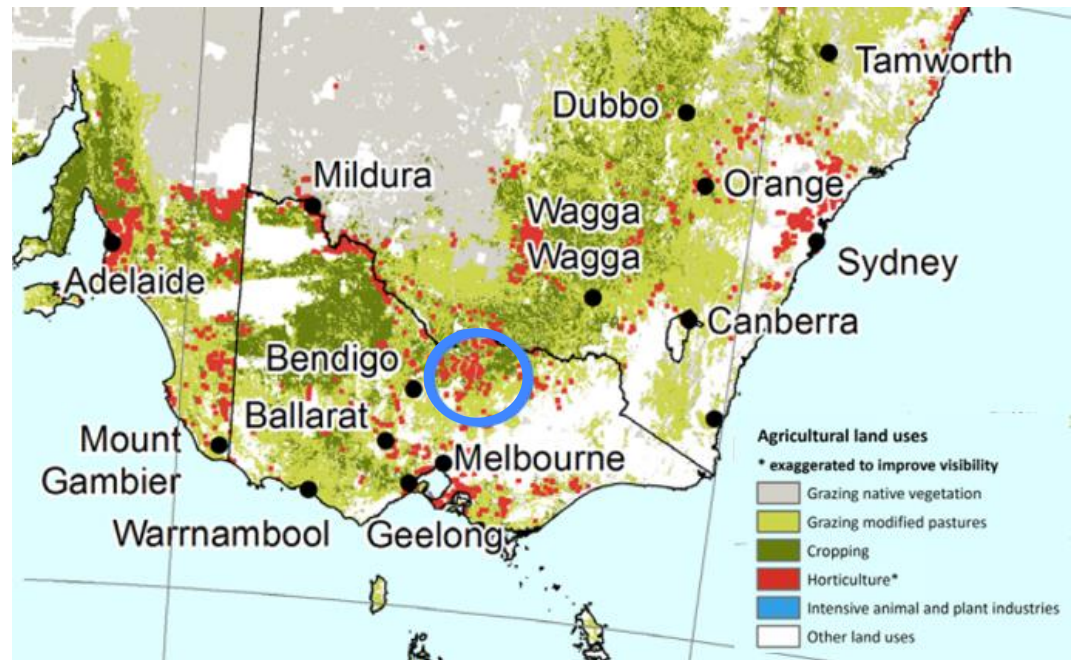
⁹ https://bitre.gov.au/publications/2014/files/is_063.pdf

¹⁰ <https://inlandrail.artc.com.au/keyfacts>

¹¹ From Albury-Wodonga

Area of New South Wales, the Sunraysia district of Victoria and New South Wales, Riverland region of South Australia, and northern Tasmania.¹² An agency in the field of agriculture will likely require access to these productive regions, making Hume a sensible location.

FIGURE 7: AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION IN SOUTH EAST AUSTRALIA



Source: http://data.daff.gov.au/data/warehouse/9aal/2017/aaim17_20171121/AusAgIndMap2017_v.1.1.0.pdf

¹² http://www.agriculture.gov.au/ag-farm-food/hort-policy/horticulture_fact_sheet

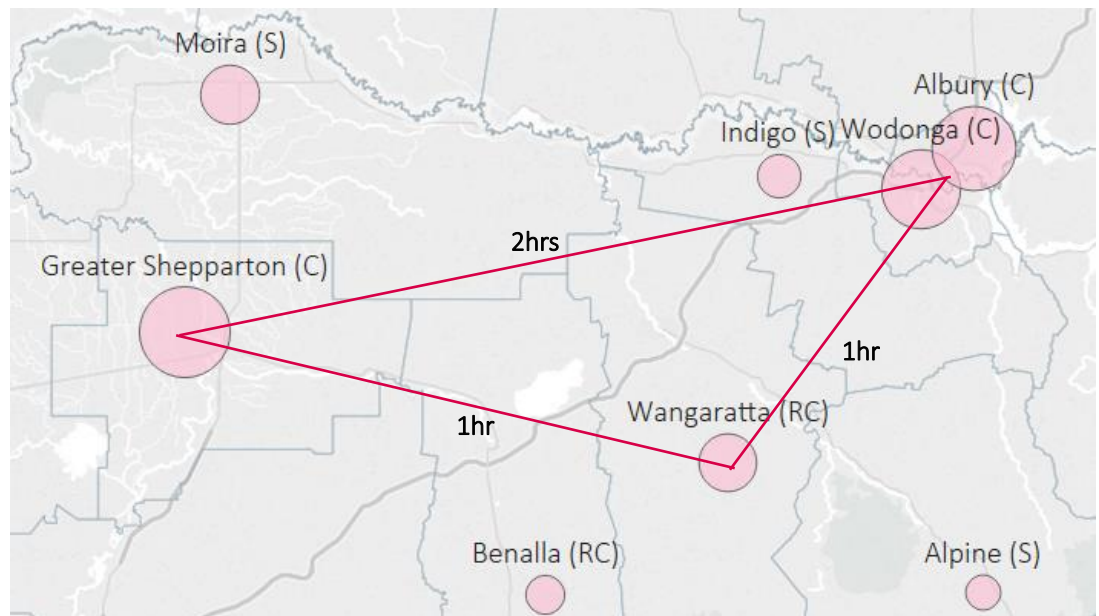
3.3 Regional centres

For decentralisation to be successful, it requires the destination to be a city with a large labour force, adequate office space and attractive amenity. Therefore, we limit our analysis to the three largest population centres in the Hume region: Albury-Wodonga, Wangaratta and Shepparton.

In this section we profile these three regional centres individually. However, we also note that taken together, the three regional cities represent a significant cluster of population and employment centres within close proximity to each other, as shown in the figure below.

Mitchell Shire is omitted from the analysis as the population centres within it functions as an outer suburb of Melbourne meaning relocation would not be a true decentralisation. However, we do note that agency relocation to Mitchell Shire, potentially Seymour, could be an attractive peri-urban decentralisation option for Government due to its proximity to Melbourne.

