

# ANNUAL REPORT ON OUTCOMES: 2022 - 2023



**Regional  
Development**  
*Australia*  
MIDWEST GASCOYNE



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**“THIS REPORT WAS PRODUCED BY REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AUSTRALIA MID WEST AND GASCOYNE AND DOES NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT THE VIEWS OF THE COMMONWEALTH, ITS OFFICERS, EMPLOYEES OR AGENTS.”  
(ABN 22 450 469 916)**

## **RDAMW&G CHAIR YVONNE MESSINA'S REPORT**

I am again delighted to present the annual outcomes report for Regional Development Australia Mid West and Gascoyne (RDAMW&G) 2022 to 2023.

Over the past year our organisation has continued to focus on growing strategic partnerships and regional capacity building as our contribution to the ongoing growth of the Mid West and Gascoyne region. Attention has been given to strengthening partnerships with public and private sector organisations that support practical initiatives and outcomes for the benefit of regional communities.

The leadership of Hon. Kristy McBain, MP, Member for Eden-Monaro and Minister for Regional Development, Local Government and Territories and The Hon. Madeleine King, MP, Member for Brand and Minister for Resources and Minister for Northern Australia, to the Commonwealths Regional Agenda and the Regional Development Australia committees is acknowledged. The improvements to the Charter and the Regional Investment Framework provide scope for a coordinated approach to regional development, supported by local engagement.

Our organisation enjoys a strong relationship with twenty local government organisations that manage a geographic area spanning more than 600,000 sq. We include local government in everything that we do as we have found that when social and economic planning processes are aligned with Commonwealth and State processes there are better outcomes for all stakeholders. In addition, we value productive relationships with a wide range of stakeholder organisations through these communities and recognise that these partnerships are essential to initiatives that are relevant and contribute to regional outcomes. Most importantly whilst the Mid West and Gascoyne Regions share similar issues with other regions, the responses, and solutions to enhance liveability and productivity, require a place-based approach.

We continue to represent and advocate for the Gascoyne region with respect to the broader agenda for Northern Australia and we are using our resources to invest in a collective commitment to planning with respect to public and private sector investment in this important part of Western Australia. Our early work on Gascoyne Infrastructure Priorities remains relevant as new resource companies, including those contributing to green energy and global energy transition, invest in the region. Whilst considering the opportunity for this region to contribute to net zero outcomes strategic regional benefits and priorities are also important. At the same time, some of these companies are 'start-up's and we can inform the Government of investment priorities that facilitate growth and de-risks investment.

The sustainability of our regional communities is an essential part of regional development. Over the past year our organisation has worked with the Regional Australia Institute to provide our stakeholders with a more informed understanding of regional demographics and the environment required to hold and attract people who will be part of future growth. We have also completed the business case for a Designated Area Migration Arrangement and because of this have an improved understanding of labour force and skill requirements. It is anticipated that the DAMA, once approved, will add to regional prosperity and through more industry engagement, lead to a better understanding of the skills that will be required into the future.

Over the past year Sarah James - Wallace and Michael May joined the RDAMW&G Board with other Board members being Tony Turner, Tami Maitre, Jackie Brooks, Jim Sandy and Ray Moir. I would like to express my sincere gratitude for their service over the past 12 months. Contributing to a volunteer Board requires time and the dedication, and the interest of the RDAMW&G Board is evident and appreciated. During the year the Board participated in an AICD Vital Signs Review and following this most Board Members participated in and completed an AICD online Foundations of Directorship program. The achievements of RDAMW&G are due in large measure to the leadership of the Board and the commitment to quality over an extended period.

It is my most sincere regret that long time RDAMW&G Board Member and Deputy Chair Mr. Tom Mwangi Maina passed away in April 2023. His tireless energy and capacity to give to the community saw him contribute to a broad range of organisations including *multicultural advocacy* through the Mid West Multicultural Society (President) and the Mid West African Association (Founding member), *faith* through the Lighthouse Church, *community* through the Geraldton Rotary Club (Immediate Past President) and *professional* Australian Institute of Company Directors (Mid West Committee).

Without exception the Board and staff of RDAMW&G feel that we have lost more than a professional colleague. We have lost a friend and a mentor.

**Yvonne Messina JP, GAICD**

**Chair RDA Mid West and Gascoyne**

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Regional Development Australia Mid West and Gascoyne (RDAMW&G) is a not-for-profit, incorporated organisation, governed by a Board and funded by the Australian Government, Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts.

