

# Regionalisation Ambition 2032

## A Framework to Rebalance the Nation



**REBALANCE**

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THE NATION



## Acknowledgement of country

The Regional Australia Institute (RAI) acknowledges the Traditional Owners and Custodians of Country throughout Australia. The RAI recognises the strength and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and acknowledges and respects their continuing connections to country, rivers, land and sea, and recognises that they never ceded sovereignty. We also pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging and extend that respect to all Traditional Custodians of this land.

## Message from The Hon. Catherine King MP

**Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government**



I commend the Regional Australia Institute in drawing together the knowledge, experiences and views of stakeholders in *Regionalisation Ambition 2032: A Framework to Rebalance the Nation*. The Framework identifies many of the big issues facing regional communities and articulates some proposals to address them.

The report indicates that delivering on the potential of regional Australia requires many actors and agents, across sectors and levels of government, to work together towards this aim. The report recognises that no one group can do it alone and that the aims are complex and long-term.

We must also understand the priorities for people living and working in the regions. Empowering regions to have their voices heard and their solutions tailored for local need is critical.

As the Australian Minister for Regional Development, I am ambitious for Australia's regions and the part they play in our national life. The government in which I serve is working hard to develop its framework and priorities for strategic place-based investments to grow and strengthen our regions.

I look forward to working with all regions, purposefully and strategically, to achieve their goals and thank the Regional Australia Institute for its contribution to this larger endeavour. Because when our regions are strong our nation is strong.

## About the RAI

The Regional Australia Institute (RAI) is the nation's first and only independent think tank dedicated to empowering Australia's regions.

We are a not-for-profit organisation that undertakes research to stimulate and activate our rural and regional communities.

Last year the RAI celebrated 10 years. We are proud of the vast array of research, data and detailed insights the RAI has provided into many of the significant issues and challenges facing regional Australia.

The work of the Institute is made possible through research partnerships with Federal and State governments, the national Regions Rising event series, regional consultancy projects, membership and philanthropic funding.

The RAI exists so that decision-makers at all levels of government, not-for-profits, industry and community have the information they need to ensure the best outcomes for regional Australia.

By replacing myths and stereotypes with facts and knowledge, the RAI builds bridges between city and country Australians.

We care about the regions, because when our regions are strong, Australia is strong.

## Contents

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <b>Foreword</b> .....  | <b>7</b>  |
| <b>The Regionalisation Ambition 2032 – Working Together</b> .....  | <b>8</b>  |
| <b>It's time to Rebalance the Nation</b> .....                     | <b>9</b>  |
| What is Regionalisation? .....                                     | 11        |
| Why is Regionalisation Important? .....                            | 11        |
| The Regionalisation Ambition 2032 .....                            | 13        |
| Actions to Rebalance the Nation .....                              | 16        |
| The Regionalisation Journey: Implementation of the Framework ..... | 18        |
| Bringing the Ambition to Life .....                                | 20        |
| <b>Exploring the Regionalisation Ambition 2032</b> .....           | <b>22</b> |
| Key Themes for Regionalisation .....                               | 22        |
| The Five Pillars .....   | 25        |
| Jobs and Skills .....  | 27        |
| Liveability .....  | 33        |
| Population .....   | 41        |
| Productivity and Innovation .....                                  | 47        |
| Sustainability and Resilience .....                                | 51        |
| <b>Appendices</b> .....  | <b>55</b> |



## Foreword

As Australia’s pre-eminent, authoritative source of independent information and policy advice on regional Australia, the Regional Australia Institute works with partners across the country to ensure regions are empowered to thrive and take their rightful place in the Australian story.

Regional Australia shaped the foundation of our nation. At Federation, just under two thirds of Australia’s population lived in the regions. This has since shifted dramatically, with just under two thirds of Australia’s population living in the capitals, and the cities of Sydney and Melbourne on a trajectory to ‘megacity’ status by mid-century. We believe this expansion of ‘megacities’ is not the right trajectory for Australia – instead, we must unlock the productivity and economic potential of Australia’s regional cities and communities, and rethink our nation’s population settlement.

We know that Australians are ‘voting with their feet’ and looking to alternate lifestyle opportunities outside of the major capitals. In the two Census periods to 2016, we have seen more people moving from capital cities to regions than the other way around. Since the launch of our Regional Movers Index, powered by Commonwealth Bank of Australia, we know that this has only further propelled movement during the recent pandemic. It’s time to harness this opportunity, and rebalance the nation.

We are proud to present our **Regionalisation Ambition 2032 - A Framework to Rebalance the Nation** (the Framework). Regional people have said for years that they don’t want to be told, they want to be heard. They want a long-term plan, to contribute and collectively build a stronger Australia and ensure a healthy and prosperous future for their children. We also want this and it’s our role to help achieve this through developing a lasting legacy that we can all be proud of.

But we cannot do it alone. The Framework translates the critical matters most important to regional Australia into a call for real, **collaborative action** which will shape the nation for generations to come. We know this is no small ask – the Framework poses a deeply complex, systems-wide approach to regionalisation, and can only be influenced by the whole eco-system through collaborative action between all parties. As we enter this next decade, we must work together – as governments, industry, peak and regional organisations, not-for-profits and communities – to embrace and unlock the opportunities of regional Australia, and build stronger regions, for a stronger, more balanced nation.

We are kickstarting a **movement, a genuine shift in mindset and action** right across the country, that places regional Australia solidly at the heart of our policy, planning, investment and decision-making. We ask that you champion this with us.



Christian Zahra AM FAICD, Chair  
Regional Australia Institute



Liz Ritchie, CEO  
Regional Australia Institute

## The Regionalisation Ambition 2032 – Working Together

We have worked closely with our members, government, not-for-profits, and other national and regionally-focused peak and industry bodies across the nation. We acknowledge we are not on this journey alone, and wish to thank our stakeholders for their input and close engagement in developing this body of work, and in helping us create a national movement to rebalance the nation.

Our **Regionalisation Ambition 2032 - a Framework to Rebalance the Nation** has been developed in collaboration with our members, the Regional Australia Council and the Regional Activators Alliance, to ensure the ambition and targets ring true to those we are calling on to help us achieve it.



The RAI would like to acknowledge the contribution of the Commonwealth and participating State and Territory Governments through the Intergovernmental Shared Inquiry Program. These research partnerships have produced high-quality robust reports and findings which informed this Framework.



## It's time to Rebalance the Nation

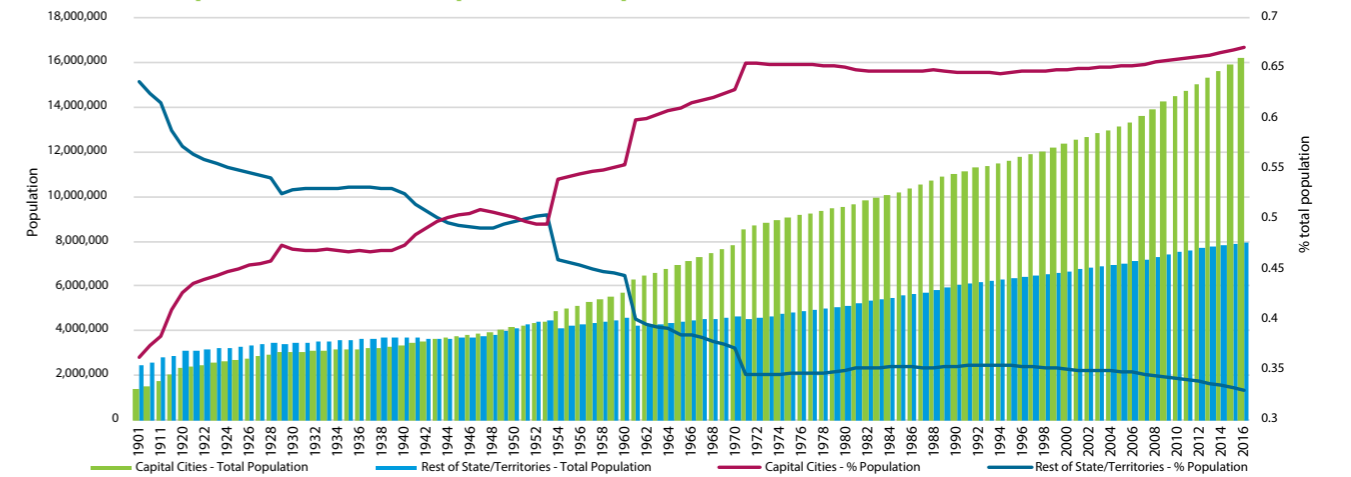
Regional, rural and remote Australia (regional Australia) is home to over 9.5 million<sup>1</sup> Australians, projected to increase to just under 10.5 million by 2032, based on the most recent combined State and Territory growth projections<sup>2</sup>. Through our continued dedication to regional Australia, the Regional Australia Institute (RAI) has highlighted the boundless potential of our regions which, if unlocked, would lead to a stronger regional Australia and a stronger, more balanced nation.

**90% of those surveyed in our regionalisation consultation survey agree that Australia needs a long-term ambition for strengthening our regional communities.**

We know that regional Australia is calling for a long-term ambition for regions – we simply need to come together as government, industry, not-for-profit and community leaders to lead the way. We at the RAI wish to champion this shift in mindset that places regional Australia solidly at the heart of policy, planning, investment and decision-making.

Today, Australia is one of the most urbanised nations in the OECD, with just under two thirds of Australia's population living in our handful of major capitals. Historically this has not always been the case – at Federation just over one third of Australians lived in Australia's capitals, and two thirds in our regions. Whilst this trend reflects global shifts towards increasing urbanisation and expansion of city-based service industries, Australia's unique pattern of urban primacy is unsustainable, and we believe it's time to shift this trajectory.

**Australia's Population Shifts – Comparison of Capital Cities and Rest of State<sup>3</sup>**



This report poses a bold ambition to rebalance the nation, and seeks to challenge the current trajectory of Australia's growth with an ambitious alternative, building a more prosperous, inclusive and balanced Australia.

This is, however, only the beginning of this journey. The RAI is issuing a call for collaborative action and change in each of the pillars spotlighted in the Framework, over the next decade. This Framework sets out a multifaceted suite of aspirations, targets and corresponding actions, that seek to achieve impactful shifts in a complex system of stakeholders and relationships. Achieving our ambition will require collaboration, engagement and action across each of the targets set out in the Framework, by all parties. Every one of us will have the power to make regionalisation a reality. Every one of us must play a part in creating or supporting action that ensures we build a more prosperous, inclusive, and balanced future for Australia.

“There needs to be a long-term, collective understanding of the value regional communities contribute to Australia. Then, regardless of who is leading the government(s) at the time, the jointly-agreed strategies for developing and maintaining the regions will already exist and be the guiding light on the way forward to ensure the sustainability of our regions and to continue providing benefits to those communities.”

*Survey respondent, Regionalisation Consultation Survey*



Regionalisation is the process of delivering on the potential of regional Australia.

### **What is Regionalisation?**

At the RAI we believe in an Australia where our regions have the infrastructure, services, the investments, and the people that they need to thrive and to take their rightful place in our nation's story.

Regionalisation lifts and strengthens our regions, ensuring greater opportunity among all Australians which helps drive the nation's prosperity. Regionalisation is an investment in growing a more prosperous, inclusive and balanced Australia.

Regionalisation is the key to Rebalancing the Nation.

We need a plan to drive regionalisation and this Framework will lead the way by setting targets that will strengthen our regions over the next 10 years.

### **Why is Regionalisation Important?**

A more balanced Australia, across the areas outlined within this Framework, will foster stronger prosperity and productivity for both our nation's regions, and major capitals.

Not only is regionalisation a sound strategy for strengthening Australia's economy, but it is also a broader national strategy for shaping a stronger future for our country's wellbeing and living standards, our resilience to economic shocks and natural disasters, and our capacity to manage a changing demographic.

The 2021 Intergenerational Report (IGR) released by the Treasury<sup>4</sup> frames the recent and longer-term challenges our nation will face in the next 40 years, from an ageing population and declining rate of natural increase, to slowing productivity. Regional Australia has an important role to play in overcoming these challenges, particularly in unlocking the potential for productivity gains across regional centres and industries. Regional Australia already plays a critical role in the Australian economy, leading in productivity across the nation in five industries<sup>5</sup>.

The Australian economy as a whole is forecasted to be better off if the nation sees more balanced population growth. Modelling undertaken for the Framework by the National Institute of Economic and Industry Research (National Economics)<sup>6</sup> shows that Australia's GDP in 2032 would be \$13.8 billion larger under a scenario of a larger regional population than a 'business as usual' (BAU) population scenario.