FIGURE 8: TRAVEL TIMES FOR ALBURY-WODONGA, SHEPPARTON, AND WANGARATTA



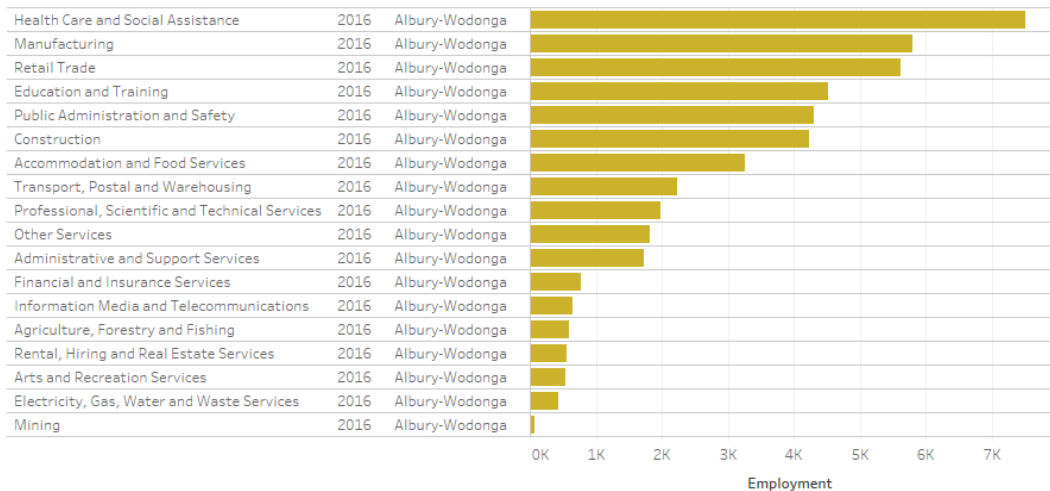
Source: SGS Economics and Planning. Travel times are approximate by car. Size indicates population size.

Albury-Wodonga

Albury-Wodonga's current population is around 91,000 people.¹³ The population has an age profile similar to other places in Australia with an average age of 38 which is the same as the Australian average. Albury-Wodonga has a buoyant labour market with an unemployment rate lower than the national average.

In terms of industry structure, Albury-Wodonga has a strong manufacturing base that is supported by access to road and rail transport along the Hume transport corridor, as well as freight transport and logistics capability. Other key drivers of economic growth are healthcare, public administration (including defence), and retail. Employment by industry is illustrated in the chart below.

FIGURE 9: ALBURY-WODONGA EMPLOYMENT BY INDUSTRY, 2016



Source: SGS Economics and Planning, using ABS and Forecast .id

Wangaratta

Wangaratta has a population of around 19,000 people and its population is significantly older than other areas with a median age of 44.

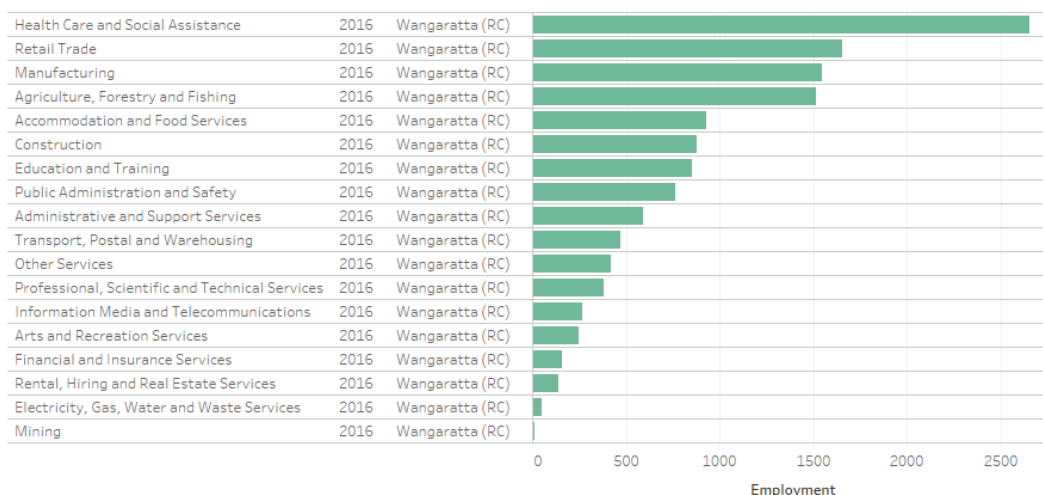
Tourism is a major contributor to the local economy with retail and accommodation and food services significant employers. Health services is also a significant employer indicating Wangaratta's role in providing health services to surrounding areas. Agriculture and manufacturing are the key economic activity generating employers.

Ready access to water is an important economic asset for the sub region, supporting high value agriculture and tourism.

We also note the regional centre of Benalla is located 30 minutes from Wangaratta with a population of around 9,000.