The RDA network strengthens partnership across all three tiers of government, regional business and the wider community. We aim to work with all these stakeholders to find local solutions to local issues in the Mid West and Gascoyne regions of Western Australia. By bringing people together, we can generate ideas and strategies to move forward with.

Regional Development Australia Mid West and Gascoyne is one of the nine Western Australian and fifty-two Regional Development Australia offices nationwide.

## 2.0 RDA CHARTER

Refreshed by the Minister for Regional Development, Local Government and Territories in July 2023 the Charter for Regional Development Australia states that:

Regional Development Australia Committees will support the successful implementation of the Australian Government's Regional Investment Framework (RIF), which will guide a more coordinated approach to regional development, underpinned by local engagement.

RDAs play a role in helping to drive economic growth, innovation and entrepreneurship in regions through facilitating investment in community, industry and the environment. RDAs assist to bridge the regional development gaps in regions by working with a broad range of stakeholders across sectors and supporting the delivery of identified Australian Government strategic priorities.

As representatives of their local communities, RDAs will:

- focus their activities and strategy on delivery of the RIF in their region, including investment in people, places, services, and industries and local economies.
- support regional stakeholders, including local government and the not-for-profit-sector, to seek grant opportunities that advance strategic regional priorities.
- support decarbonisation efforts and the transformation to a net zero economy and enable regional linkages between sectors to achieve these aims.
- build the evidence for economic development, including innovation and diversification strategies.



- facilitate meaningful engagement across the three levels of government to ensure investments deliver better outcomes for regions, and
- contribute relevant data and local intelligence to support the evidence base to inform regional development strategies, program design and policy responses.

RDAs use their local, cross-sector expertise and regional voice to:

- collaborate with integrity, transparency, respect and accountability.
- engage with diverse communities, especially First Nations people.
- support the Government’s ambition of ‘no one held back and no one left behind’, and • support gender equality opportunities in their regions.

### **3.1 RDAMW&G BOARD**

The RDAMW&G met twice during the financial 2022 – 2023 year; 16<sup>th</sup> February 2023 and 22 June 2023.

The Annual General Meeting which was held on Thursday 22 October 2022.

Board members serving during this time were:

- Yvonne Messina (Chair)
- Tom Maina Mwangi (Deputy Chair)
- Tony Turner (Member)
- Tami Maitre (Member)
- Jackie Brooks (Member)
- Ray Moir (Member)
- Jim Sandy (Member)
- Michael May (Member)
- Sarah James – Wallace (Member)

The organisation operates under a funding agreement with the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communication and Arts which runs from 1st July 2021 to 30th June 2025.

#### ***Recognition***

Acknowledgement and recognition are given to Mr Tom Mwangi Maina who passed way in April 2023. Tom was Deputy Chair of RDAMW&G and brought sound knowledge and guidance to the Board. He could transition comfortably between the details of finance and strategic direction and in

this capacity had a strong influence on the growth and maturity of our organisation and the contribution that we make to this region.

### **3.2 VISION**

A Strong and prosperous Mid West and Gascoyne region with an enhanced identity, prosperity and quality of life.

### **3.3 STRATEGIC INTENT**

We are committed to facilitating a strong regional economy through economic opportunity and investment.

### **3.4 MISSION**

Together we grow our region.

### **3.5 STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS**

RDAMW&G activities are guided by three strategic outcome areas:

#### **3.5.1 Facilitate regional economic development outcomes, investment, jobs and local procurement.**

- Regional collaboration.
- Improved competitive advantages.
- Business promotion and innovation.
- Investment, jobs, procurement and other regional development outcomes.

#### **3.5.2 Promote greater regional awareness of and engagement with Australian Government policies, grant programs and research.**

- Alignment of regional requirements to federal government programs / policies.
- Seek opportunities for regional businesses and organisations to access and win grant funding.
- Provision of best practice facilitation and advice regarding accessing relevant grants.

#### **3.5.3 Contribute to Commonwealth regional policy making by providing intelligence and evidence-based advice to the Australian Government on regional development issues.**

- The capability and performance of RDAMW&G is improved and enhanced.

### 3.6 OUR VALUES IDENTIFY WHAT RDAMW&G CARES ABOUT

<b>Equity and Inclusiveness</b>	Productive client relationships first, every time
<b>Engagement</b>	Engaging with those who are committed to our vision
<b>Integrity</b>	Honesty and credibility underpin our work
<b>Respect</b>	We value diversity, trust, cultural respect & fairness to all
<b>Resilience</b>	We value the capacity to adapt, to not give up, to try new things and be willing to rebound and recover

## 4.0 TOP FIVE BUSINESS ACTIVITIES

### 4.1 SUMMARY OF KEY OUTCOMES

Progressing opportunities to lead and facilitate a programmed approach to **Regional Growth and Investment**.