More balanced growth benefits both regional and metropolitan people. The modelling showed that under the scenario of a larger regional population in 2032, Gross Regional Product (GRP) per capita in metropolitan areas is estimated to be \$1,800 higher than a BAU population scenario. For regional cities it's estimated to be \$400 higher. The increases in output and productivity come from economic gains that are available in Australian regional cities compared with the state capitals.

To unlock this potential, the Regionalisation Ambition 2032 articulates a national framework for regionalisation that poses targets and actions that, combined, will contribute to rebalancing the nation.

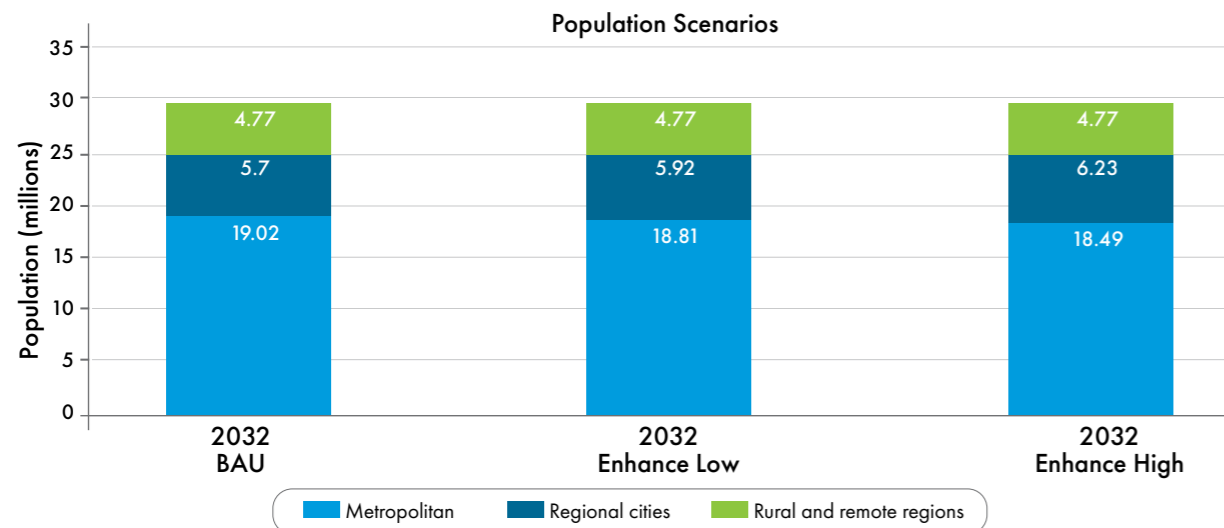
**Population scenario modelling**

The modelling<sup>7</sup> used three population distribution scenarios to assess the impact on regional, metropolitan and national economies from higher population growth in regional cities<sup>8</sup>.

The BAU case takes the current projections from each state and territory with some adjustments for recent pandemic impacts.

The 'low enhanced regional city growth' scenario increases the population of regional cities by 220,000 people (3.9% above BAU) by 2032 and reduces the metropolitan population accordingly to maintain the total national population.

The 'high enhanced regional city growth' scenario increases the population of regional cities by 530,000 people (9.3% above BAU) by 2032 and the total regional population to 11 million, while again reducing metropolitan population growth to keep a national total of 29.5 million.



Modelling the economic impact of these population scenarios shows that among the three scenarios, total national output is highest when regional city populations are highest. When regional populations account for 11 million of the national total, national output reaches \$2.297 trillion by 2032. This is \$13.8 billion more than the national output associated with population growth out to 2032 under a BAU scenario, some \$2.284 trillion.

Under the Enhanced High Regional Population growth scenario, national output is estimated to grow by 34.8% from 2021, 0.8 percentage points more than the growth expected under BAU.

Importantly, the net national productivity benefit from accelerated regional city growth does not come at the expense of productivity in metropolitan areas. More balanced growth benefits both regions and metropolitan places. This is clear from the estimates of GRP per capita under the three scenarios.

GRP per capita is estimated to be \$130,800 per person (of working age) in metropolitan areas in 2032 under the enhanced high scenario, above the \$129,000 under BAU. Productivity in regions too is highest under the most dispersed population scenario – reaching \$100,900 per person (of working age) in regional cities in 2032 – above the BAU estimate of \$100,500.

The modelling shows that rebalancing population growth towards regional cities has an overall national economic benefit, which stems from the potential to realise output and productivity gains more easily in regional cities than the capital cities.

The RAI's recent 2019 report '*Regional Population Growth - Are we ready?*' highlighted that there are rapidly diminishing returns for agglomeration benefits as our cities get very large. This is because the costs of being big – congestion and high cost of living – undermine the benefits of having additional people. In Australia, places with a workforce density of around 500 workers per square km, such as 'middle ring suburbs' of capitals and the employment lands of regional cities, offer optimal rates of potential increase in output per worker.

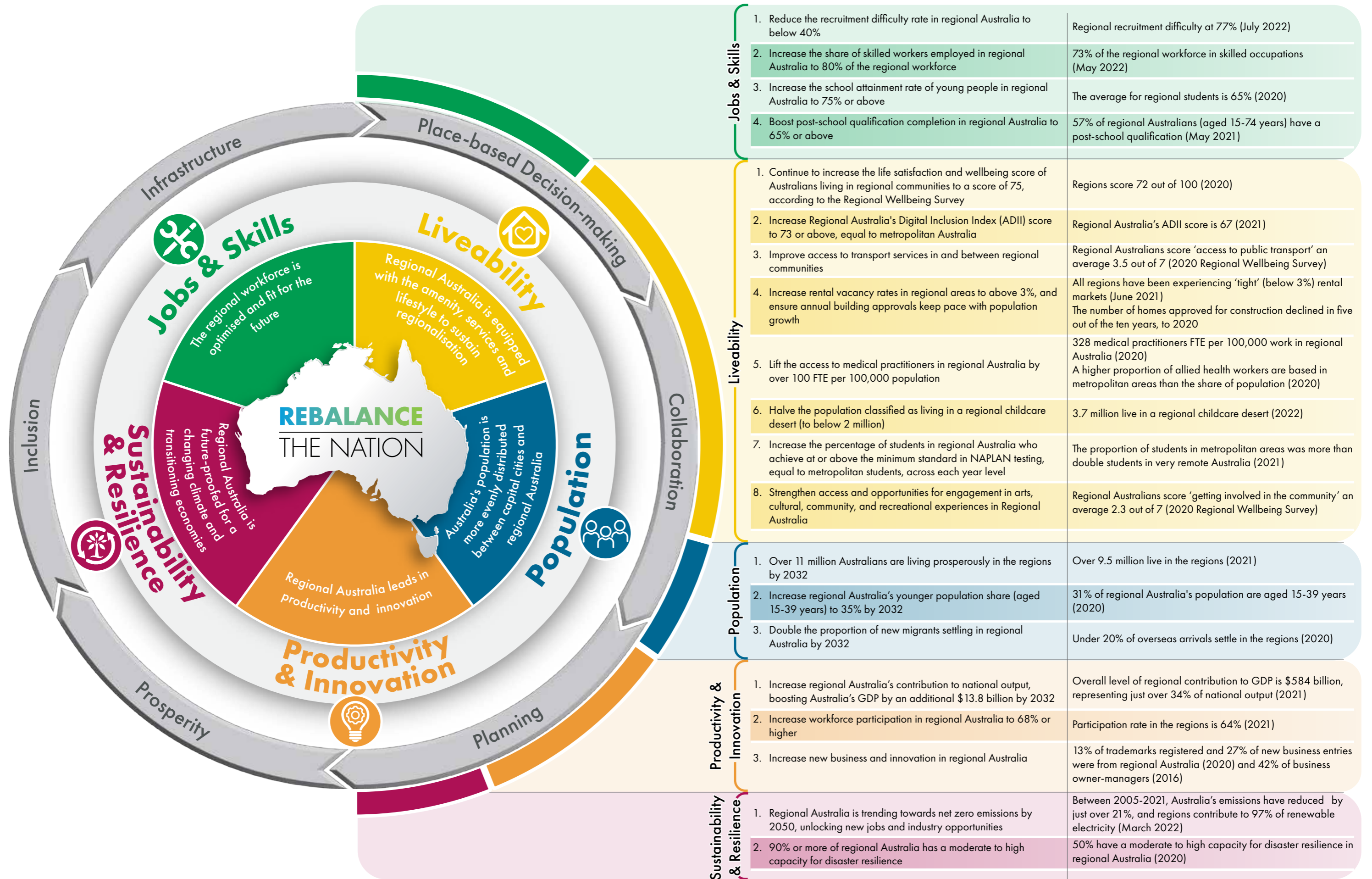
**The Regionalisation Ambition 2032  
A Framework to Rebalance the Nation**

The Regionalisation Ambition 2032 outlines a Framework to Rebalance the Nation (the Framework), by seeking more ambitious and balanced growth across our nation's regions.

To achieve our ambition, the Framework outlines cross-cutting themes, and five pillars that are each interlinked and equally important. Across each pillar we have outlined key targets, actions and benefits that will each contribute to building stronger and larger regional communities, and a stronger Australia.

By setting our ambition to Rebalance the Nation and see more Australians calling regional Australia home, we are seeking to lead a shift in mindset both in how we plan for and rethink our nation's future settlement, but also how we as a nation - government, not-for-profits, industry and community alike - can contribute.














Please refer to the respective pillar detail, later in this document, for additional information and data sources.