¹³ ERP, ABS 2016 and QuickStat 2016 Census

FIGURE 10: WANGARATTA EMPLOYMENT BY INDUSTRY, 2016

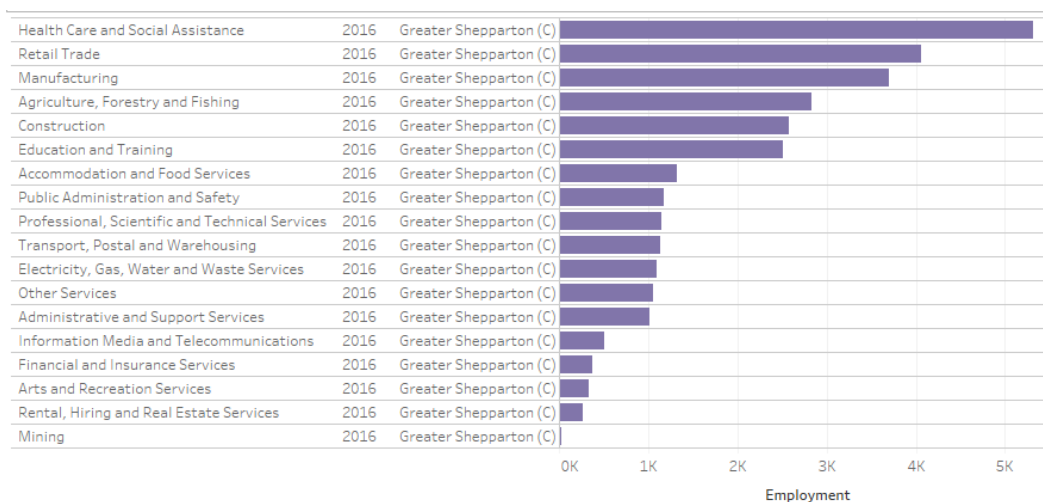


Source: SGS Economics and Planning, using ABS

Shepparton

Shepparton’s current population is 50,000 people and has a median age similar to that of Victoria and Australia of 37.¹⁴ The city offers higher education institutions, specialist health services and cultural facilities. Agriculture is the key economic contributor with irrigated and dry land agriculture, grazing, manufacturing (including food processing), the equine industry and viticulture all major employers.

FIGURE 11: SHEPPARTON EMPLOYMENT BY INDUSTRY, 2016



Source: SGS Economics and Planning, using ABS

3.4 Higher education institutions

The Hume region benefits from a range of higher education institutions locating in the area.

Universities located in the area include La Trobe University (Shepparton and Albury-Wodonga), the University of Melbourne (Shepparton, Wangaratta and Dookie), UNSW (Albury-Wodonga), and Charles Sturt University (Wangaratta and Albury-Wodonga).

¹⁴ Defined as Shepparton – Mooroopna.

In addition, a few specialist centres relating to agriculture are located in the region:

- University of Melbourne Faculty of Veterinary and Agricultural Sciences in Dookie near Shepparton.
- Horticulture Centre of Excellence for Industry Development.
- National Centre for Equine Education, incorporating Wangaratta Equine Hospital.

FIGURE 12: UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE FACULTY OF VETERINARY AND AGRICULTURAL SCIENCES



Source: <https://fvas.unimelb.edu.au/dookie/welcome>

The regional hosts a number of high quality vocational education institutions which contribute to the highly skilled workforce of the region.

Albury-Wodonga has one of the highest attainment rates of vocational education across Australian cities.¹⁵ This high level of attainment is enabled by the high-quality TAFEs in the area. This includes:

- Wodonga TAFE which was awarded 2018 Australian Large Training Provider of the Year. Wodonga TAFE offers courses which plug into local specialisations including Agriculture and Horticulture as well as Transport and Warehousing.
- GoTAFE in Shepparton and Wangaratta which offers courses with pathways to local careers such as Food Processing, Animal Sciences, and Agriculture.

FIGURE 13: WODONGA TAFE



Source: <https://www.wodongatafe.edu.au/Whats-On>

¹⁵ <https://smart-cities.dashboard.gov.au/all-cities/jobs#sc-education>

3.5 Workforce, housing and office markets

Relocating an agency to one of Hume’s regional centres would draw on government and private resources such as office space, housing, and other infrastructure. Therefore, it is important for both the receiving community and the relocating agency that the scale of the relocation can be successfully absorbed into these communities.

Workforce

Public service work is predominantly white collar administrative services, coming under the ABS industry class of ‘Public Administration and Safety’. However, the skills which are applicable to public service work can also be found in other related industries. To understand the existing workforce in the regional centres we have considered the broader knowledge intensive industries, which we define as the following:

- Administrative and Support Services
- Public Administration and Safety
- Professional, Scientific and Technical Services
- Financial and Insurance Services
- Information Media and Telecommunications
- Rental, Hiring and Real Estate Services

In determining the size of a potential public service workforce in these regional centres, we have taken this broader definition of knowledge intensive industries. The number of workers across the regional centres at 2016 is outlined in the table below.

TABLE 1: KNOWLEDGE INTENSIVE WORKERS

	Greater Shepparton (C)	Wangaratta (RC)	Albury-Wodonga
Administrative and Support Services	1,012	591	1,724
Public Administration and Safety	1,177	764	4,304
Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	1,143	384	1,980
Financial and Insurance Services	372	156	766
Information Media and Telecommunications	511	265	646
Rental, Hiring and Real Estate Services	267	143	560
<i>Knowledge Intensive Total</i>	<i>4,482</i>	<i>2,304</i>	<i>9,980</i>

Source: SGS Economics and Planning, using ABS

In order to determine the size of an agency that could be readily absorbed, we have benchmarked historical growth rates in these sectors and the current size of the workforce. Public and admin services averaged growth of up to 1.3% from 2011 to 2016. If we take this as a lower bound, we see growth of up to 2.0% to 2.5% as feasible.

The major centres of Albury-Wodonga, Wangaratta, and Shepparton, all have sizeable and growing white collar workforces. This workforce provides a pool of potential staff for a relocating agency over the medium term, allowing a move to be sustainable with staff turnover an issue for any employer.

If an agency is relocated over two years, this means it is possible for an agency the size of 4-5% of the existing knowledge intensive workforce to be successfully absorbed without detrimental effects to the existing workforce. This suggests an agency of around 400

employees would be appropriate for a relocation to Albury-Wodonga, 200 employees for Shepparton, or an agency of 100 employees to Wangaratta.

SGS notes that these prospective agency sizes are maximums, and that smaller agencies could also be well accommodated in the region, though they would have a smaller economic impact.

Housing

With additional people moving to the area as a result of the relocation, additional dwelling stock will likely be required. In Albury-Wodonga the dwelling stock has historically grown by around 600 dwellings a year (net). Therefore, an increase of an additional 200 employees a year should be able to be accommodated. Similarly, Wangaratta's dwellings grow on average by around 100 a year and Shepparton by around 300 dwellings a year. This implies growth of an additional 50 or 100 employees (Wangaratta and Shepparton respectively) a year could be absorbed.