*The Gascoyne Infrastructure priorities statement was continued with an early assessment of the potential for a business case to support regional road renewal in the Gascoyne region.*

RDAMW&G has focused on developing best practice through an investigation of the **Collaborative Arrangements** between Shires and Mining Companies.

*Originating from many discussions and feedback from regional communities this project has reviewed agreements and commitments in place between small communities and mining companies. One-on-one meetings have been held with miners, local government and community stakeholders in the Murchison sub-region.*

Lead engagement with Shire communities with the aim of developing frameworks that support **Growth Strategies for Small Shires**.

*Acknowledging that many shires are experiencing a multi-decade trend of population decline RDAMW&G has engaged Regional Australia Institute to develop a regional liveability strategy with a view to addressing questions like (i) managing population decline, (ii) retaining growth in a strategic and sustainable way.*

Leading the development of the **Governance, Leadership and Advocacy** arrangements for sub regional Shires:

*In the Murchison funding and supporting the development of a sub-regional strategic plan, and in the Gascoyne supporting local government executives to develop advocacy strategies around areas of common regional interest.*

Building community capacity through a best practice **'grants program'**.

*Developing the capacity of the Mid West and Gascoyne community and business community to easily identify, learn about, apply for and manage applications for federal, state and local government and non-government grants and associated funding programs is a priority and key program area for RDAMW&G.*

#### **4.2 GROWING REGIONS FUND.**

RDAMW&G was pleased to be able to support the applications of local government and service organisations within Round 1 of the Growing Regions Fund.

### **5.0 PARTNERSHIPS**

#### **5.1 DEVELOPING NORTHERN AUSTRALIA**

RDAMW&G is a participant and Member of the RDA Northern Australian Alliance. The Alliance was established to provide input to and respond to the 'Our North Our Future: White Paper on Developing Northern Australia' (2015). Geographically the Gascoyne Region Shires of Exmouth, Carnarvon, Shark Bay and Upper Gascoyne in addition to the Shires of Meekatharra and Wiluna are included in the Developing Northern Australia agenda.

#### **5.2 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ZONE MEETINGS**

At a local level, the region is managed by 20 Local Government Authorities who provide services to communities that range in size from around ninety people to 39,000 people. These Local Governments belong to voluntary regional associations of Councils that are supported by the Western Australian Local Government Association. RDAMW&G is a non-voting participant of these Local Government zone meetings:

- **Murchison Country Zone of Western Australian Local Government Association (WALGA) (Cue Parliament)** incorporating the Shires of Cue, Meekatharra, Mount Magnet, Murchison, Sandstone and Yalgoo.
- **Northern Country Zone of WALGA (Midlands)** incorporating the Shires of Carnamah, Chapman Valley, Coorow, Irwin, Mingenew, Morawa, Northampton, Perenjori, Three Springs and the City of Greater Geraldton.
- **Gascoyne Country Zone of WALGA** incorporating the shires of Carnarvon, Exmouth, Shark Bay and Upper Gascoyne.

## 6.0 RDAMW&G REGIONAL FOCUS

During the 2022/23 budget year RDAMW&G has continued to focus on the smaller remote communities within the Mid West and Gascoyne region. This has been a deliberate policy and program position informed by:

- An evidence-based understanding of economic and population-based indicators.
- The development of an improved understanding of the vision that leaders have for their communities and the gaps in resources and capabilities.
- Our major projects which are highlighting opportunities to create shared value and collaboration across communities.

Observations are that:

- The development of appropriate governance and implementation frameworks at a local and regional level is essential to develop the business case opportunities that are required for transformational programmes that will attract both private and public sector investment.
- RDA's play a valuable role in developing shared value that identifies issues and opportunities that cross local government boundaries.
- Sub-regional and regional interventions are required to develop and implement strategies that address growth opportunities in small shires.
- Implementation of both State and Federal Government programs is challenging within micro communities.
- There is no one single solution to the factors that support jobs and growth. A multifaceted approach that incorporates population is required.

## 7.0 OUTCOMES

### 7.1 FACILITATION OF REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OUTCOMES, INVESTMENT, JOBS AND LOCAL PROCUREMENT.