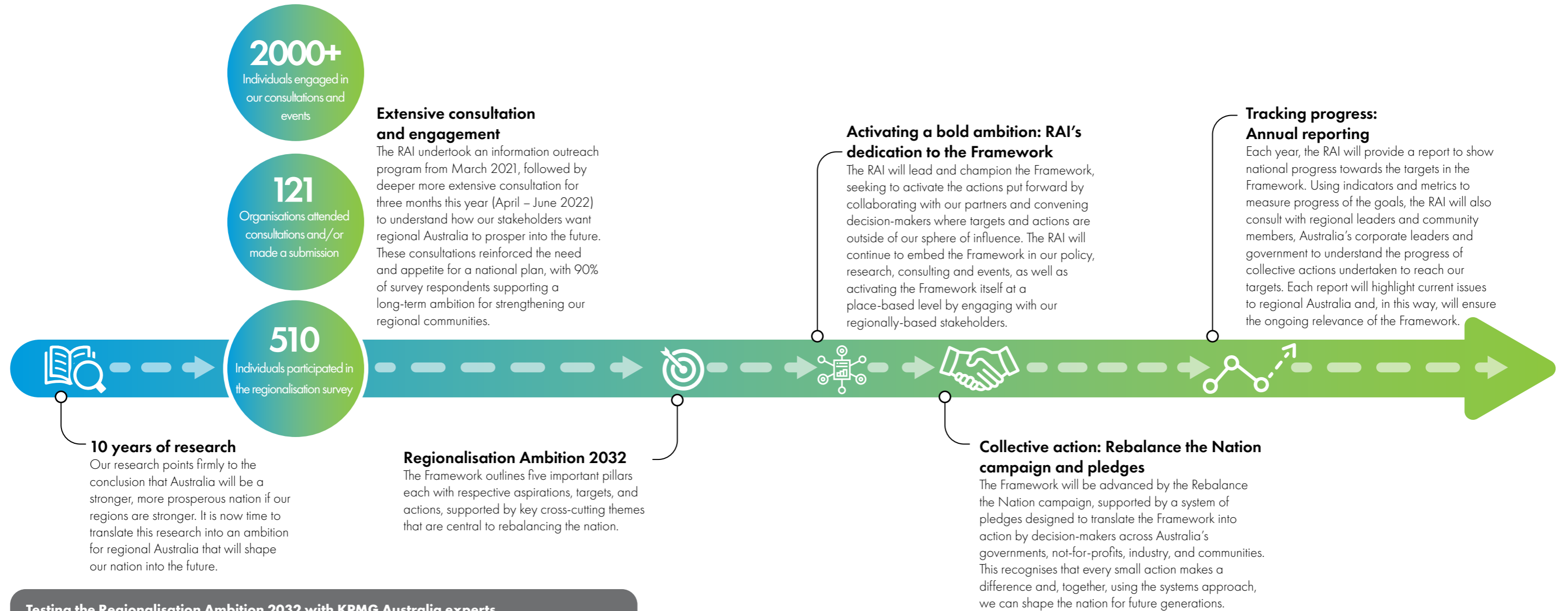


**Actions to Rebalance the Nation**

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|--|--|
|    | <p>Promoting regional Australia as a great place to live, work, visit and invest in through a national awareness campaign.</p>   |
|    | <p>Establish a National Population Plan that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Considers higher-growth scenarios and their implications for planning</li> <li>• Considers projected growth at a regionally disaggregated level</li> <li>• Considers industry growth and structural changes</li> <li>• Addresses associated liveability (infrastructure and services) needs</li> <li>• Addresses projected climate risk</li> </ul>  |
|    | <p>Develop targeted workforce strategies and associated attraction and settlement support programs to encourage new workers, their families, and new skills into the regions. Strategies may be targeted at the short and medium-term (i.e. addressing current labour shortages) or longer-term (considering future workforce needs), and should consider the different needs of newcomers to the community, such as overseas workers, the expat community, or workers from across Australia's cities and regions.</p>   |
|   | <p>Facilitate increased participation and engagement in the workforce by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fostering and educating employers on how to embed flexible and remote working arrangements, such as flexible working hours, remote work, and part-time roles.</li> <li>• Encouraging participation with targeted programs and support, such as culturally safe workplaces, indigenous-led economic development and enterprise support, or increased access to childcare.</li> <li>• Facilitating short-course training and support programs and incentivising on-the-job training.</li> </ul>   |
|  | <p>Harness Australia's migration program to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Address the lack of supply in the labour market, with demand-driven migration for regional areas and supporting locally-led migration attraction and settlement support (access the RAI's toolkit <a href="#">Steps to Settlement Success</a>).</li> <li>• Address longer-term workforce needs, by considering the current and future place-based needs of regional Australian communities, and the role of Australia's migration program to address these.</li> </ul>   |
|  | <p>Foster and invest in the growth of regional learning systems across regional Australia considering:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building 'locally grown' talent for key workforce needs and supporting pursuit of local training and practice.</li> <li>• The role that industry can play in proactively working with local communities to identify potential future skills gaps and work collaboratively towards implementing solutions.</li> <li>• Investing in forums, programs and channels that encourage sustained relationships with residents who have left their regional area, to foster continued connection and encourage 'regional returners'. This is particularly important for younger people living in regional Australia to foster connections to their local community whilst they are living there, and enabling sustained connections whilst they are pursuing post-school opportunities.</li> </ul> <p>Read our report '<a href="#">The Future of Regional Jobs</a>' to find out more about this approach.</p> |

|   |  |
|---|--|
|    | <p>Facilitate post-school programs and support to enable young regional, rural and remote Australians to pursue further qualifications by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Investing in localised tertiary education models that allow residents to study further qualifications in place, such as education centres and ensuring reliable, good quality digital access.</li> <li>• Ensuring young people can access the financial support they need to pursue further studies in their desired field.</li> <li>• Build connections and support student transition from school to post-school opportunities such as through funding of Gap Year Co-ordinators in regional centres.</li> </ul> |
|    | <p>Invest in and improve key services, amenity and lifestyle enablers nationally to ready regional Australia for greater regionalisation, incentivising innovative place-based actions and solutions to improve regional liveability (across all aspects of liveability).</p>  |
|    | <p>Recognise and invest in liveability for building long-term, prosperous regional communities, and facilitate regional communities to explore and understand their regional, place-based assessment of liveability. Access the RAI's <a href="#">Liveability Toolkit</a>, which provides a step-by-step guide for regional communities to assess liveability, and develop a tailored action plan to improve liveability in their region.</p>  |
|  | <p>Explore and improve the measurement and data of all aspects of liveability, productivity and innovation, and sustainability and resilience at a regionally-disaggregated level.</p>   |
|  | <p>Realise agglomeration benefits in regional cities and centres through strategic investment and policy, facilitating connected, liveable, productive, innovative, sustainable and resilient regional centres.</p>  |
|  | <p>Foster the growth of regional innovation ecosystems, adopting a systems-wide approach that encourages entrepreneurialism and corporate investment.</p>  |
|  | <p>Unlock the potential of net-zero emissions for Australia's regions through fostering key projects which accelerate the development of new industries as well as those which attract investment.</p>   |
|  | <p>Invest in and foster the resilience of regional communities by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equipping communities to understand, prepare for, and respond to natural disasters and the effects of climate change through collaboration and capacity building - refer to the Australian Government's National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework.</li> <li>• Investing in the resilience of critical infrastructure (across areas such as water security, energy and connectivity) in regional communities to prepare, withstand and respond rapidly to natural disasters.</li> </ul>  |
|  | <p>Support regional communities in the transition through long-term planning which identifies and works toward transition, and involves co-design with affected communities.</p>   |

**The Regionalisation Journey: Implementation of the Framework**



**Testing the Regionalisation Ambition 2032 with KPMG Australia experts**

As a member of the Regional Australia Council, KPMG Australia provided challenge and feedback to the RAI to support the development of the Regionalisation Ambition 2032. KPMG reviewed the Framework’s targets, assisting in addressing ‘gaps’ across the Framework. KPMG coordinated a half-day workshop with ten leaders with expertise in Government policy, regional development, education and health, sustainability and climate change, and Indigenous services. Their expertise and feedback provided support in the development of the Framework, and we thank them for their contribution.



**Bringing the Ambition to Life**

This Framework is deeply complex in scope and topic, and achieving the actions set out does not rest with us at the RAI, nor any single party or organisation – it rests instead upon the collaborative action between all parties (including governments, industry, peak and regional organisations, not-for-profits and communities). We hope to facilitate such collaboration through the Rebalance the Nation campaign and work program, including the system of pledges by all types of organisations that are making real, impactful commitments to rebalance the nation.

In bringing this work to life, we will be seeking to work closely with our current members and partners, as well as other national and regionally-focused organisations across the nation. We acknowledge the work of others and we will continue to work collaboratively and to seek to build on existing work in this process. The next steps of consultation will be ongoing, stretching wider and deeper into all sections of the regional eco-system, so if you're interested in working with us to bring our ambition to life, please connect.



**Pledge your support**

In championing the Framework, our members are leading the change with their inaugural pledges. Our members have pledged initiatives to be delivered by their organisation that contribute to the targets set out in the Framework, that will unlock the opportunities and potential of our regions.

From overcoming the current labour market shortage or housing affordability and availability challenges, investing in the regional skills and development of our existing and future workforce, to fostering innovation across regional organisations and investing in critical infrastructure and community leadership – we are proud to work with such passionate, pioneering leaders of industry and regional communities.

If you would like to explore these pledges, visit our website [www.rebalancethenation.com.au](http://www.rebalancethenation.com.au), and explore how your organisation can get involved!



## Exploring the Regionalisation Ambition 2032

### Key Themes for Regionalisation

Our approach to greater regionalisation considers a set of key cross-cutting themes used in unison, and acting to ensure that our ambition is achieved through a balanced, well-rounded and equitable approach.

#### Collaboration

Our research has continued to emphasise the importance of collaboration in regional development, particularly in enabling effective, place-based solutions<sup>9</sup>. More effective linkages are needed between the work being done by different groups. We have heard, both via research and consultations, that the nature of funding, policy-making and investment conducted today can often create competition (for example across 'official' boundaries and borders), as opposed to fostering collaboration. This factor emphasises the importance of our three tiers of governments, our not-for-profits, industry and community leaders, working together.

#### Continued prosperity

The targets set out in the Framework must be achieved in a holistic and sustainable way. We know that one of the most valued attributes of regional Australia for many who call it home is the small-town community connectedness, the access to the natural environment, and the liveability benefits (what makes a place enjoyable or attractive to live). Regionalisation therefore should not diminish the liveability and happiness of existing communities. Likewise, regionalisation must be cognisant of balanced prosperity across the natural environment and the community.

The interdependency between each of the five pillars of the Framework is critical to support continued prosperity as each pillar is assessed and translated into action from a national, place-based, or organisation lens.

#### Inclusion

Whilst the Framework is set at the national level, we will continue to monitor how our ambition and targets are measuring for the different communities and voices across regional Australia, including Australians living in rural and remote regions, First Nations people, and women in the regions, amongst others.

Similarly, the Framework is designed to be translated and leveraged by governments, organisation leaders and the community. Considering the many voices and stakeholders as part of this process must be central to such applications. We encourage inclusion to be considered and embedded as part of any planning, policy-making, and investment decisions related to regionalisation, both in terms of representation in consultations and engagements, analysis of data and insights, and in designing and assessing appropriate solutions that overcome barriers or address inequities across regional Australia.

### The Regionalisation Ambition 2032 and United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

Increasingly, organisations across the nation are looking to the future of our world and Australia's role in contributing to each of the United Nations 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)<sup>10</sup> for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. These SDGs pose an important call to action globally to aspire to a world of peace and prosperity for our people, and planet. This Framework supports these SDGs, and brings to life how a more prosperous, balanced and inclusive regional Australia can be achieved.



### The Regionalisation Ambition 2032 and Closing the Gap

In developing the Framework and its targets, we also acknowledge the important work of the Joint Council in leading the nation's actions to achieving the targets set out in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. This Agreement seeks to accomplish equality in life outcomes for all Australians, centered on 'Closing the Gap' of inequality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.<sup>11</sup> At the forefront of the design of the Framework is the importance of not contradicting the targets set out in the National Agreement, but ensuring the Framework can support Closing the Gap.

### Infrastructure

Infrastructure investment and planning is an important factor for regional growth and will be a critical enabler for many aspects of this Framework. Infrastructure supports regional development in connecting communities, facilitating interactions and transfers within the economy, enhancing social opportunities and improving quality of life.

There is a need to ensure infrastructure investment and planning is focused on the needs and opportunities of regional communities, as well as capital cities.

### Infrastructure Australia as the nation's independent infrastructure advisor



**Australian Government**  
**Infrastructure Australia**

Infrastructure Australia's role to advise governments, not-for-profits, industry and the community on infrastructure investment and reform is important to support decision-making that enables the pillars and targets set out in this Framework.

The challenges and opportunities in delivering infrastructure across Australia's diverse regions are well documented by Infrastructure Australia in their '2019 Australian Infrastructure Audit', in addition to the infrastructure reform recommendations highlighted in the '2021 Australian Infrastructure Plan 2021' (the 2021 Plan)<sup>12</sup>. With a focus on place-based outcomes for communities, sustainability and resilience, and industry productivity and innovation, the 2021 Plan provides a roadmap for infrastructure reform, and includes, for the first time, a focus on social infrastructure.

Each of Australia's regions are unique, so too are their infrastructure needs and the resources available to their community to meet these needs. Infrastructure Australia's recent Regional Strengths and Infrastructure Gaps (2022) report provided a national view of the diverse strengths and infrastructure gaps facing Australia's regions. Infrastructure gaps most frequently highlighted through this analysis includes the availability, diversity and affordability of housing, digital connectivity (across broadband and mobile services), water security, access to post-school education and skills training, and the capacity, connectivity and quality of public transport infrastructure.

**Place-based decision-making**

We understand and recognise the diversity of regional Australia and the importance of place-based approaches to regional development. We know that communities across regional Australia are experiencing different challenges and opportunities and must therefore create their own futures. We support local leaders being empowered to make decisions on priorities which are then endorsed and resourced at a higher government level.

To enable such decision making and ensure regionalisation is considered at a place-based level, it is important to recognise the current organisations and mechanisms that contribute to conveying regional voices and facilitate these important connections. For example, the Commonwealth Government’s Regional Development Australia Committees, State and Territory-based regional development agencies, Local Government joint regional committees, and other regional organisations, all have a role to play in brokering the place-based decision making that is so important to regional development.

**Planning**

The Framework does not seek to replace nor eclipse the importance of regional planning. Instead, the Framework will seek to support and complement these activities, offering a basis for a holistic framework for regionalisation, and emphasising the importance of framing regional planning across the five pillars of the Framework.

We have heard through our research and consultation that longer-term planning and policy settings will be critical to enable a bold ambition for regionalisation, particularly any long-term planning that asks ‘what if’ and to think beyond past trends. Planning that focuses on a more ambitious population scenario in regional Australia and an alternative settlement approach to urban growth and suburban spread.