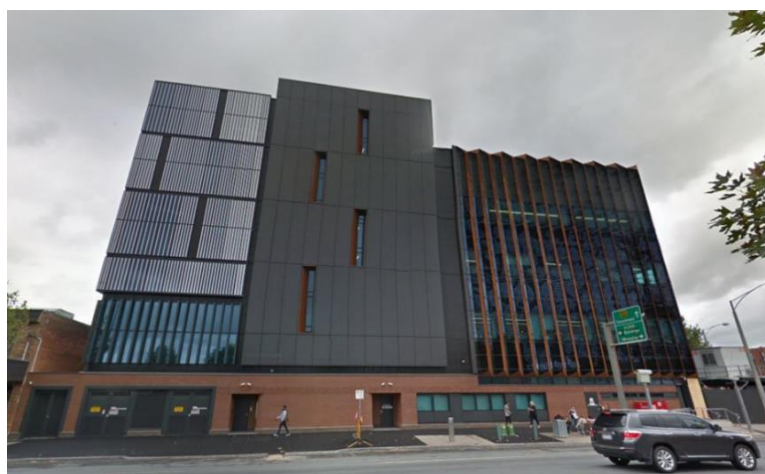
Office space

Relocation of an agency will create additional demand in the chosen city for suitable offices. Based on standard floorspace ratios¹⁶, this would create demand for additional commercial floorspace of around 5,000 sqm for Albury-Wodonga, 2,500 sqm for Shepparton, or 1,250 sqm for Wangaratta. This is a substantial amount of office floorspace for these cities and may be hard to locate on the one site of an existing building, but could be accommodated on two to three sites. A preliminary search of commercial real estate listings in these cities found readily available commercial spaces maxing out at around 1,500sqm.

If the government committed to keep the relocating agency in the area for the long term, it is likely that a new office development would be viable.

There are multiple precedents of purpose-built office buildings for government departments in the area. The ATO's Albury building was built for the department in 2012, with the ATO taking out a 15 year lease of around 11,000 sqm of the five storey building.¹⁷ More recently, Court Services Victoria completed the development of the Shepparton Law Courts project which delivered a five storey building in Shepparton. The building serves as the Law Courts regional headquarters and offers around 7,900 sqm of floorspace.¹⁸

FIGURE 14: SHEPPARTON LAW COURTS FOLLOWING COMPLETION IN 2018



Source: Google Maps

¹⁶ Office jobs typically require around 25 sqm in gross floor area per person or around 12.5 sqm in net lettable terms.

¹⁷ <https://www.smh.com.au/business/companies/koreans-snap-up-ato-offices-for-230-million-20151013-gk7ruk.html>

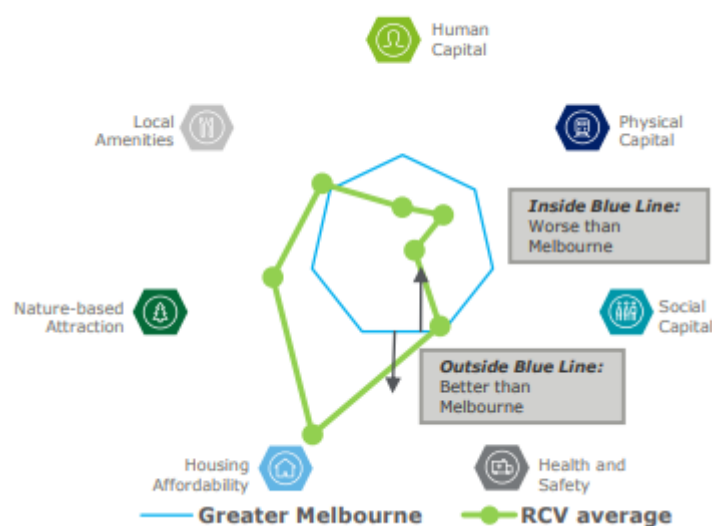
¹⁸ <https://www.courts.vic.gov.au/projects-resources/shepparton-law-courts-project>

3.6 Regional living

For agency staff considering whether to relocate, the services, recreation and amenity opportunities of the area will be a key factor. Hume's regional centres could attract staff seeking a more laidback lifestyle compared to major cities, while also having rich cultural and recreation offerings.

While regional living excels in a number of areas, it also compares less favourably to large cities in other areas. The figure below illustrates how Victorian regional cities compare on liveability indicators compared to Melbourne. Nature-based attractions and housing affordability are clear advantages to regional living. On the other hand, human, physical and social capital detract from regional living. Large cities typically have more established transport networks (physical capital), deeper and wider labour markets (human capital) economic, and greater opportunities for social connection. These liveability indicators are explored further below.

FIGURE 15: LIVEABILITY REGIONAL CITIES AND MELBOURNE COMPARISON



Source: Regional Cities Victoria – Liveability Index http://www.regionalcitiesvictoria.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/RCV_LiveabilityIndex_Final_Report_aggregated.pdf

Housing Affordability

Regional areas avoid some of the diseconomies of scale which detract from big city living, such as high property prices, congestion and pollution. Residential property prices and rents are lower in regional centres with Wangaratta and Shepparton having some of the cheapest rents in all of Victoria. A family could save around \$400 a week renting in Shepparton, compared to Canberra.¹⁹

Physical Capital

While regional cities lack the efficient public transit networks of larger cities, they avoid the traffic congestion and pollution along with the associated stress and health impacts which persist in large cities.²⁰

¹⁹ <https://www.rent.com.au/blog/rental-prices-december-2018>

²⁰ <https://smart-cities.dashboard.gov.au/albury-wodonga/liveability>

Additionally, access to digital services is readily available in the Hume Region with nbn available across Albury-Wodonga, Shepparton, and Wangaratta.²¹ This offers the potential for individual government workers to work remotely from the Hume region, given the right workplace policies allowing for flexible working practices.