<p><b>7.1.1 Gascoyne Infrastructure Priorities</b></p>	<p>Following consultation with Gascoyne Shires RDAMW&amp;G prepared the Gascoyne Infrastructure Priorities statement. The report will allow RDAMW&amp;G to develop a Gascoyne Infrastructure Priorities Statement that will drive regional infrastructure strategy and advocacy.</p> <p>Previous work on Gascoyne Infrastructure Priorities has been extended into pre-business case assessment of a Gascoyne regional roads strategy. It is envisioned that the business case will be used to support business cases road that show the relationship between road upgrades and renewal and private sector mining and tourism investment.</p>
<p><b>What did we do?</b></p>	<p><b>Background</b></p> <p>The Infrastructure Priorities report was prepared to provide a <i>Gascoyne regional perspective</i> of infrastructure priorities – a Gascoyne Perspective. The priorities are aligned with infrastructure reports released by Infrastructure WA and Infrastructure Australia and the themes of the Northern Australia agenda.</p> <p>The geographic scope of the report includes the Shires of Carnarvon, Exmouth, Shark Bay, Meekatharra, Murchison, and Upper Gascoyne.</p> <p>Regional Roads were identified as key infrastructure priority in the Infrastructure Priorities report.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Roads are critical for the further development of tourism, mining and horticulture. Upgrading and renewing roads had the potential to unlock or stimulate private sector investment.</li> <li>b. Providing serviceable roads to Aboriginal communities will reduce social and economic inequalities.</li> </ol>

	<p><b>Process</b></p> <p>Using internal resources RDAMW&amp;G researched and prepared a report that reviewed the business case opportunity for a regional road's renewal business case.</p> <p><b>Summary Recommendation</b></p> <p><i>Gascoyne Investment Road map</i></p> <p>The Gascoyne would benefit from a Regional Business case that acts as an investment road map for State and Federal Government.</p> <p><i>Challenges with Regional Business case</i></p> <p>Creating a business case like the Wheatbelt or Mid West freight routes is not as clear cut for the Gascoyne. The Gascoyne Road traffic is generated from area specific economies.</p> <p>There is more than one business case, and each business case is subregional rather than regional. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Horticultural freight routes – Carnarvon</li> <li>• Mining access roads – Upper Gascoyne</li> <li>• Tourist: current &amp; future: Exmouth, Shark Bay, Carnarvon.</li> <li>• Legacy roads: e.g., Meekatharra to Wiluna.</li> </ul> <p><i>The Gascoyne Regional Economies are Changing – Is the Road Network Future Proofed?</i></p>
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Given the anticipated future growth of the key economic sectors in the Gascoyne region, it is not clear if the road network is 'fit for purpose' for future business needs. Feedback from industry sectors and key stakeholders has been limited and difficult to obtain.

- (i) A regional strategy might focus on road guidelines or standards as benchmarks for future upgrades and projects.

**Areas of Benefit**

Areas of benefit the business case would need to consider are:

- (i) Freight Efficiencies: *road improvements that lead to industry RoI improvements (larger vehicles, improved supply chain productivity, consistent (RAV) standards)*
- (ii) Economic Growth: *investment resulting from road network improvements (resources, tourism)*
- (iii) Economic Diversification: *providing private sector with a greater level of certainty: e.g., enhancing visitor experience.*
- (iv) Road safety & maintenance: *improvements to road safety and reduction in accident rates.*
- (v) Improves revenue capacity of local government: *Local Government can meet revenue capacity required for road preservation needs.*

**Outcome**

The Report was presented to the Gascoyne Zone Meeting of Local Government in November 2022 and the Gascoyne Regional Roads Group in July 2023.

The Shires agreed to continue the business case preparation on a Shire-by-Shire basis.



	<p><b>Next Steps</b> Following a meeting with the NAIF funded Hastings Technology metals rare earths company RDA has an improved understanding of the importance of RAV rated roads to value chain productivity and profitability.</p>
<p><b>Did it have an impact?</b></p>	<p>The work around Gascoyne Infrastructure has shown:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The importance of having a ‘regional voice’.</li> <li>• Acknowledgement that organisations like RDA can fulfill an ‘honest broker’ role in developing a regional business case perspective on areas of common interest.</li> <li>• Recognition that that the business case for public sector investment requires evidence that it can assist in de-risking private sector activity. This is demonstrated as the Hastings Technology Metals rare earth mining company moves towards production.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Priority Performance Measures</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) The need for a regional infrastructure strategy is recognised.</li> <li>(ii) Willingness of regional local government organisations to collaborate for the benefit of their own communities and the region.</li> <li>(iii) Readiness of local government and business to participate in a shared activity.</li> <li>(iv) Process allows refinement to a range of infrastructure areas: digital, housing, skills etc.</li> <li>(v) Regional consensus and advocacy supported by stakeholders.</li> <li>(vi) RDAMW&amp;G has an enhanced understanding of its role in collaborating with stakeholder organisations particularly in capacity development.</li> </ul>