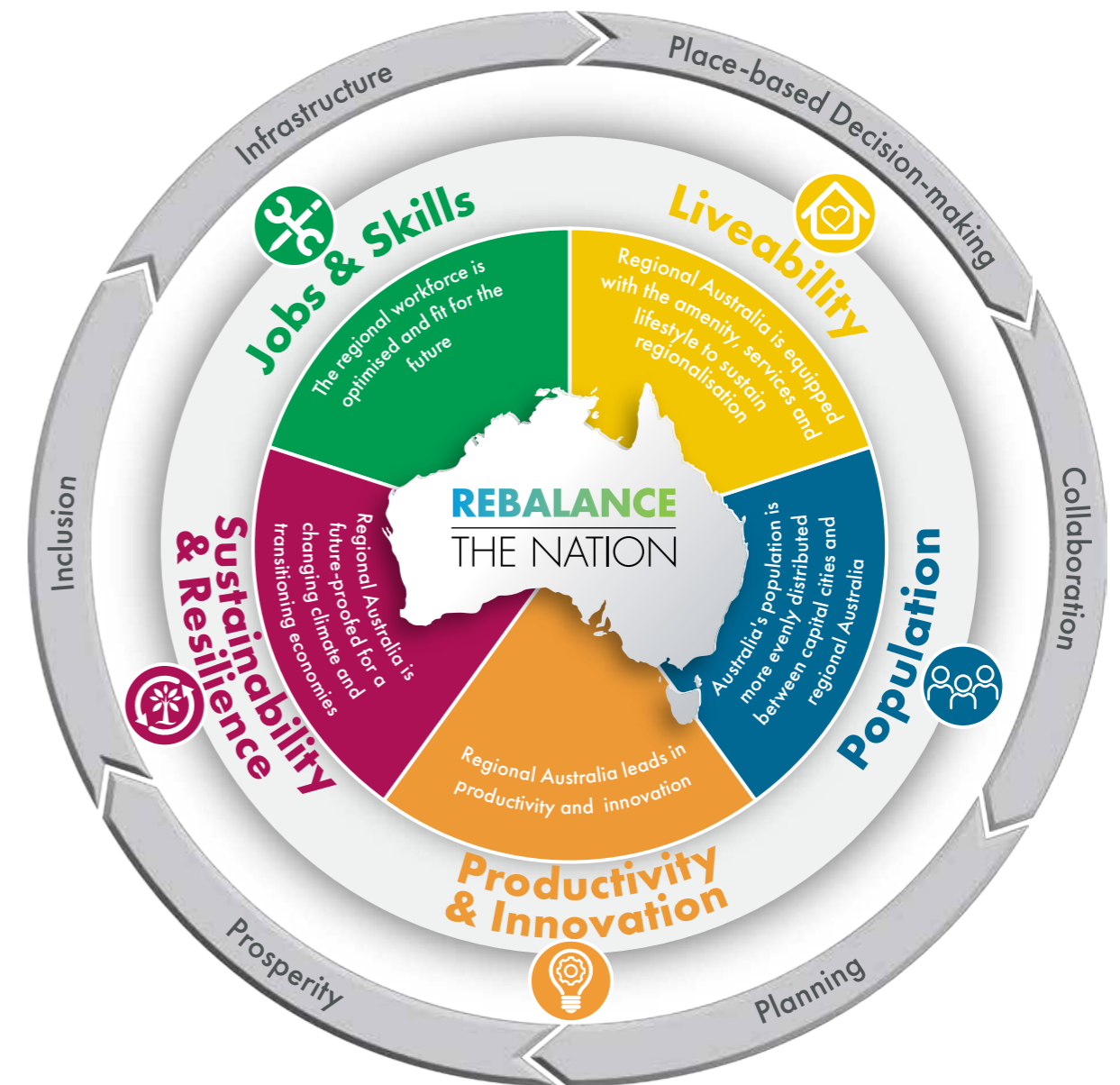
“We want to have investment coming in to allow the growth to occur, rather than re-stimulate it after the growth has slowed.”  
*Regionalisation Roundtable Commentary*

This Framework proposes the ambition and targets to aspire to, and what could be realised with a long-term plan for regionalisation. We hope national and regional planning will consider alternate growth scenarios and the enabling themes the Framework identifies to facilitate a growing population in regional Australia.

To support planning and enable informed and measurable outcomes, data that is regionally disaggregated is fundamental to this process. We know that many organisations contribute to the reporting on regional progress<sup>13</sup>, and the Australian Government has recently invested in developing a Regional Data Hub that will bring together key economic, demographic and socio-economic data in a central ‘Hub’.<sup>14</sup> There remain some gaps in the data available at a disaggregated level. We will be working with governments and the private sector to understand and collaborate on addressing such gaps as we continue to monitor progress against the Framework.

**The Five Pillars**

To achieve our ambition, the Framework outlines five pillars, with key targets, actions and benefits that will each contribute to building stronger and larger regional communities, and a stronger Australia. These pillars are significantly interlinked and addressing each of them is needed to fully unlock the potential of regional Australia.





## Jobs and Skills

To rebalance the nation, we envisage that: **The regional workforce is optimised and fit for the future.**

Regional Australia is experiencing a momentous change in the jobs and skills in demand across regional labour markets, with job vacancies in May 2022 reaching historical highs of 86,050 which is far exceeding the demand associated with the mining construction boom back in 2010-2012.<sup>15</sup> This is at a time where the supply of labour across Australia has been tightened dramatically due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with an average regional unemployment rate of 3.7% in June 2022.<sup>16</sup>

### Reduce the recruitment difficulty in regional Australia to below 40%

#### Today

- 77% of recruiting employers in regional Australia report difficulty filling advertised jobs in July 2022 compared to 37% in 2019.<sup>17</sup>
- 90% of respondents in our regionalisation consultation survey said their region experienced difficulty finding people with the right skills to fill available jobs.

#### How?

- Harness overseas talent through attraction and settlement support for both international migrants and the skilled expat community living abroad.
- Promote regional Australia as a great place for career growth and development, such as the Move to More platform.
- Emphasise and recognise the importance of liveability for building long-term, sustainable regional workforces into the future.
- Foster flexible and remote working arrangements.

#### Impact

- The workforce is well matched to the regional labour market, with employers finding the right workers, and workers finding the right jobs.
- Regional businesses and local economies grow and prosper, encouraging new business and newcomers.
- Regional people have diverse career opportunities in a truly national employment market.
- New residents filling vacant jobs bring new knowledge, experiences, diversity – and often families – to the region.

“It [recruitment difficulty] is becoming a serious constraint on economic activity. It is exacerbated by the housing crisis, such that even if employers can attract the talent they need, there is no accommodation for them.”

*Survey respondent, Regionalisation Consultation Survey*

Whilst this tight market represents a more recent trend in some sectors, the regional labour market has evolved into a dynamic market, offering diverse and rewarding careers in a range of professions and skills.

### Increase the share of skilled workers employed in regional Australia to 80% of the regional workforce

#### Today

- The proportion of skilled occupations in regional Australia has steadily increased over the past two decades, from 67% in May 2001 to 73% in May 2022. In contrast, 79% of employment in our major capitals is in skilled occupations.<sup>18</sup>
- Nationally, skilled employment is projected to grow by 10% between 2021 to 2026.<sup>19</sup>
- Demand for skilled workers has been the strongest of jobs vacancies, accounting for over half of all vacancies in regional Australia in June 2022.<sup>20</sup>

#### How?

- Develop targeted workforce strategies and support programs to attract new workers and their families.
- Build upon the Move to More campaign to boost awareness and attraction amongst city dwellers to consider the benefits of regional careers.
- Encourage and incentivise the role that industry can play in proactively working with local communities to identify potential future skills gaps and work collaboratively towards implementing solutions.
- Harness overseas talent through attraction and settlement support for both international migrants and the skilled expat community living abroad.

**Impact**

- The workforce is well-matched to the regional labour market, with employers finding the right workers, and workers finding the right jobs.
- Increased prosperity of regional communities, as average household incomes are bolstered with increased skilled workers in the local labour market.
- Building of skills in line with new processes and occupations as new technology and innovations are introduced, boosting productivity.

“It is all about regional attraction and ability to compete for skilled workers in each sector, which stems from necessary infrastructures, regional promotion, available jobs and openness to embrace new people.”

*Survey respondent, Regionalisation Consultation Survey*

To further bolster regional labour markets, it is important to ‘grow from within’. Our young regional Australians are the best talent and opportunity for regions to tap into. Ensuring they receive a quality education, and continue to aspire to learn, grow, and acquire new qualifications through VET or university is critical to achieving a stronger, rebalanced Australia. The jobs and skills on offer in regional Australia must keep pace with that of our larger capitals, and it is essential that our nation shifts the dial in regional Australia to increase school completion, and further post-school or tertiary qualifications.

**Increase the school attainment rate of young people in regional Australia to 75% or above**

**Today**

- The Year 12 certificate attainment rate for regional students on average was 65% in 2020.<sup>21</sup> This rate represents the number of students who meet the requirements of a year 12 certificate or equivalent, expressed as a percentage of the estimated potential year 12 population in that year.
- In 2020 the Year 12 certificate attainment rate for all students (nationally) was 76%. Across Australia’s regional areas, this attainment rate was lower in very remote areas at 47%, compared to 70% in inner and outer regional Australia, and 79% in major cities.<sup>22</sup>
- Similarly, when looking at overall completion of Year 12 or equivalent for persons aged 15-74 years, there is a large divide between those living in major cities. In 2021, just over 70% of the population living in our major cities had completed Year 12 compared to just under 50% for those living in regional Australia.<sup>23</sup>

**How?**

- Foster and invest in the growth in regional learning systems across regional Australia – read our report ‘[The Future of Regional Jobs](#)’ to find out more about this approach.
- There are a number of key areas where local level interventions can nurture this approach, including aligning school pathways with community and local government goals and priorities, supporting close connections among community, employers, industry and education and training providers, providing students with a sense of ‘what’s next’.

**Impact**

- According to the OECD<sup>24</sup>, increased education of regional Australians can foster increased engagement in the labour market, increased earnings, as well as improved wellbeing and lifestyle outcomes for individuals.
- The workforce is trained and skilled in qualifications of high demand now, and in the future, in their region, increasing regional and national output and productivity.

“A comprehensive strategy is needed and investment in local talent attraction, development and retention, plus more practical collaboration between businesses, govt and unis/TAFEs.”

*Survey respondent, Regionalisation Consultation Survey*

When considering tertiary (VET and university) or ‘post-school’ education of regional Australians, the divide within regional Australia, and compared to major capitals, is even more pronounced.

**Boost post-school qualification completion in regional Australia to 65% or above**

**Today**

- The proportion of regional Australians with post-school qualifications (aged 15-74 years) in May 2021 was 57%<sup>25</sup>.
- Overall, people living in capital cities are more likely to have a post-school qualification than those living in the rest of Australia. The proportion of Australians with post-school qualifications (aged between 15-74 years) in May 2021 was 64% in major cities, compared to 59% in inner and 54% in outer regional Australia, and 66% in remote and very remote Australia<sup>26</sup>.
- This difference increases when considering attainment of a bachelor’s degree (or above), with 36% of people living in capital cities (aged 15-74 years) completing a bachelor’s degree or above, compared to 20% in inner regional and 16% in outer regional Australia, and 17% in remote and very remote Australia<sup>27</sup>.

**How?**

- Foster localised tertiary education models that allow residents to study further qualifications in place, such as education centres and ensuring reliable, good quality digital access.
- Foster regional learning systems.
- Establish forums that enable younger people living in regional Australia to connect to their local community whilst they are living there, and enabling sustained connections whilst they are pursuing post-school opportunities.
- Facilitate post-school programs and support to enable young regional, rural and remote Australians to pursue further qualifications:
  - Financial support for young people to pursue further studies is an important factor for many people deciding where and what they will study – assistance through government programs or private scholarships are an important facilitator for young people in enabling further studies post-school.
  - The path from school in a small community to further studies can be confusing, daunting, and for some implausible. Funding Gap Year Co-ordinators in regional centres to build connections and support student transition from school to post-school opportunities could further facilitate these opportunities.

**Impact**

- The RAI estimates that if people in the regions had the same share of Bachelor level qualifications as in metropolitan areas, there would be just over 461,000 more graduates living and working in regional Australia, collectively earning about \$26 billion each year, based on the average salary for a graduate.<sup>28</sup>
- The workforce is well-matched to the regional labour market, with employers finding the right workers, and workers finding the right jobs.
- Increased prosperity of regional communities, as average household incomes are bolstered with increased skilled workers in the local labour market.

“Ensure the university sector understands the need and caters courses to our regional youth. Accessibility is a major issue with the prospect of having to move to do the course of choice a major disincentive for our regional youth.”

*Survey respondent, Regionalisation Consultation Survey*

### Growing Local

There is strong recognition that 'growing local' is the best approach to build a strong, skilled future workforce. For example, research<sup>29</sup> has shown that health workers are more likely to practice within the regions if they are familiar with or from a rural community and complete their training regionally during their undergraduate and postgraduate education.

Ensuring there are local pathways and training opportunities for essential workers like those in healthcare is an important strategy for 'growing locally', and forms a key focus of the recommendations stemming from the National Regional, Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy (also known as the Napthine Review) in 2019.

From regional study centres and facilities, industry-partnered traineeships and entry-level career programs, to educating young regional Australians on local career opportunities and education pathways, there are many initiatives that can support 'Growing Local' skills and talent.

Visit [www.rebalancethenation.com.au](http://www.rebalancethenation.com.au) to see the great initiatives our members are driving to develop and grow local skills in their communities!