Local Amenity and Access to Nature

Despite being smaller cities, the regional centres still offer an abundance of lifestyle and cultural offerings, such as museums, galleries, shopping centres and award-winning restaurants and wineries. Outdoor recreation options are also plentiful with a network of riding and walking trails, fishing, golfing as well as horse riding, and seasonal snow and water sports.

The regional centres' access to the outdoors, minimal traffic congestion, and laid back lifestyle would be big potential drawcards for people considering a move. The high quality amenity, health care, and education facilities in the region means quality of life can be maintained or improved upon by leaving a bigger city.

Human Capital and Health and Safety

Workers considering a move can rest assured that the education and health care needs of their families will be ably met. Shepparton is home to one of Victoria's top performing secondary schools, Goulburn Valley Grammar School which consistently scores well on NAPLAN and VCE results. Victory Lutheran College in Wodonga and Cathedral College in Wangaratta are also high quality schools in terms of VCE performance.²² As these cities are service centres for the surrounding region, the quality and breadth of health care on offer is also high. Hospitals, medical clinics, and allied health care are readily available across the cities.

²¹ <https://www.nbnco.com.au/residential/learn/rollout-map>

²² <https://www.goodeducation.com.au/victorias-top-schools-announced/>

4. AGENCY REVIEW

This section uses the insights gained from our analysis to identify potential target agencies for decentralisation to the Hume Region.

The characteristics of the Hume Region lend itself to be a suitable host for a government agency relocation of around 100 to 400 employees; ideally with a focus on agriculture (or linked food processing and transport). The major centres of Albury-Wodonga, Wangaratta or Shepparton could readily accommodate this size of relocation if it is staged over two years.

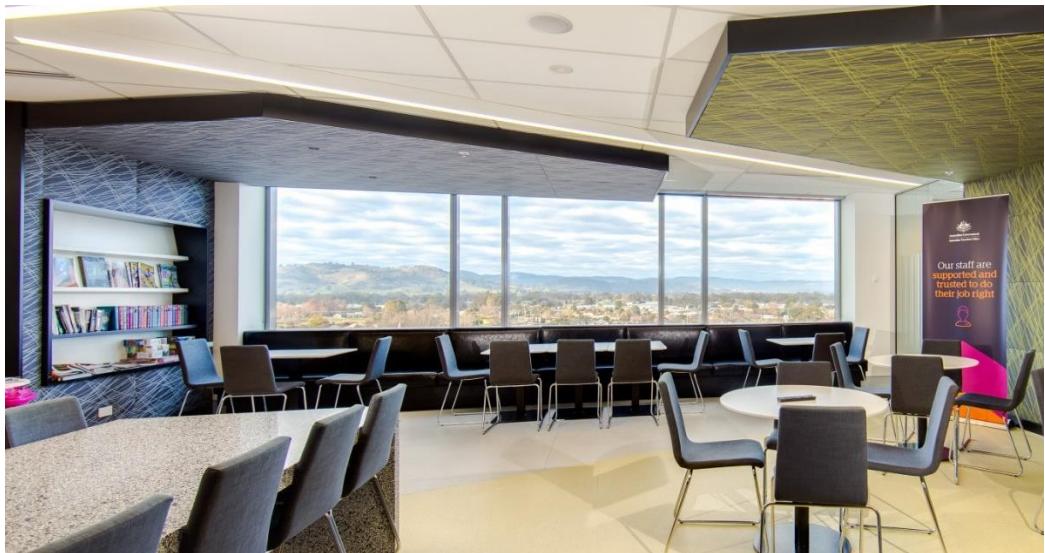
There is a readily available workforce of knowledge sector workers who would provide a pool of workers for the agency to draw from. The location of the Hume region makes it an ideal location for decentralisation as the regional centres have strong transport links to Melbourne, Sydney and Canberra.

The major centres of Albury-Wodonga, Wangaratta, and Shepparton offer a compelling lifestyle change for workers, with lower costs of living, great access to outdoor recreation, as well as substantial cultural, dining, and entertainment offers.

Therefore, SGS is of the view that an ideal target agency should have the following characteristics:

- White collar workforce: related to the agricultural sector or back of office function
- Located in a major city
- 100 to 400 staff.

FIGURE 16: VIEW FROM THE ATO ALBURY OFFICE



Source: <https://farben.com.au/recent-work/commercial/albury-tax-office/>

SGS notes that while a large agency with these characteristics would be ideal in terms of maximising economic impact for the region, target agencies could also be of a smaller size.

4.1 Agriculture sector

As we have explored in the previous section, the region's agricultural sector is a clear specialisation. The sector itself is large and growing and benefits from well-established food manufacturing and processing in the area as well as nationally significant transport links to major markets.

The industry is supported by ancillary institutions in the area such as universities and centres of excellence. Other major Australian agricultural production areas are also close by.

With these factors in mind, SGS has identified the following agencies which are related to the agricultural sector and could be a good fit for the region. We have limited these candidate agencies to those which are of a large enough size to have an impact on the region and those related to the Hume Region's competitive advantage of agricultural production and its associated supply chain.