<p><b>7.1.2 Designated Area Migration Arrangement (DAMA) – Business Case</b></p>	<p>Responding to business requests RDAMW&amp;G lead the preparation of a business case to support an application to the Minister for Immigration, Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs for a Mid West and Gascoyne Designated Area Migration arrangement.</p> <p>The DAMA is a five-year labour agreement with the Federal Government that has the purpose of providing employers a specific tool to sponsor skilled overseas workers in specified industries that are experiencing critical skill and labour shortages.</p>
<p><b>What did we do?</b></p>	<p><b>Background</b></p> <p>Throughout the region there is a common view that employment should be offered to Australians first, however where there is skills shortage, it is recognised that skilled migrants are critical to supplement the local workforce. Central to the business case was that businesses in the region have access to a workforce that can will enable businesses to grow and remain competitive now and in the future.</p> <p><b>Regional Steering Group</b></p> <p>RDAMW&amp;G sought and gained the involvement of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exmouth Chamber of Commerce and Industry</li> <li>• Carnarvon Chamber of Commerce and Industry</li> <li>• Mid West Chamber of Commerce and Industry</li> <li>• Gascoyne Development Commission</li> <li>• Mid West Development Commission.</li> </ul>

	<p>To fund and sponsor the preparation of the business case. This group functioned as the business case steering group, chaired by RDAMW&amp;G.</p> <p>Keston Economics were contracted to prepare the business case and work closely with the Steering group.</p> <p><b>Process</b> Following guidelines provided by the Department of Home Affairs the preparation of the business case included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workshops with businesses in Carnarvon and Exmouth.</li> <li>• Use of Census and ABS data to understand regional employment and demographic trends.</li> <li>• A survey of business skills and employment needs.</li> <li>• Direct approach to specific businesses.</li> <li>• Use of existing reports (e.g., demand for early childhood education).</li> <li>• Anecdotal feedback and information.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Did it have an impact?</b></p>	<p><b>The business case:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is orientated towards small to medium sized businesses and organisations in each of the regions 20 local government communities.</li> <li>• Acknowledges the importance of supporting businesses owners and managers who live and work within the region to access employees who are attracted to a regional lifestyle and want to make this region their home.</li> <li>• Identifies the skill gaps within the region and the cost in productivity for the region.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognises that whilst there are many new projects planned for the region, in the hydrogen, energy and mining sector most of these organisations will have access to professional recruitment and migration agencies.</li> </ul>
<b>Priority Performance Measures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) The DAMA application is endorsed by the Minister.</li> <li>(ii) Administrative arrangements for the DAMA are established.</li> <li>(iii) Businesses understand and utilise the DAMA arrangement.</li> <li>(iv) Successful recruitment and settlement of overseas applicants.</li> </ul>

<b>7.1.3 Gascoyne Advocacy</b>	<p>The Gascoyne infrastructure priorities identified the infrastructure that will deliver the greatest return to the Gascoyne, the state and the nation in terms of business investment and jobs growth. The outcome of this initiative identified eight key pillars for underpinning business investment and jobs growth in the region: Tourism, Horticulture, Pastoralism, Fishing &amp; Aquaculture, Mining, Energy, Liveability and Defence.</p> <p>RDAMW&amp;G recognised the opportunity to lobby the Australian and Western Australian Governments to gain funding support, positive policy changes or other measures which can support the people and the economy of the Gascoyne.</p>
<b>What did we do?</b>	<p><b>Background</b></p> <p>From a Commonwealth perspective there are both challenges and opportunities to the region with enhanced scrutiny on infrastructure and program funding proposals likely. The Northern Australia portfolio further creates an opportunity to promote the Gascoyne and WA's specific needs, leveraging federal recognition of WA's contribution to the Commonwealth.</p>