### Inspiring Rural and Remote Careers - Case Study

#### Rural Inspire<sup>30</sup>

*Rural Inspire* is a youth driven multi-platform initiative that supports rural and remote young people from across Australia regardless of where they live, their personal backgrounds and who they are.

The initiative seeks to create confident and informed rural and remote young people who achieve their dreams by facilitating connections and opportunities, while challenging their current aspirations and instilling a readiness to pave their own life and career path after completing schooling.

Developed by [Country Education Partnership](#) twelve years ago, Rural Inspire since its inception has been powered by an ever-growing diverse team of passionate rural and remote young people.

It facilitates a strong ambassadorial roll for young people at a regional, state and national level through its highly regarded Rural Youth Ambassador program – providing a real voice for rural and remote young people on their life and future aspirations and exploring creative ways in building the capacity of these communities into the future.

It also provides a range of specific programs and services to support rural and remote young people on their journey from their school to the next stage of their life, whilst encouraging them to see their upbringing within a rural community as a real asset for their future. Participants are connected with other rural young people already on their journey to their dream, to industry and key organisations with a focus on rural communities and provided a "Journey Mate" to support them along their pathway to their dream.

#### Facilitating rural and remote career dreams

Lauren from South Gippsland in regional Victoria participated in one of the very first cohorts of the Rural Youth Ambassador Program of Rural Inspire. The Program helped her to realise living in and serving rural communities gave her a sense of fulfilment which she struggled to find elsewhere. Following six years in Melbourne to undertake university studies, she moved back to a rural town in South Gippsland where she now works as a Park Ranger.

*"[The RYA Program] taught me to think on my feet and relate to people from all different backgrounds."*

Now in a substantive management role within the South Gippsland region of Victoria overseeing the Bushfire management within that region, she reflects that the Rural Inspire put her outside of her comfort zone and taught her how to persevere and problem solve in situations she wasn't familiar with. These skills have helped her to achieve her success in her career so far.

*"As I move through my career, I have been able to build upon some foundational skills which I learnt through the RYA Program, which I might otherwise have had to wait to enter the workforce to develop."*

Be [Inspired](#) and read other personal stories of the impact of the Rural Inspire initiative.



#### Further reading



- [Regional Jobs Vacancy Map](#) and the [Regional Jobs Update](#) for monthly updates on job vacancies in regional Australia
- [The Future of Regional Jobs](#)
- [Job Vulnerability in Australia](#)
- Read the RAI's Submission [Jobs for the Future in Regional Areas](#)





### Liveability

To rebalance the nation, we envisage that: **Regional Australia is equipped with the amenity, services and lifestyle to sustain regionalisation.**

While people choose to move to regional areas for economic and employment-related reasons, other themes also influence these mobility decisions such as the 'liveability' of the location. The importance of liveability has become increasingly recognised across Australia as central to community and regional planning.

Regional Australia is already recognised as an attractive place to live and work, with regional Australians scoring their own life satisfaction and personal wellbeing higher than those living in our major capital cities. We know that liveability is highly valued by regional Australians (and those considering or making the move), and that sustaining liveability and prosperity of regional communities into the future must remain a central principle for regionalisation.

#### Continue to increase the life satisfaction and wellbeing score of Australians living in regional communities to a score of 75, in the Regional Wellbeing Survey

##### Today

- In 2020, Regional Australians scored their life satisfaction and personal wellbeing 72 (out of 100) compared to 69 in capital cities.<sup>31</sup>
- The international 'World Happiness Report' spotlighted rural and urban differences in happiness across the globe in their 2020 edition, finding on average the happiness of city residents is more often higher than those of the country – Australia being one of 13 countries where the rural evaluation is higher than the urban population.<sup>32</sup>
- A continuing increase in overall life satisfaction alongside the targets of the other Framework pillars is an important sense check as to whether the nation is rebalancing in the 'right' way.

##### How?

- Support and incentivise innovative place-based actions and solutions to improve regional liveability.
- Invest in key services, amenity and lifestyle enablers nationally to ready regional Australia for greater regionalisation.
- Explore and improve understanding of regional liveability. Access the RAI's *Liveability Toolkit*, which provides a step-by-step guide for regional communities to assess liveability, and develop a tailored action plan to improve liveability in their region.
- Explore and improve measurement and data of all aspects of liveability in regional communities, as opposed to 'urban' centred Liveability measures.

##### Impact

- Regional areas maintain their vibrancy, liveability and inclusiveness as they grow.
- Investment, policy and planning in readiness for regionalisation.

- Regional Australia is considered a great place to live, work and visit, attracting new job seekers, skills, and families.

"We have to get this right, or we become the place people don't want to live."

*Regionalisation Roundtable Commentary*

Many parts of regional Australia offer enviable lifestyles, with abundant access to green spaces and recreational opportunities, shorter commute times, affordable living and strong community connections. Such regional communities are growing based on their existing services, accessibility and infrastructure. However, the picture is diverse across the country, with more rural and remote parts of regional Australia having unequal access to services and opportunities, thus restricting their ability to attract new workers and families to fill job vacancies and grow the local economy.

**92% of survey respondents agreed their region's services and infrastructure should be more evenly balanced between metro and regional Australia.**

This pillar sets out several supporting targets that seek to improve the liveability of regional Australia, right across its diverse regions.

#### Increase Regional Australia's Digital Inclusion Index (ADII) score to 73 or above, equal to metropolitan Australia

##### Today

- Regional Australia measured a Digital Inclusion Index score in 2021 of just over 67. This was over 5 points less than metropolitan Australia (at just under 73). This index considers three separate aspects of digital inclusion; access, affordability, and ability. Regional Australia falls behind in each of these three aspects.<sup>33</sup>

- Digital connectivity is a critical enabler for many services and functions considered essential to a community's liveability today.

#### How?

- Invest in access and affordability of digital connectivity in regional Australia, improving internet and mobile coverage across Australia's regional communities, and ensuring resilience of critical networks during natural disasters.
- Foster digital literacy and capability in line with improved access, ensuring regional Australians and businesses can harness the benefits of digital tools.

#### Impact

- Digital connectivity is an important enabler for many aspects of liveability, work, and doing business.
- The resilience of regional communities will improve with better digital connectivity and communication channels in times of need.

"People who choose to live in regional areas, particularly regional cities, should not be disadvantaged by either opportunities or services."

*Survey respondent, Regionalisation Consultation Survey*

### Improve access to transport services in and between regional communities

#### Today

- Regional Australians scored their 'access to public transport' an average 3.5 out of 7 in the 2020 Regional Wellbeing Survey compared to metropolitan counterparts' score of 5.4<sup>34</sup>.
- Regional Australians should have quality access to transport services to connect them within their community, and neighboring regions, particularly in assisting those who are more vulnerable and may not be able (due to cost, or ability) to use their own vehicle as a means for transportation.
- When asked about 'other' important liveability challenges (beyond health, education, digital connectivity and housing) in consultations, over 25% of surveyed respondents indicated the importance of public transport and transport services in overcoming existing liveability challenges (including roads, rail and air services).
- The 2016 Census indicated that households with no vehicles are more likely to appear in remote areas of Australia<sup>35</sup>. In 2016 the percentage of individuals travelling via public transport to work was 3% or less for inner, outer and remote regions of Australia, compared to 17% in major cities.<sup>36</sup>
- Regional airports facilitated over 360,000 flights in 2016-17, 25% of total domestic 'public' aircraft movements, employing

over 1700 full-time workers. Regional airports also play a crucial role in facilitating emergency evacuations, over 6000 each year.<sup>37</sup>

#### How?

- Invest in traditional and new and innovative solutions to improve regional communities' access to low-cost transport services, across roads, rail, and air.
- Explore and improve measurement and data of physical connectivity and transportation in regional communities.

#### Impact

- Regional Australians are better able to travel to their jobs, appointments, and families, thus encouraging increased participation and active engagement in the region.
- Regional Australia is increasingly accessible for visitors, encouraging tourism and investment in regional economies.

### Increase rental vacancy rates in regional areas to above 3%, and ensure annual building approvals keep pace with population growth

#### Today

- Regional vacancy rates (of rental properties) more than halved across Australia during the pandemic, with all regional areas experiencing tight rental markets – some well below the 3% vacancy rate threshold, experiencing even below 1%.<sup>38</sup>
- Housing investment and new home building in regional Australia has not kept pace with population growth, with the recent regional housing shortage accumulating over several years as a result. Whilst the population of regional Australia grew by an average of 76,500 people per annum over the course of the most recent decade, the number of homes approved for construction declined in five out of those ten years.<sup>39</sup>
- Investment in social housing has also not kept pace with population needs in Australia. According to Shelter NSW analysis, there has been a 61% reduction in applicants granted social housing tenancy proportionate to population, between 2021 and 1991 across Australia.<sup>40</sup>

#### How?

- Establish a National Population Plan, and consider in development planning the higher growth scenarios for regional Australia.
- Foster the development of non-detached housing through revisions of policy, planning and zoning settings. Read the RAI's most recent research and recommendations for housing in 'Building the Good Life: Meeting the Demand for Regional Housing' and 'Foundations of Regional Housing' reports.

- Incentivise trades career pathways in regional communities of significant need – refer to Jobs and Skills for more actions on growing the regional workforce.

#### Impact

- Affordability and accessibility of regional housing continues to be an attractive driver for capital city movers.
- The liveability of regional communities is upheld and strengthened with a planned, long-term approach to population settlement and housing.
- Investment, policy and planning is in readiness for regionalisation, proactively investing in regional Australia for productive, prosperous growth.

### Lift the access to medical practitioners in regional Australia by over 100 FTE per 100,000 population

#### Today

- In 2020, there were 328 medical practitioners FTE per 100,000 in regional Australia, increasing by just under 50 FTE in a five year period.<sup>41</sup>
- Metropolitan and regional centres had considerably better access to registered, working medical practitioners, with 456 FTE in metropolitan areas, and 443 FTE in regional centres. In comparison, medium and small rural towns had access to 243 FTE and 120 FTE per 100,000 population respectively, whilst remote and very remote communities had access to 348 FTE and 245 FTE per 100,000 population.<sup>42</sup>
- In 2020, the proportion of allied health workers based in metropolitan areas was higher than the 72% share of population (for example, 83% of psychologists were based in metropolitan areas)<sup>43</sup>.
- Medical Practitioners provide essential health services for a community and are a fundamental component of what makes a place liveable. Our research found that families, millennials and professionals tended to be satisfied with a general practitioner and a chemist in their communities so long as other services could be accessed nearby.
- Consideration and need for health services may shift and evolve as an individual progresses through life. For example, some specialist healthcare and allied health might become increasingly important for an individual as they grow their family, or grow older. Thus, whilst this target is specific to access to medical practitioners, it is still important to ensure there is improved access to other key health services.

#### How?

- Filling medical practitioner and broader health worker roles in regional (particularly rural and remote) Australia has been an ongoing challenge. Fostering 'locally grown' talent for key pathways in health careers could help to encourage more young Australians to train and practice in the field, in their region.
- Explore new and innovative models to health care for rural communities – refer to the case study 'Community-directed, systems-thinking approach to rural health care' in this section.

#### Impact

- Improved health outcomes for regional Australians, such as lower burden of disease, and lower rate of hospitalisations.
- Improved wellbeing and living standards across Regional Australia, encouraging participation in the workforce and increased productivity.
- Greater liveability of regional communities, promoting regional Australia as a great, healthy, safe place to live and work.

## Rural Health Care – Case Study

### Community-directed, systems-thinking approach to rural health care

Rural and remote communities of Australia each have their different challenges and strengths, and delivering key services to communities across regional Australia requires recognition of these differences, and adoption of a place-based, community-led approach.

Governments, organisations and communities are tackling the shortage of primary health care in smaller rural and remote communities with new innovative models of health care, that place this approach at their centre. For example, the new Australian Government grant funding program *PRIMM*, seeks to foster 'Primary care Rural Innovative Multidisciplinary Models' through community-directed trials. Similarly, the *NSW based Collaborative Care Program*, also funded by the Australian Government, works across five pilot projects that engage local neighbouring communities and health professionals to design shared priorities and solutions for the region's primary health care.



Building further on this innovative approach to primary health care, the National Rural Health Alliance is advocating for a new model for rural health that overcomes the barriers to attracting and retaining a rural health workforce, and focused on individual community needs. The proposed '*RACCHO*' (*Rural Area Community Controlled Health Organisations*) model<sup>44</sup> is an example of place-based and systems-thinking solutions to tackle the unique challenges experienced in regional Australia.