TABLE 2: POTENTIAL AGENCY CANDIDATES: AGRICULTURAL SPECIALISATION

Agency	Location	Size (FTE)	Function
Dairy Australia	Melbourne with regional offices in Vic, NSW, SA, and Tas.	90	DA assists farmers adapt to a changing operating environment and achieve a profitable, sustainable dairy industry.
Wine Australia	Adelaide	70	WA coordinates wine research and development, controls the export of wine from Australia, and market Australian wines, both in Australia and overseas.
Grains Research and Development Corporation	Canberra	80	GRDC is responsible for planning, investing in and overseeing research and development to deliver improvements in production, sustainability and profitability in the grains industry.
Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research	Canberra	50	ACIAR identifies opportunities and brokers partnerships to undertake international agricultural research and capacity building.
Murray-Darling Basin Authority	Canberra with some offices in regional centres (including Albury Wodonga). Only 10% of staff located outside of Canberra.	290	MDBA leads the planning and management of Basin water resources, and coordinates collaborative relations with other Australian governments, industry groups and scientists. Note: MDBA has been slated for further decentralisation to regions within the Basin.
National Heavy Vehicle Regulator	Brisbane as head office with other offices in Adelaide, Canberra, Launceston, and Melbourne	260	The NHVR is Australia's independent regulator for all vehicles over 4.5 tonnes gross vehicle mass. NHVR aims to minimising the compliance burden in heavy vehicle regulation, provide leadership, and drive sustainable improvement to safety, productivity and efficiency outcomes in the heavy vehicle sector.
A division of the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources	Offices across Australia in 100 locations, but 50% of staff located in Canberra	4,560	The Department of Agriculture and Water Resources helps drive a stronger Australian economy by building a more profitable, resilient and sustainable agriculture sector, and by supporting the sustainable and productive management and use of rivers and water resources.

Source: Australian Government Directory

4.2 Back of office functions

Apart from agencies related to the agriculture industry, the regional centres could also accommodate back of office or administrative functions of government departments which do not require ready access to policy makers.

For example, a department's customer support (such as a call centre or online support) could move into the area. Again, there is a significant white collar workforce in Albury-Wodonga, Wangaratta and Shepparton which could absorb and contribute to a sustainable relocation with staff turnover an issue for any employer.

Existing government departments in the area, including the ATO's office in Albury and Victorian government offices, also indicate that there are likely to be public administration skills applicable to a back of office function moving into the area.

Examples of back of office functions which could be considered for a relocation include:

- Records/database management
- IT and web support
- Call centres
- Form processing
- Finance including payroll and accounts payable/receivable

Some departments considered back of office such as strategic communications and people and culture (i.e. human resources) typically need more regular contact with general and senior staff and would thus be less suitable for a move in isolation.

The table below covers large agencies with significant back of office and administration functions which could be relocated.

TABLE 3: POTENTIAL AGENCY CANDIDATES: BACK OF OFFICE FUNCTIONS

Agency	Location	Size (FTE)	Function
Department of Human Services	Offices across Australia with Canberra the largest office.	27,300	The Department of Human Services delivers social and health related services, through its Centrelink, Medicare and Child Support programmes.
Australian Taxation Office	Offices across Australia with Canberra the largest office.	18,200	The ATO is the government's principal revenue collection agency.
Department of Home Affairs	Offices across Australia with Canberra the largest office.	14,400	The Department of Home Affairs is responsible for immigration and customs border policy.

Source: Australian Government Directory

4.3 Victorian Government agencies

The focus of this report has been on Australian Government agencies. However, the same principles for agency relocation also apply to Victorian Government agencies. This section identifies potential target state agencies.

The same principles for identifying Australian Government agencies for decentralisation also apply to Victorian Government agencies. A list of state agencies which broadly align with the Hume Region is presented below. Victorian Government agency relocation should be explored in further work.

TABLE 4: POTENTIAL AGENCY CANDIDATES: STATE GOVERNMENT

Agency	Location	Size (FTE)	Function
Country Fire Authority	Across Victoria	2,100	Victoria's fire service for non-metro areas.
Parks Victoria	Across Victoria, head office in Melbourne	940	Manage Victoria's parks system.
Emergency Services Telecommunications Authority	Across Victoria, head office in Melbourne	800	To provide emergency call-taking and dispatch for Victorians.
Environment Protection Authority	Across Victoria, head office in Melbourne	600	Regulate the environment.
Victoria State Emergency Service	Across Victoria	200	The control and response agency for flood, storm, tsunami and earthquake in Victoria.
Victorian Fisheries Authority	Across Victoria, head office in Melbourne	160	Manage Victoria's fisheries resources.
Energy Safe Victoria	Melbourne	140	Technical and safety regulator responsible for electricity and gas.
Visit Victoria	Melbourne and International	125	Victoria's primary tourism, business and major events company
VicForests	Melbourne	120	Manage Victoria's forests.
Sustainability Victoria	Melbourne	110	Facilitate and promote environmental sustainability resource use.
Victorian Planning Authority	Melbourne	110	Land use plans for Melbourne and Regional areas.
Dairy Food Safety Victoria	Melbourne	25	Regulating Victoria's dairy industry.
Agriculture Victoria Services Pty Ltd	Melbourne	18	Provide an interface between the Department of Agriculture and private industry.
Launch Victoria	Melbourne	15	Development of a startup ecosystem in Victoria.
Victorian Environmental Water Holder	Melbourne	13	Improve the environmental health of waterways.
Game Authority	Melbourne	11	Regulator for game management.
Office of Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability	Melbourne	8	Provide independent and objective scientific reporting to inform on the state's natural environment.
Alpine Resorts Coordinating Council	Melbourne	7	Setting the strategic direction and for Victoria's five alpine resorts.
Rural Assistance Commissioner	Melbourne	1	Oversee the delivery of financial support to rural communities

Source: Agency annual reports and websites

4.4 How the Hume region can assist with a move

Any substantial change to the operations of a workplace, including relocation, will require careful and extensive management.

Change management can help ease the disruption and uncertainty faced by staff in an office relocation. Principles to successfully manage a relocation are outlined as:²³

- **Plan:** planning for both the physical and people aspects of the move are equally important.
- **Communicate:** ensure communications and project plans (for the move) are aligned. Staff should be kept regularly informed with updates with face to face communication the key.
- **Change Champions:** identify staff who can act as champions of the change. They are the eyes and ears on the ground providing feedback in both directions.
- **Listen:** ensure communication is two way. Relocation is emotionally unsettling, and people's concerns need to be heard.
- **Manage Expectations:** be understanding but realistic about expectations for the move.
- **Post move support:** following a successful move it will be important for support to continue to be available as people adjust.