	<p><b>Regional Coalition</b></p> <p>RDAMW&amp;G sought and gained the involvement of the Gascoyne Local Governments to support the preparation of advocacy collateral as the foundational building block of a comprehensive government engagement strategy. The strategy will provide direction and a tangible set of actions for RDMW&amp;G to undertake with an overarching objective of securing government support.</p> <p><b>Stage one: priority setting.</b></p> <p>In progress: Development of an advocacy document and associated material to distil regional priorities into a compelling proposition for governments to support and invest in.</p>
<p><b>Did it have an impact?</b></p>	<p>The work around Gascoyne Priorities has shown:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The importance of having a ‘regional voice’.</li> <li>• Acknowledgement that organisations like RDA can fulfill an ‘honest broker’ role in developing a regional business case perspective on areas of common interest.</li> <li>• Recognition that that the business case for public sector investment requires a collaborative approach, to establish a broader level of engagement and commitment.</li> <li>• Participants recognition of shared value and that not all participants receive the same value.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Priority Performance Measures</b></p>	<p>(i) The need for a regional priorities is recognised.</p> <p>(ii) Willingness of regional local government organisations to collaborate for the benefit of their own communities and the region.</p> <p>(iii) Readiness of local government and business to participate in a shared activity.</p> <p>(iv) Prioritisation of a targeted government relations strategy to support engagement with key political and bureaucratic stakeholders.</p>

	<p>(v) RDAMW&amp;G has an enhanced understanding of its role in collaborating with stakeholder organisations particularly in capacity development.</p>
<p><b>7.1.4 Small Shires in the Mid West Growth Strategies</b></p>	<p>RDAMW&amp;G initially commenced a project on the strategies and practices used by small shires to create growth and build their economies to improve community outcomes and bring investment into the local area.</p> <p>Feedback has enabled the project to evolve towards a region wide liveability strategy, with the potential to tailor this to the needs of the 20 Shires in the region.</p>
<p><b>What did we do?</b></p>	<p>Guided by the Regional Australia Institute (RAI) as an organisation that has a special interest in policy and regional Australia and the Liveability Toolkit three broad questions are being considered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) How do Shires with declining populations change their fortunes?</li> <li>(ii) How do growing shires retain this growth?</li> <li>(iii) How do both plan and develop for population growth scenarios.</li> </ul> <p><b>Stage 1:</b></p> <p>An initial analysis of key data sources to understand how the region has been growing, leading to information and review sessions with local governments through the region. The three WALGA regional meetings provide opportunities to engage all local governments with a facilitated conversation around goals for liveability, population attraction and retention.</p>

	<p><b>Next steps</b></p> <p>Further stages will focus on ‘future target markets’ and what these target markets are looking for in terms of lifestyle, and a ‘candid stock of liveability factors and gaps.</p>
<p><b>Did it have an impact?</b></p>	<p>RDAMW&amp;G is championing the importance of population alongside jobs and growth.</p> <p>Communities are now raising their concerns about population change and the impact on identity and sense of place.</p> <p>Resource challenges and sustainability are discussed along with factors that enhance liveability and attract or retain people.</p>
<p><b>Priority Performance Measures</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) Communities recognise population change as an issue and are prepared to work towards improved sustainability, liveability and population.</li> <li>(ii) How agencies like RDAMW&amp;G, and the regions small towns and communities, can better understand the ways that local capabilities can address opportunities in the region’s economy.</li> <li>(iii) Improved understanding of the tool sets and capabilities that can be used by local government and communities to enhance liveability, economic growth, population and actions that will have the greatest impact.</li> <li>(iv) Greater collaboration between local government and communities on infrastructure and investment opportunities.</li> <li>(v) Interventions that result in improvements in liveability, investment, jobs and population.</li> </ul>

<p><b>7.1.5 Storytowns</b></p>	<p>As part of initiatives to attract more people to visit and explore the region, RDAMW&amp;G partnered with Storytowns and 14 Shires to participate in a nationwide tourism initiative called Storytowns.</p> <p>Storytowns is a story-based travel guide uncovering hidden gems of unique stories that are not often heard but are now found by travellers as they approach towns in the Mid West and Gascoyne.</p> <p>Storytowns content is available as a downloaded app where tourists can listen to a podcast of local stories, history and attractions told by local people. The content is geo-located within the app and plays automatically as visitors approach a town. This initiative aims to increase the likelihood that the visitor will stop and spend some time exploring the area.</p>
<p><b>What did we do?</b></p>	<p>Facilitated the participation of Shires in the Mid West and Gascoyne in the Storytowns initiative.</p> <p>Provided supplementary funding for each podcast prepared for each Shire.</p> <p>Developed a regional marketing campaign, including posters and brochures, social media, radio advertising and ABC interview to create awareness and engagement.</p> <p>Provided marketing collateral for each Shire to support local marketing and engagement.</p>
<p><b>Did it have an impact?</b></p>	<p>To date there have been 4,600 downloads of the Mid West and Gascoyne Storytown Apps.</p> <p>Shires have expressed interest in producing further Storytown Apps.</p>
<p><b>Priority Performance Measures</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) Number of application downloads</li> <li>(ii) Further participation of Shires in the program.</li> <li>(iii) Feedback from visitors and participants.</li> </ul>