Designed to deliver a range of primary healthcare services (including general practitioners, nurses, dentists and allied health professionals) to local communities, as directed by community needs, RACCHOs would provide a new point of attraction for professional development and workplace flexibility compared to traditional rural health care practices or locum models. RACCHOs are an evidence-based model aimed at overcoming the professional, financial and social barriers to attracting and retaining a rural health workforce, including through providing an ongoing employment model supporting multi-disciplinary teams. RACCHOs are not a 'one-size-fits-all' model, but rather a ground-up, tailored model designed to meet the specific primary health care needs of individual rural and regional communities. RACCHOs will also facilitate greater co-operation and co-ordination between different levels of government and promote rural-specific approaches to funding, recognising that what works in urban areas, is not viable in thin, rural markets.

Building further on this innovative approach to primary health care, the National Rural Health Alliance is advocating for a new model for rural health that overcomes the barriers to attracting and retaining a rural health workforce, and focused on individual community needs. The proposed '*RACCHO*' (*Rural Area Community Controlled Health Organisations*) model<sup>44</sup> is an example of place-based and systems-thinking solutions to tackle the unique challenges experienced in regional Australia.

### Halve the population classified as living in a regional childcare desert (to below 2 million)

#### Today

- In 2022, 3.7 million Australians lived in a childcare desert in regional Australia<sup>45</sup>.
- A recent study into childcare access across Australia conducted by the Mitchell Institute found that 35% of the nation's population, or just over 9 million Australians, live in a region classified as a childcare desert – a region where there are less than 0.333 childcare places per child.<sup>46</sup>
- This lack of access to childcare, or a 'childcare desert' was more heavily felt in regional Australia, with an average of 75% of Australians living in outer regional, remote and very remote, and 45% of Australians living in inner regional, living in a childcare desert compared to 29% of the people living in major capitals.<sup>47</sup>

- The Australian Early Development Census in 2021 found 24% of children (with valid scores) were developmentally vulnerable in one or more domains over time, compared to 21% of children in major capitals.<sup>48</sup>
- Access to childcare is an important liveability consideration for young families, and improving access to convenient, nearby (and affordable) childcare services in regional Australia can help attract young professionals and families.

#### How?

- Explore new and innovative models to childcare delivery in 'thin markets', such as the cluster-based Regional Early Education and Development (REED) model in Western Australia's Wheatbelt region.

#### Impact

- Greater movement of young families to regional Australia.
- Improved participation in the workforce, assisting labour market supply and productivity.

### Increase the percentage of students in regional Australia who achieve at or above the minimum standard in NAPLAN testing, equal to metropolitan students, across each year level

#### Today

- The proportion of regional students achieving at or above the minimum standard in NAPLAN testing in 2021 falls behind those in our metropolitan areas. For example, the proportion of metropolitan students is more than double students in very remote Australia in at least one year level in four of the five domains.<sup>49</sup>
- Access to quality educational offerings is a key factor for liveability, especially for families with young children, and for those continuing education through university or TAFE.

#### How?

- Investing and incentivising regionally-based teachers (particularly rural and remote Australia) is important to build quality regional educational opportunities for young Australians.
- Fostering 'locally-grown' talent for key pathways in teaching careers could help to encourage more young Australians to train and practice in the field, in their region. Refer to Jobs and Skills for more about regional learning systems.

#### Impact

- Greater movement of young families and professionals to regional Australia.
- Improved skills of the future workforce, investing and building local regional talent.

### Strengthen access and opportunities for engagement in arts, cultural, community, and recreational experiences in Regional Australia

#### Today

- In the 2020 Regional Wellbeing Survey, regional Australians scored slightly lower for 'getting involved in the community' compared to metro dwellers – scoring 2.3 (out of 7) compared to 2.8, and falling from 3.4 in 2018. This measure aggregates the scores in response to respondents' engagement in community events, local clubs, sporting groups, and volunteering.<sup>50</sup>
- We know that connection to community, and the 'sense of community' is what makes regional Australia so special and considered by many as a competitive strength of regional Australia. For example, regional respondents in the Life in Australia survey<sup>51</sup> placed greater emphasis on having a strong sense of community in making a good place to live, compared to city counterparts.
- Part of this connection to community is fostered through local arts, community, and recreational forums and events, with many regional towns known for their creativity in establishing community events for their region.
- In addition to community connection, communities across regional Australia also offer a rich cultural and arts history, particularly the talents, knowledge and expertise of First Nations people. In 2011, it was estimated that over 23 million cultural and heritage visitors contributed approximately \$28 billion to the Australian economy.<sup>52</sup>

#### How?

- Embed and foster greater engagement in arts, cultural and community participation through targeted regional initiatives (refer to the case study 'Creative communities partnership program').
- Build on the strengths and connections of regional arts, community and cultural organisations, enabling place-based decision making and direction.

#### Impact

- Arts and community experiences builds employment, businesses opportunities and tourism opportunities for the region.
- Arts, cultural, community and recreational experiences and forums enable greater community connection and networks, improving community connectedness and resilience.

**Creative Arts in Regional Australia – Case Study**

**Creative communities partnership program<sup>53</sup>**

Country Arts SA's Creative Communities Partnership Program partners with regional organisations to employ Arts and Cultural Facilitators in three-year partnerships, including those with a First Nations focus and knowledge, to support and empower artists and communities to realise arts and cultural priorities and drive change through the arts. Country Arts SA currently supports eight partnerships across the state and since 2012 the program has employed 19 facilitators.

Their current partnership with the City of Victor Harbor has seen the establishment of the Coral Street Arts Space, design and concepts for an Arts and Culture Centre, and extended programming that includes visiting engagements such as with State Opera of South Australia and the Illuminate Festival.

Coral Street Art Space exhibition program, a key community arts facility, continues to grow with new exhibitions each month, profiling works from artists across the Fleurieu Peninsula region with 10,800 people visiting in the last six months.

In June 2022 the Space installed Victor Harbor's first permanent exhibition space for First Nations Ramindjeri/Ngarrindjeri creatives, where locals and visitors can interact with art, weaving, culture and language.

The work undertaken by the Facilitator has seen an increase of arts and culture immersive experiences as part of the Winter Whale Fest, extending the Festival from one weekend to four weeks with workshops, attracting great audiences and employing local artists, exhibitions, artisan markets and music events spread across a number of community spaces: Coral Street Art Space, Warland Reserve, Railway Plaza, Victor Harbor Library, The Amphitheatre, Victa Cinema and Town Hall. The opening event attracted 1500 people.



Public Art installation, 'Kondoli' in Victor Harbor<sup>54</sup>

Community forums have provided an informal platform for interested individuals and organisations to connect, share information, knowledge, and skills and to facilitate partnerships and promotion. This has seen the growth of an artisan market now reaching across the Fleurieu Peninsula and beyond, a key attraction for locals and visitors alike.

**Regional Arts Australia (RAA) Regional Strategic Framework<sup>55</sup>**

Regional Arts Australia (RAA) Regional Strategic Framework, is a placed-based strategy that is designed to bring together industries and policy sectors to build a diverse, adaptive and more sustainable regional, remote and rural Australia. The framework is positioned to understand the variety and diversity of a whole regional creative ecology. It is cross-disciplinary, multi-artform, inter-generational and importantly is self-determined by and for regional communities.



The framework is structured around creating Strategic Partnerships with key industries that intersect cultural practice and experience, that work across geographies, industries and art forms & creative sector:

- Technology and digital
- Education and employment
- Health and wellbeing
- Cultural and social infrastructure
- Agriculture and aquaculture (environmental)
- Industry and manufacturing

This will be brought together by innovation and entrepreneurship, data and research, and collaboration and exchange, generating employment, liveability, and culture vibrancy.

The framework unlocks the cultural ambition and potential of regional Australia by integrating industries such as tourism, hospitality, manufacturing, agricultural and technology with the creative sector and supporting the distinctive assets of a region and their communities.



**Further reading**



- [Liveability Toolkit](#)
- RAI's [MOVE Tool](#) – to help you find out what regional town or city is the best fit for you
- [Building the Good Life: Meeting the Demand for Regional Housing and Foundations of Regional Housing](#)
- [Inquiry into Regional Australia](#)



## Population

To rebalance the nation, we envisage that: **Australia's population is more evenly distributed between capital cities and regional Australia.**

The population story in Australia is diverse and nuanced. We are a nation of significant urban primacy, meaning much of our nation's population lives in a few of the major capitals. At the same time, regional Australia has the capacity and desire to grow and sustain a larger proportion of our nation's population, with untapped potential in regional economies awaiting to welcome those with the skills and experience to fill the many job vacancies on offer.

**80% of those surveyed think Australia's population should be more evenly distributed between metro and regional Australia**

In framing this story however, it is important to acknowledge that rebalancing the nation, and a more evenly-distributed population, does not mean a perfectly distributed population across the nation. We know that many regional towns and cities have been experiencing significant pressure in the recent population movements to regional Australia, whilst other regional towns (many outside the peripheral 'catchment' of our major capitals) have not experienced this increase in population. It is common to hear of regional towns which would welcome more people but do not have the housing or services to sustain them. We know that regional employers are in need of more people to fill their jobs. We must also acknowledge that many regional towns across Australia treasure their small town feel and do not want to lose that.

**Just under 40% of those surveyed indicated they felt population growth in their region was 'too low', whilst 40% felt it was 'about right'.**

Our aspiration for population in regional Australia seeks to set an ambitious target for population growth, to stimulate a different approach to planning and investment and to encourage decision makers to consider how we can ready regional Australia for regionalisation.

### Over 11 million Australians are living prosperously in the regions by 2032

#### Today

- Regional Australia was home to over 9.5 million Australians in 2021.<sup>56</sup>
- On our current trajectory, by 2056, Sydney and Melbourne will approach global megacity status of around 10 million residents each, with Brisbane and Perth projected to grow to the scale of Sydney and Melbourne today. Most growth would be in the outer suburbs of these cities.<sup>57</sup>
- Across the OECD countries in 2019, 48% of the population lived in predominantly urban regions, with 28% living in 'intermediate' regions, and 24% in predominantly rural regions.<sup>58</sup> Further, Australia is a country of urban primacy, the majority of the urban population living in six of the major capitals, whilst in Europe two thirds live in cities smaller than 500,000 residents.<sup>59</sup>
- For every additional 100,000 Australians who choose to live in small cities rather than the capital cities, the RAI estimates that around \$42 billion dollars would be released into the economy over the next 30 years through reduced interest payments on mortgages alone.<sup>60</sup>

- A national survey conducted in 2021, 'Plan My Australia', sought to understand preferred population settlement patterns of Australians. This study<sup>61</sup> indicated strong preference for more balanced growth across the country, with a 'megacities' scenario being the least preferred outcome, whilst 'Satellite', 'Rail' and 'Inland' Cities scenarios being the most preferred.

#### How?

- Establish a National Population Plan that addresses settlement patterns at a regionally disaggregated level, and the enablers across the Framework to support the Plan.
- Foster flexible and remote study and work models.
- Promote national awareness for regional Australia as a great place to live, work and visit, such as the Move to More platform.
- Focused attraction, settlement and retention strategies for regional areas.
- Invest in critical enablers for population growth across the Framework, particularly liveability.

#### Impact

- Creating more vibrant, diverse, and prosperous regional communities.
- Reducing urban primacy of Australia's capitals and placing a greater spotlight from investment and policy on regional Australia.
- Increasing economies of scale and agglomeration benefits for the regional economy.

“It [population growth] depends on infrastructure, housing accessibility, employment opportunities. You cannot have population growth without all of the key determinants of health that create healthy communities.”

*Survey respondent, Regionalisation Consultation Survey*



**Promoting Regional Australia - Case Study**

**Move to More**

*Move to More* is the Regional Australia Institute’s national campaign to raise awareness among metropolitan residents about the great opportunities to live, work and invest in our regional towns and cities.

Supported by the Federal Government, this landmark campaign was launched in March 2021 by RAI CEO Liz Ritchie and the then Deputy Prime Minister, the Hon. Michael McCormack and will run throughout 2022.

*Move to More* features a [movetomore.com.au](http://movetomore.com.au) website which is a one-stop-shop for metro movers looking to build their best life in one of more than 700 towns and cities across regional Australia. It is designed to encourage localised promotion through freely-available campaign collateral, accessible from the website.

Since its launch, we have heard many stories from Australians who have since moved to more!

**A golden life in Kalgoorlie**

When James Dillon got the opportunity to live in Kalgoorlie-Boulder, rather than fly in and fly out from Perth, he and his partner Noeleen didn’t hesitate.

In April 2020, just 10 days after their second child was born and in the middle of Western Australia’s initial COVID-19 lockdown – they drove to the Goldfields, 600 kilometres beyond the capital and moved into a rental house.

“We love everything Kalgoorlie and its surrounding areas have to offer,” Noeleen says.

“We have made lots of new friends and explored some amazing new areas. We love learning about its culture and all the activities available. Kalgoorlie has brought our family closer and we really couldn’t be happier.”