Hume RDA and local governments could aid this by providing resources and support to the agency and its staff. This could be through getting local people to share with agency staff their authentic experiences on what living in the area is like; assisting management with identifying offices and connecting them to local suppliers for fit out and other services; assisting staff find housing, schools, and employment for their families; hosting site visits of the area and introducing them to the recreation and food options available.

²³ Adapted from <http://www.tmsconsulting.com.au/six-change-management-tips-for-your-office-relocation/>

5. KEY MESSAGES

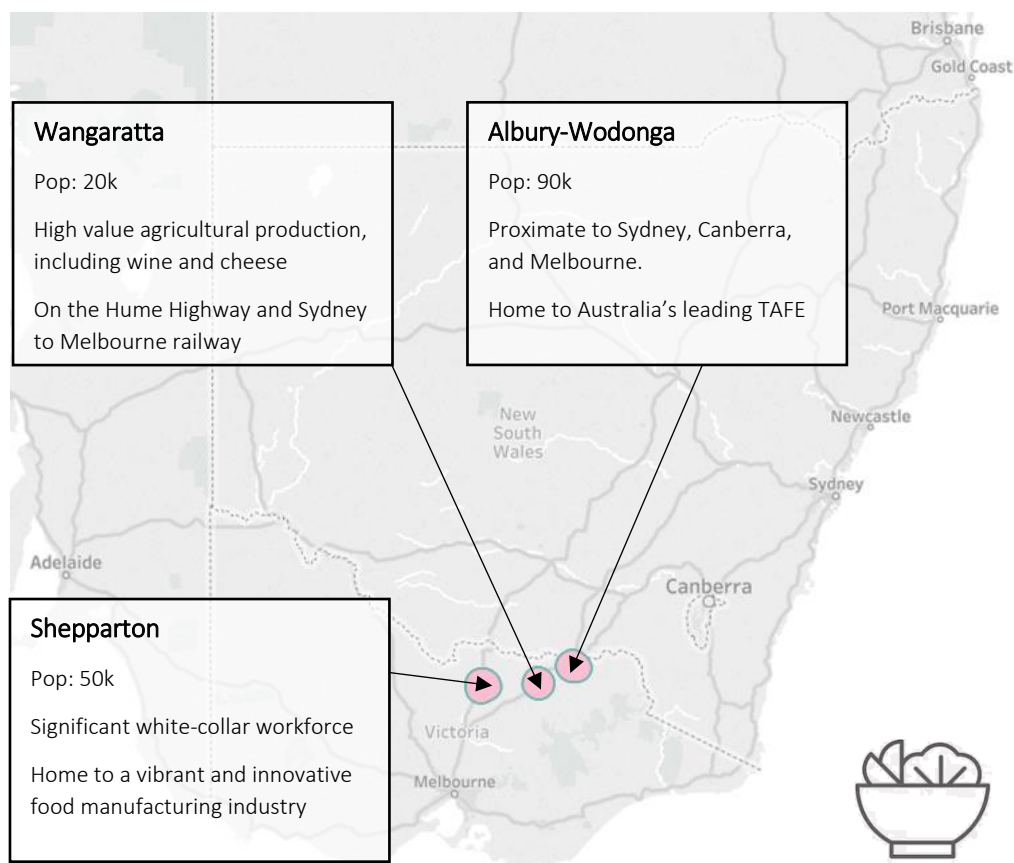
This section outlines the key messages to communicate to elected officials and senior agency staff to advocate for a relocation.

5.1 Relocation to the Hume Region

The Hume region offers a chance to decentralise government workers from capital cities to the middle of Australia's food bowl, while still having strong links to the population and policy centres of Canberra, Sydney, and Melbourne.

The Hume region's centres of **Albury-Wodonga**, **Shepparton**, and **Wangaratta** are the perfect fit for a relocation of a medium sized government agency.

The Hume region **specialises in agricultural production**, making it ideal for an agency wanting to be close to its stakeholders in this industry. The Hume region's specialisation in agriculture spans the supply chain, from primary production, to food manufacturing, to exports from the region via nationally significant transport corridors. Agricultural production in the region is supported by a large and growing skilled workforce and aided by research and teaching centres of excellence in agricultural science.



Relocation would allow staff to have ready access to, and live alongside, their key stakeholders in the agricultural industry: farmers, agricultural scientists and experts, as well as food transport and manufacturing businesses.

The Hume region's workforce could also readily service an agency's back of office functions or could be aligned with the Region's emerging strengths in defence industries and sustainability

The Hume Highway and the Melbourne to Sydney railway cross through the Hume region, as will the Inland Rail which will connect Melbourne to Brisbane. These transport links open the region to markets across Australia and internationally. Hume's location also puts it near other agricultural production regions of the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area (NSW), the Sunraysia district (Vic and NSW), the Riverland region (SA), and northern Tasmania.

Shepparton, Albury-Wodonga, and Wangaratta are all bustling regional cities which could readily accommodate a relocating agency of up to 400 staff. Staff who relocate will benefit from lower costs of living, access to some of Australia's finest outdoor recreation, as well as high quality food, entertainment, and cultural offerings.

The local communities in these regions would welcome a relocating agency with open arms. Local councils and the RDA will provide ready support to a relocating agency and its staff to ease the process and ensure a sustainable future for an agency in the region.

6. NEXT STEPS

This section outlines the broad next steps for the Hume RDA to take to pursue its decentralisation agenda.

A headline action plan for attracting a Commonwealth or Victorian agency presence in the Hume Region is provided below for the Hume RDA.

6.1 Settle regional approach

Description

Settle the overarching approach for the region in pursuing external agencies. This report could form the basis of the regional approach; meaning that regional stakeholders agree with its underlying philosophy which is summarised as follows:

- Agencies are unlikely to willingly relocate and are unlikely to be receptive to the region's approaches unless they are directed to do so by their political masters
- Competition for relocating agencies amongst the regions will be fierce given the socioeconomic challenges faced across most of regional Australia
- Successful regional attraction strategies should be narrowly targeted and should aim to minimise risks and costs for the agencies involved and maximise the alignment of regional strengths with agency needs.