<b>7.1.6 Murchison Regional Strategy</b>	RDAMW&G took a lead role in developing a regional strategy for the Murchison sub region.
<b>What did we do?</b>	RDAMW&G 's contribution covered four key enablement areas:  <i>Leadership:</i> Advocated the opportunity that a Regional strategy would provide to the Murchison sub-region.  <i>Funding:</i> Provided funding through the Commonwealth Government that enabled employment of a person to manage the production of the document.  <i>Collaboration:</i> Gained support from the Murchison regions seven local governments to undertake the strategy.  <i>Process:</i> Provided research and input to the regional strategy working group.
<b>Did It have an impact</b>	This is the first regional strategy for the Murchison subregion. The purpose is to strengthen regional collaboration and focus on shared regional issues.  The Murchison Regional Strategy examines the region's evolution over the next decade and beyond, identifying economic, environmental, and social challenges and opportunities. It presents the region's perspective on shaping its future and how to respond to these issues.  This plan aims to ensure local, state and federal stakeholders recognise the issues and establish new collaborations to address strategic goals and align government investment and service delivery.
<b>Priority Performance Measures</b>	The performance measures for RDAMW&G are different to those within the Regional Strategy  Advice provided to the Murchison Executive Group is valued and recognised as appropriate.

	<p>RDAMW&amp;G can support and promote the added value of the strategy and its priority actions within the growth pillars of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Business and industry</li> <li>• Jobs and Skills</li> <li>• Liveability</li> <li>• Look to the future.</li> </ul>
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**7.2 PROMOTE GREATER REGIONAL AWARENESS OF AND ENGAGEMENT WITH AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT POLICIES, GRANT PROGRAMS AND RESEARCH.**

<p><b>7.2.1 Grant Management</b></p>	<p>Promoted grants and programs available to the region as well as supporting grant applications made by Local Governments and stakeholder organisations.</p> <p>RDAMW&amp;G has provided advice on any application when it is sought in the context of an understanding of regional strategies, challenges and opportunities.</p> <p>Provided an aggregated grant information and assistance portal in partnership with RDA Wheatbelt since 2021.</p>
<p><b>What did we do?</b></p>	<p><b>Grant Portal</b></p> <p>Developing the capacity of the Mid West and Gascoyne local governments, community and business to easily identify, learn about, and manage applications for federal, state and local government and non-government grants and associated funding programs is important program area for RDAMW&amp;G.</p> <p>RDAMW&amp;G and RDA Wheatbelt have jointly funded and launched:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A Grant portal that is now provided to local governments, community groups and business groups in up to 63 Shires throughout the Mid West, Gascoyne and Wheatbelt regions. The Grant portal reduces the reliance on other organisations for Grant information.</li> </ul> <p>The Grant Portal can be accessed on the RDAMW&amp;G website: <a href="http://www.RDAMW&amp;G.com.au">www.RDAMW&amp;G.com.au</a></p> <p><b>Promotion of Grants</b></p> <p>Grants and funding opportunities are promoted on the RDAMW&amp;G website, social media and through the RDAMW&amp;G newsletter.</p> <p><b>Grant Support</b></p> <p>Over the past year has supported local shires and community in applications made for community and infrastructure projects to Building Better Regions Fund (BBRF), Growing Better Regions fund and other community and innovation that have become available.</p>
<p><b>Did It have an impact</b></p>	<p>Regional communities rely heavily on grants for infrastructure, events, cultural and community development and capacity building, and this RDA initiative is in response to a widely recognised need for improved awareness and access to grant funding.</p> <p>RDA’s Funding and Grants Hub is a time-saving and effortless way for applicants from small community organisations to local governments to identify funding tailored to their needs.</p> <p>The Grants hub is accessible to local government Shires, business and community groups across sixty-three regional communities.</p> <p>In June 2023 the Grant Hub had:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1,314 grants on the portal with a combined value of \$128B</li> <li>• 521 users registered users and increase of 200 over the previous year. On average there are 10 new user registrations per month.</li> <li>• 3,777 Grant alerts sent to registered users by email.             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 47.7% of searches were for community grants.</li> <li>○ 41.4% of searches were for business grants.</li> <li>○ 10.8% of searches were for Council grants.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Most popular grant categories include: sport, community, energy and renewables.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Priority Performance Measures</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local Governments and communities have up to date information on available Grants.</li> <li>• LG and communities improve skills in Grant application and management.</li> <li>• RDAMW&amp;G can assess skill requirement required with respect to Grant application and management.</li> <li>• Applicability of grant to the region can be assessed from an advocacy perspective.</li> </ul>