Australia’s largest outback town markets itself as a place for the bold and the Dillons certainly take life head on.

Since their move, Noeleen and James have married, are now expecting their third child, and they’ve bought the home they were renting and are renovating. James has changed careers, swapping shift-work in the mines for his original trade as a builder, as there’s huge demand for skilled labour.

“He usually works just minutes from home, which means our family is together every night,” Noeleen says.

James has also sharpened up his skills at darts, making the state championships.

“Kalgoorlie has quite a young community so we have made many fantastic, lifelong friends. It’s child friendly with beautiful parks and great local primary schools,” Noeleen says.

“I don’t miss anything about Perth, except maybe the beach.”

But weekend trips to the sparkling coastline of Esperance more than make up for that.



In rebalancing the nation, there is opportunity to simultaneously rebalance the working-age population in regional Australia. This seeks to minimise the historical ‘brain drain’ often felt in regional Australia of younger school-leavers and career-entry workers.

**Increase regional Australia’s younger population share (aged 15-39 years) to 35% by 2032**

**Today**

- In regional Australia in particular, there has historically been a lower share of younger working-age Australians (aged 15-39), representing 31% of the population in regional Australia

in 2020, compared to 36% in our major capitals. Nationally, whilst the average has been declining in line with an ageing population, it most recently sits at 35%.<sup>62</sup>

- In 2020, the dependency ratio in regional Australia was 60 dependents per 100 working-age persons, compared to 50 in the major capitals.<sup>63</sup> A high dependency ratio indicates increasing pressure on the workforce paying taxes to sustain Australia’s younger and older generations in accessing the services, infrastructure and other supports they need.

- The Regional Movers Index found that millennials (aged 24-40 years) accounted for the majority among all regional movers to each of the regional hotspots in March 2022, particularly as the attractiveness of housing affordability in regional areas increases for city dwellers.<sup>64</sup>

**How?**

- Facilitate ‘sustained’ relationships with residents who have left, to foster continued connection and encourage ‘regional returners’.
- Foster and invest in regional learning systems to encourage young career seekers to study and work within the local region – see jobs and skills.
- Promote national awareness for regional Australia as a great place to live, work and visit, such as the Move to More platform.

**Impact**

- Increasing the capacity of regional Australia to grow and sustain connections to local talent.
- Increasing the regional working-age population, boosting growth in regional economies and demand for services.
- Regional Australia offers a great lifestyle, affordable living, and diverse and rewarding careers – and yet the settlement of overseas migrants to regional Australia makes up only a small proportion of total migration each year.

Regional Australia offers a great lifestyle, affordable living, and diverse and rewarding careers – and yet the settlement of overseas migrants to regional Australia makes up only a small proportion of total migration each year.

**Double the proportion of new migrants settling in regional Australia by 2032**

**Today**

- Less than 20% of Australia’s overseas arrivals settle in regional Australia each year, representing an average of just under 105,000 overseas arrivals annually (prior to COVID-19).<sup>65</sup>
- With the pandemic leading to an historical closure of Australia’s borders, the region’s labour markets are extremely tight and in short supply of labour, skilled and unskilled. Australia’s migration program is a viable solution in the short and medium-term to respond to labour demand.
- Migration is the largest driver for population growth in Australia, and is anticipated to continue to play an important role in ‘offsetting’ the associated challenges of the demographic shift to an ageing population. Increasing the share of migrants settling in regional Australia will assist in rebalancing the nation’s population across regional Australia and our major capitals

**How?**

- The elevation of migration strategies for regional Australia that match current and future place-based needs with appropriate skills.
- Supporting locally-led migration attraction and settlement support (access the RAI’s toolkit [Steps to Settlement Success](#)).

**Impact**

- Addressing jobs vacancies and skills gaps in the short-medium term.
- Building even greater cultural vibrancy and skills uplift in the regions to enhance the social fabric for our future generations.
- Migrants tend to be younger and higher skilled, supporting productivity and the participation rate.<sup>66</sup>
- According to the OECD, increasing the share of migrants in a region by 10% is associated with a 0.15%-0.36% increase in regional GDP per capita.<sup>67</sup>

**Growing Regions of Welcome in NSW – Case Study**

The *Multicultural NSW* pilot program, Growing Regions of Welcome (GROW)<sup>68</sup>, launched in June 2021 and aims to connect interested migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Western Sydney with employment opportunities in Regional NSW.

This pilot program encourages rural communities, like Temora, to welcome migrants and refugees to join their community and fill job vacancies that have otherwise been difficult to fill. The program aims to build and maintain community-led partnerships which improve outcomes for new residents and regional communities.



**Further Reading**

- [Regional Movers Index](#)
- [The Big Movers: Understanding Population Mobility in Regional Australia](#)
- [A National Population Plan for Australia and Regional Population Growth – Are we ready?](#)
- [Steps to Settlement Success: A Toolkit for Rural and Regional Communities.](#)
- [Inquiry into Australia’s Skilled Migration Program](#)





## Productivity and Innovation



To rebalance the nation, we envisage that: **Regional Australia leads in productivity and innovation.**

The most recent Intergenerational Report (2021) released by the Treasury<sup>69</sup> highlights the importance of productivity and participation in driving economic growth in Australia, and the importance of innovation as an enabler for continued improvement in productivity. Regional Australia can have an important contribution to unlocking growth in both of these areas.

During the Global Financial Crisis of 2009-10, and most recently the COVID-19 pandemic, the regions have shown a proclivity for driving the economy. The significant growth in regional job vacancies and near full employment in the upheaval of the pandemic in 2021-22, coinciding with the significant up-turn in the agricultural sector has seen a quicker rebound for regional economies. Regional Australia has the capacity to strengthen Australia's future growth if regional economies are incentivised and empowered to unlock their full potential.

### Increase regional Australia's contribution to national output, boosting Australia's GDP by an additional \$13.8 billion by 2032

#### Today

- In 2021, the overall level of regional contribution to GDP was \$584 billion, representing just over 34% of national output. This share has been declining over recent decades as the service sector grows and population share increases in our major capitals.<sup>70</sup>
- Since 2001, regional Australia has gained ground on metropolitan areas in productivity terms in every industry except mining where it is already ahead. Regional Australia has led in productivity across the nation in five industries (Mining, Agriculture Forestry and Fishing, Construction, Other Services and Accommodation and Food Services) and are fractionally behind metropolitan Australia in another three industries (Manufacturing, Health Care and Public Administration).<sup>71</sup>
- The OECD has found that countries with a greater number of cities, through a network of cities or polycentric urban systems, have higher per capita GDP<sup>72</sup>.
- The RAI's report 'Regional Population Growth - Are we ready?' found that workforce density of around 500 workers per square km, such as 'middle ring suburbs' of capitals and the employment lands of regional cities, offer optimal rates of increase in output per worker<sup>73</sup>.

#### How?

- Invest in critical enablers for business and innovation, particularly regional liveability, to facilitate business and workforce attraction.
- Realise agglomeration benefits in regional cities and centres through strategic investment and policy.
- Foster the growth of regional innovation ecosystems, and a systemic regional approach to learning, training, and innovation.
- Establish a National Population Plan (see population pillar).

#### Impact

- Sustaining regionalisation through targeted place-based industry and economic development will boost national productivity and output.
- Regional economies, and Australia, is more prosperous, with increased economic growth and living standards.



### Advanced Manufacturing Growth Centre – Case Study

#### Transforming manufacturing in Australia<sup>74</sup>

The Advanced Manufacturing Growth Centre (AMGC) is an industry-led, not-for-profit organisation established through the Australian Government's Industry Growth Centres Initiative. AMGC's vision is to transform Australian manufacturing to become an internationally competitive, dynamic and thriving industry with advanced capabilities and skills at its core.



Through the delivery of its world-leading research, Manufacturing Academy, workshops, and ground-breaking co-invested projects, AMGC aims to develop a highly-skilled and resilient local manufacturing sector that delivers high-value products – via the integration of innovative technology – to domestic and international markets.

From the depths of the oceans to the expanses of space, *AMGC has co-invested in 141 promising projects* which are expected to directly generate 4,000 new, highly-skilled, and well-paid roles and on completion will return \$1.6 billion to the economy – all from \$57 million of Federal and Territory funding. These are ambitious and commercially promising projects which lacked early-stage financial and advisory support.

Examples of AMGC facilitated projects include Water Source Australia's commercialisation of a cloud-connected water purification unit, which will overcome the high cost of maintenance and servicing in remote communities, and New South Wales based Energy Renaissance, which will begin manufacture of Australia's first lithium-ion batteries in the nation's only Giga Factory.

The AMGC's current funding program, the Advanced Manufacturing Ecosystem Fund, is investing further in Northern Territory advanced manufacturing capabilities and seeking to grow jobs across the advanced manufacturing ecosystem within the Northern Territory spanning 14 priority areas from clean energy, critical minerals processing, to maritime and space.

Workforce participation is an essential component of economic growth and productivity, and with Australia's population continuing to age in line with broader global trends in developed countries, encouraging greater workforce participation of the working-age population across Australia will be an important driver to continue growth into the future.

#### Increase workforce participation in regional Australia to 68% or higher

##### Today

- In May 2021, the participation rate of regional Australia's population was 64%, compared to the rate in main capitals at 68%.<sup>75</sup> Whilst not a huge difference, the participation divide heightens for different groups of our population.
- In 2021, regional Australia participation for males was 68% compared to women at 61%.<sup>76</sup>
- In 2018–19, the employment rate of Indigenous Australians decreased consistently with increasing remoteness, from 59% in major cities to 35% in very remote areas.<sup>77</sup>

##### How?

- Incentivise participation with targeted programs and support, such as culturally-safe workplaces, Indigenous-led economic development and enterprises, or increased access to childcare.
- Educate and facilitate broader adoption of flexible work arrangements amongst employers, such as flexible working hours, remote work, and part-time roles.

- Facilitate tailored training (and re-training) programs for individuals who face additional challenges in engaging in the workforce, such as people with a disability, or long-term unemployed.

##### Impact

- Regional Australia is realising its potential in labour productivity and output, with increased labour force participation increasing labour supply in regional economies and filling vacant jobs.

"The only thing limiting our productivity and growth is workforce"

*Regionalisation Roundtable Commentary*

To bolster productivity and economic growth in Australia, we know that the biggest productivity gains are available to regional cities where agglomeration economies are still ripe for harvesting. Agglomeration economies refer to the benefits that accrue when large numbers of workers and firms cluster together. But innovation is needed to create new jobs in new industries to offset the expected job losses from industries shedding staff as worker productivity continues to improve.

#### Increase new business and innovation in regional Australia

##### Today

- Regional Australia tends to measure lower against a range of innovation indicators compared to major capital cities, with regional Australia contributing to 13% of all trademarks registered in 2020 (dropping from 17% of total trademarks registered in 2016),<sup>78</sup> and 27% of new business in 2020.<sup>79</sup>
- Regional Australia however represents a strong proportion of business owner-managers – in the 2016 Census, 42% of all business owner-managers, and 81% of Indigenous business owner-managers, were from regional Australia (whilst the population share was well below 40%).<sup>80</sup>
- In contrast, regional Australia is certainly responsive and innovative in doing business as indicated by the strength in business appetite and growth during the COVID-19 pandemic – according to Square data, regional businesses were processing 2.5 times more payments since March 2020.<sup>81</sup>
- Nearly half of our regionalisation consultation survey respondents indicated they felt their region encouraged innovation and new ways of doing business, whilst just over half recognised the difficulty of attracting new private and public investment in their area.

##### How?

- Foster business investment and new business entry through incentives and new business support.
- Foster the expansion of regional innovation ecosystems, and a systemic regional approach to learning, training, and innovation.

##### Impact

- Innovative and dynamic regional economies are better equipped to stabilise industry shocks.
- Regional Australia offers a diversity of occupations, lifting per-capita incomes and increasing regional spending, and stimulating business formation and growth.

"There is no 'new generation' coming through. Whilst that is not to say that older generation are 'stuck in their ways' it just means there are no entrants to the game, no new ideas, perspectives or learnings being contributed."

*Survey respondent, Regionalisation Consultation Survey*

### Regional Innovators – Case Study

#### Issimo - Innovators and social entrepreneurs in Victoria's High Country<sup>82</sup>

Issimo is a regional start up from Mansfield, in the High Country of Victoria, which provides the tech to build and grow marketplaces. Tech innovators and social entrepreneurs, Issimo places communities, conversations, interactions, and shared purpose at the centre of everything they do.



The team are dedicated to taking complex interactions between people, groups, communities, and organisations and making them simple. The goal is to create human-centric tech tools "that just work" to reduce the admin load and create opportunities to amplify meaningful work.