To ensure a consistent method, the following criteria should apply in any future work to identify potential agencies for relocation:

- The agency should align with the unique economic and human capital strengths of the region – both in terms of established and emerging strengths.
- The agency should ideally be of a substantial size to provide a real economic boost to the region. Smaller agencies can also be considered if larger agencies are not available.
- The agency should be sized such that it can be absorbed into local economies in terms of workforce, office space, and housing.
- The relocating agency should be relatively independent or specialised and not require daily interaction with central agencies.

Timeline/ responsibility

Immediate/ Hume RDA

6.2 Finalise key messages

Description

Finalise the key messages in Section 5, which have been developed with the philosophy articulated above, and convert these messages to a one page narrative for communication to central decision makers.

Timeline/ responsibility

Immediate/ Hume RDA

6.3 Identify and map stakeholders

Description

While elected politicians and agency leaders are obvious targets, the task requires detailing specific individuals who need to be targeted (i.e. central decision makers), as well as those who need to champion the Hume Region (i.e. regional champions).

Decisions about government agency relocations are typically made at the political level. Therefore, it will be important to have political advocates for the region; this would likely be the local Commonwealth and State sitting members of parliament.

At the regional level, champions are likely to be well known by the Hume RDA. These champions are likely to include bureaucrats, private sector and institutional leaders.

Timeline/ responsibility

3 months/ Hume RDA

6.4 Brief regional champions

Regional champions must be briefed thoroughly on the overall approach and key messages adopted by the Hume Region for communicating to central decision makers. This briefing aims to ensure that regional champions balance the need to stick to the script, based on the region's settled approach, while also using their initiative to respond to central decision makers for more information or elaboration.

This report should be provided to all regional champions as a starting point and needs to be supplemented with a conversation with a member of the Hume RDA Committee.

Regional champions should know who else from the region is involved in the advocacy effort and which central decision maker/s has been assigned to each champion.

Timeline/ responsibility

3 months/ Hume RDA

6.5 Engage central decision makers

This involves the regional championships actively seeking out their nominated central decision maker/s and communicating the key messages. It also includes synthesising feedback from central decision makers and communicating this back to the Hume RDA so that any potential follow up activities can be appropriately responded to.

Timeline/ responsibility

4 months then ongoing/ Hume Regional Champions

6.6 Support regional champions

Regional champions may get follow up information requests from central decision makers. The Hume RDA needs to proactively and promptly support these champions to ensure the best response can be made to central decision makers.

Timeline/ responsibility

Ongoing/ Hume RDA

6.7 Communicate with broader community

Community support within the Hume, particularly in Shepparton, Albury-Wodonga and Wangaratta, is essential and it is not a given that the community will automatically support a relocation. The Hume RDA needs to engage with the local community to build this support, potentially through local media channels.

Timeline/ responsibility

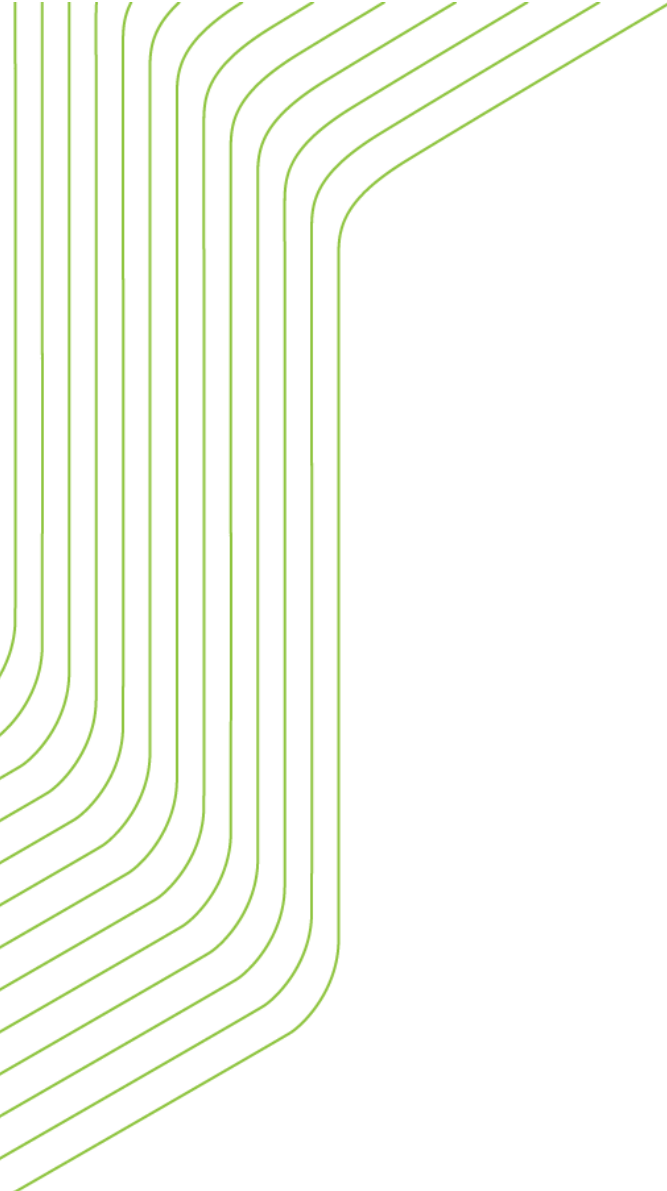
Immediate and ongoing/ Hume RDA

6.8 Review and refine approach/ key messages

Based on the feedback/ response from central decision makers, the Hume RDA should review its approach, key messages and regional champions in the medium term, making changes as needed.

Timeline/ responsibility

6 months/ Hume RDA



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