Their flagship product – *Issimo Markets* – makes markets simple, creates a seamless experience for Market Managers to take applications, attract stallholders and captures visitor data. During COVID-19, with markets and events scarce, Issimo helped other regional innovators create and grow their own marketplaces. These include Pointer Remote, a remote-ready jobs board bringing roles from top employers such as Deloitte and Telstra to access talent in regional communities; Social Enterprise Academy with ACRE in Beechworth empowering students to create their first social enterprise and sell online; and a virtual Main Street with providing e-commerce to over 400 businesses in North East Victoria.



#### Further reading

- *Lighting Up our Great Small Cities: Challenging Misconceptions*
- *Deal or No Deal? and Blueprint for Investing in City Deals: Are you ready to deal*
- *Innovation in Regional Australia: Spreading the Ideas Boom*



## Sustainability and Resilience

To rebalance the nation, we envisage that: **Regional Australia is future-proofed for a changing climate and transitioning economies.**

Climate change and the transition to renewables and Australia's pathway to net zero emissions will present both challenges and opportunities for our regions. With climate change impacting our environment and in many regions, our ways of life, it is important that we equip our regional communities for the future.

74% of those surveyed agreed climate change was a significant challenge for their region.

### Regional Australia is trending towards net zero emissions by 2050, unlocking new jobs and industry opportunities

#### Today

- To reach the Paris Agreement target for net zero emissions by 2050, global emissions need to be at least halved by 2030 "for the world to stand a chance".<sup>83</sup> Australia's emissions in the year to December 2021 reduced by just over 21% since the baseline year (2005), and the Australian Government is committed to reduce emissions by 43% by 2030.<sup>84</sup>
- Australia's renewables sector and transition to a 'green' economy has gathered momentum in recent years, with national solar generation growing by 42% between 2018-19 and 2019-20, with renewables generating 24% of Australia's electricity in 2020.<sup>85</sup> In March 2022, 86% of electricity generation came from regional Australia, powering 79% of fossil fuel electricity and 97% of renewable electricity.<sup>86</sup>
- Governments and regional communities across Australia are stepping up to the challenge<sup>87</sup>, with Tasmania aiming to transform into the nation's battery, legislating a Tasmanian Renewable Energy Target to double renewable energy production and reach 200 per cent of electricity needs by 2040.<sup>88</sup>
- Communities, jobs, livelihoods and industries will be permanently impacted as we transition to net zero, particularly those regional communities with large fossil fuel industries such as the Hunter Valley in NSW. At the same time, thousands of new jobs and industries will be created, with over 85,000 Australians employed in the installations and operation of renewable energy in 2020.<sup>89</sup> Meanwhile, the Australian Government's Powering Australia Plan is expected to create 64,000 direct jobs in the transition to net zero, and an additional 540,000 indirect jobs.<sup>90</sup>

#### How?

- Unlock the potential of net zero emissions for Australia's regions through fostering key projects which accelerate the development of new industries as well as those which attract investment.
- Support regional communities in the transition through long-term planning which identifies and works toward transition, and involves co-design with affected communities.

#### Impact

- Diversified regional economies that are ready to seize the opportunities a new 'green' economy offers.
- Regional Australia is more resilient in the face of the challenge of a changing climate.
- Regional Australia is a world leader in emissions reduction and climate change adaption.
- New job opportunities, innovation and investment.

"Regional Australia has an important opportunity, and role to play, in sustainability and resilience"

*Regionalisation Roundtable Commentary*

**Kidston Powering Northern Queensland – Case Study**

**Kidston Clean Energy Hub<sup>91</sup>**

An abandoned gold mine in Kidston, Queensland is being transformed into a Clean Energy Hub. Pioneered by Genex Power, and supported by the Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility, Australian Renewable Energy Agency and Clean Energy Finance Corporation, the infrastructure and old mine is being repurposed by leveraging the combined technology of solar, wind and hydro renewables. Beginning with a solar farm, wind turbines, and now being transformed into a ‘giant battery’ with a pumped hydro facility transforming the use of the old mine.



The Hub provides a ‘dispatchable’ and reliable source of energy for the district, and to Northern Queensland. By pumping the water between the lower and upper reservoir, powered by solar, during low-demand periods, this water can be released to generate power when demand for electricity reaches its peak. This innovative repurposing of current, retired, infrastructure will power homes right across the Northern Queensland grid, and create 900 jobs for the economy.

We know from our research and consultation that the community feels under-prepared for what’s to come – many acknowledge the impact that climate change will likely have on their regional economies and communities, however, feel ill-equipped both in education and access to data to understand the risks, and the resources to sufficiently prepare, mitigate and respond to natural disaster events.

The concept of ‘resilience’ is commonly applied today in relation to the capacity of communities in experiencing natural disasters and economic shocks. Being able to measure such resilience can help communities and governments determine risk and plan for disaster recovery. However, determinants of resilience may also differ between communities and today there remains no ‘best method’ of combining these factors into a single metric due to these complexities and differences. Indexes that do seek to measure resilience, such as the Australian Disaster Resilience Index leveraged in this Framework, can provide a snapshot of resilience for the community, region, or state – however in doing so, it remains important to consider the appropriate application of measures, and their design limitations<sup>92</sup>.

**90% or more of regional Australia has a moderate to high capacity for disaster resilience**

**Today**

- In 2020, almost 50% of regional Australia had a lower capacity for disaster resilience, with just over 50% having a moderate to high capacity for disaster resilience, compared to over 90% in metropolitan areas<sup>93</sup>.
- The Australian Disaster Resilience Index, conducted for over 2000 regional communities across Australia in 2020, highlighted that most areas of higher capacity for disaster resilience are located in our city areas, and inner regional Australia, with almost 50% of non-metropolitan areas having

lower capacity for disaster resilience. In contrast, 38% of metropolitan areas have a high capacity for disaster resilience, with just 8% of regional Australia, almost entirely within inner regional areas, having a high capacity for disaster resilience.<sup>94</sup>

- According to a 2021 Deloitte study conducted for the Australian Business Roundtable for Disaster Resilience and Safer Communities, natural disasters cost the Australian economy \$38 billion each year, with this cost expected to rise to at least \$73 billion per year by 2060.<sup>95</sup>
- In the 2020-21 Financial year, \$2.28 billion of insurance claims were incurred as a result of natural disasters. In the year prior (2019-20), the Black Summer bushfires alone incurred \$2.32 billion in claims, with an additional \$3 billion incurred over the remainder of the year.<sup>96</sup>
- To reduce this cost, regional Australia needs to invest in readying for natural disasters and climate change impacts, improving community resilience to prepare for and respond to such shocks. A key aspect of this is investing in critical infrastructure to prepare for and respond to natural disaster events, such as ensuring water security for future populations and climate change, or digital and physical connectivity and energy in times of disaster events.

**How?**

- Establish a National Population Plan that addresses projected climate risk.
- Foster resilience of regional communities, equipping communities to understand, prepare for, and respond to natural disasters and the effects of climate change through collaboration and capacity building - refer to the Australian Government’s National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework.
- Build education and understanding in regional communities of the regional impact of climate change.

- Invest in the resilience of critical infrastructure (across areas such as water security, energy and connectivity) in regional communities to prepare, withstand and respond rapidly to natural disasters.

**Impact**

- Regional communities are more resilient to manage the effects of climate change and natural disasters, minimising the impact on the community, environment and economy.
- Resilient communities will simultaneously improve their liveability and ability to sustain the great regionalisation into the future.

“Social events, participation in interest groups, and casual daily interactions can build trust and social cohesion. Well-connected communities are better able to cope with disasters and other crises and are more likely to take collective action.”

*Regionalisation Roundtable Commentary*

**Caring for Country – Case Study**

**Empowering Indigenous communities and knowledge to improve environmental outcomes**

Local resilience against natural disasters must consider the needs, knowledge, and values of local communities – particularly our First Nations peoples.

Australia’s First Nations people have cared for this country’s land and seas for countless generations – their knowledge, culture and connection to country are invaluable and critical to the sustainability of our country for future generations. This is highlighted in the most recent 2021 State of the Environment Report<sup>97</sup>, which acknowledges the positive outcomes stemming from Indigenous Rangers programs and Caring for Country principles being adopted across Australia.



*Image courtesy of: Country Needs People*

Communities who manage their environment according to their values and culture not only benefit their own wellbeing, but the natural environment as well.

From tackling feral animals and weeds, to managing the country through ‘right-way fire’ practices - a blend of traditional Indigenous fire management and modern drone and satellite technology such as the Digital Earth Australia Program<sup>98</sup>, these traditional practices continue to protect, and foster growth, in our nation’s native flora and fauna. From the home of the luulun (bush mouse) and wijingarri (northern quoll) in Wunambal Gaambera country, to the refuge of Australia’s iconic ninu (Bilby) in the Kiwirrkurra Indigenous Protected Area, Australia’s Indigenous Protected Areas are world leading for nature conservation.<sup>99</sup>



**Further reading**

- [Regions in Transition: Effectiveness of Place Based Transition Packages](#)
- [From Disaster to Renewal: The Centrality of Business Recovery to Community Renewal](#)
- [Government that Works for the Bush](#)



## Appendices

### Learnings from our consultations

Over the past two years the RAI has been working towards building the Regionalisation Ambition 2032 that was underpinned by a clear ambition to “Rebalance the Nation”. Extensive public speeches and forums have enabled a wide platform to communicate our plan and the intended approach. In our estimates, we have reached an audience well in excess of 30,000 Australians.

### Regionalisation consultation paper

The RAI developed a Regionalisation Consultation Paper, with input from the Regional Australia Council (RAC), the Regional Activators Alliance and the State, Territory and Commonwealth governments. The Paper outlined several key themes of regionalisation and posed guiding questions. It was launched at the Victoria Regions Rising event, in Bendigo in March 2022, and then made publicly available on the RAI website. The Regionalisation Consultation Paper and guiding questions formed the basis for consultations on the development of this Framework.

### Extensive consultation

The RAI’s most trusted source of knowledge is our regional leaders and community members, as well as those who support them. The RAI undertook an information outreach program from March 2021, followed by deeper more extensive consultation for three months in April – June 2022 to understand how our stakeholders want regional Australia to prosper into the future. During this consultation period the RAI spoke with over 100 organisations across governments, regional businesses, and peak bodies through one-on-one consultations, workshops and webinars. Our publicly-available survey was completed by over 500 people from around the country. The input from these consultations was used in the development of the Framework, providing valuable direction on how to shape a national ambition that would truly shift the dial for regional Australia.

90% of those surveyed in our regionalisation consultation survey agree Australia needs a long-term ambition for strengthening our regional communities.

Individuals engaged across our survey and roundtables believed:

- The ambition needed to consider a long-term, ambitious, population plan for Australia’s regions, driven by collaboration across national and regional levels. Stakeholders felt that population planning must consider more ‘what-if’ higher-growth scenarios, building on past trends.

“The regions are a strong part of the economy through their ties to agriculture. We are a country rich in resources. Centralisation has provided economies of scale for provision of services but we are undervaluing our strongest asset - our lands and our climate.”

*Survey respondent, Regionalisation Consultation Survey*



- Sustainability, place and inclusion must be considered central to any long-term plan – from an environmental, economic and social lens. Stakeholders considered a rebalanced nation a more positive pursuit for Australia’s population settlement if a plan was supported by place-based decision-making and solutions, a sustainable, measured approach to growth, and ensuring all regional Australians and metro-dwellers, and the diverse voices they bring, are made ‘better off’.

“A strategic coordinated approach with long term funding allocations will enable better targeted/focused priority investment decisions.”

*Survey respondent, Regionalisation Consultation Survey*

- The interdependence of each of the pillars is crucial to reiterate – for example, the increased population can enable improved productivity or workforce skills, yet it also cannot be achieved without liveability readying for population growth. Those surveyed in particular emphasised the importance of housing, transport in and between towns, culture and the arts, and health and education pathways as key to enabling a more balanced population.

“I think it’s an individual’s prerogative to live in a metro or regional area, however raising awareness of what regional Australia has to offer will assist to shift opinions.”

*Survey respondent, Regionalisation Consultation Survey*

### Defining regional Australia

There is no single definition of what constitutes regional Australia. Many different definitions exist and can vary depending on the user and the purpose for which the definition is required.

The RAI uses a broad definition for its research, policy and advocacy work. For the RAI, regional Australia includes **all the cities, towns and areas outside of Australia’s largest capital cities: Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth and Canberra.**

Where possible, data in this report has been presented according to the RAI’s broad definition of regional Australia, and is indicated per the reference list. There are many datapoints available, however, that are not disaggregated to the geographic level required to enable this analysis. For example, datasets are often only presented at a national level by ‘remoteness area’ structure according to the Accessibility and Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA+), produced by the Hugo Centre for Population and Migration Studies.

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