<p><b>7.2.2 Developing Northern Australia</b></p>	<p>The Office of Northern Australia (ONA) sits within the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts.</p> <p>It is the Australian Government’s area of expertise for Northern Australia, coordinating implementation of the Government’s Northern Australia policy agenda to achieve a sustainable and contemporary northern economy. The ONA provides policy advice, coordinates operational support for the Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility, supports Indigenous inclusion of First Nations involvement in the agenda, coordinates whole-of-government reporting, and facilitates governance structures.</p> <p>The Shires of Exmouth, Carnarvon, Upper Gascoyne, Shark Bay, Meekatharra, Murchison and Wiluna fall within the geographic scope of Northern Australia.</p>
<p><b>What did we do?</b></p>	<p>RDAMW&amp;G is working with the Gascoyne Shires to develop a coordinated approach to ONA policy and initiatives and communicates these to relevant local government stakeholders.</p> <p><b>Presentation at Developing Northern Australia Conference</b></p> <p>RDAMW&amp;G worked with two other RDAs to prepare and present a presentation on the NRDA to the Developing Northern Australia conference. Following the Infrastructure Priorities work, RDAMW&amp;G has undertaken preliminary work on the need for a regional road network renewal plan with a view to meeting the future needs of industry.</p>
<p><b>Did It have an impact</b></p>	<p>Developing the capacity of Gascoyne local governments and business to interpret and respond to policy and funding opportunities provided through the Office of Northern Australia is an important program area for RDAMW&amp;G.</p> <p>To have influence, the Gascoyne Shires must work together as a regional group identifying regional infrastructure and investment opportunities.</p>

	<p>RDAMW&amp;G can contribute to Northern Australia policy through reports and submissions.</p> <p>A further role is the development of regional collaboration and prioritisation of key issues that can then be promoted and advocated to Government.</p>
<b>Priority Performance Measures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local Governments and communities have up to date information on the Northern Australia policy agenda.</li> <li>• The Gascoyne region has a voice in the implementation of the Northern Australia policy agenda.</li> <li>• The Gascoyne region can support and agree priorities that have the potential to attract funding and support through the Office of Northern Australia.</li> </ul>

<b>7.2.3 Partnerships and Alliances</b>	<p>Establish partnerships and alliances with both public and private sector organisations that create <b>greater regional awareness of Australian Government policies, grant programs and research.</b></p>
<b>What did we do?</b>	<p>Participate in committees and associations that work together for the region:</p> <p><b>Developing Northern Australia</b></p> <p>RDAMW&amp;G is a participant and Member of the RDA Northern Australian Alliance. The Alliance provides a forum to share issues and discuss matters of regional interest as well as providing an RDA perspective to the Northern Australia agenda.</p> <p><b>Regional Local Government Organisations</b></p> <p>RDAMW&amp;G is a non-voting participant of Local Government zone meetings:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Murchison Country Zone of Western Australian Local Government Association (WALGA) (Cue Parliament)</b> incorporating the Shires of Cue, Meekatharra, Mount Magnet, Murchison, Sandstone and Yalgoo.</li> <li>• <b>Northern Country Zone of WALGA (Midlands)</b> incorporating the Shires of Carnamah, Chapman Valley, Coorow, Irwin, Mingenew, Morawa, Northampton, Perenjori, Three Springs and the City of Greater Geraldton.</li> <li>• <b>Gascoyne Country Zone of WALGA</b> incorporating the Shires of Carnarvon, Exmouth, Shark Bay and Upper Gascoyne</li> </ul>
<b>Did It have an impact</b>	Collaboration with agencies and organisations in both government and non-government sectors is fostered and encouraged and is an essential role of RDA's.
<b>Priority Performance Measures</b>	<p>Collaborative partnerships with other agencies, government departments and organisations increase awareness of RDA's.</p> <p>Partner organisations recognise the value created by RDA.</p>

**7.3 CONTRIBUTE TO COMMONWEALTH REGIONAL POLICY MAKING BY PROVIDING INTELLIGENCE AND EVIDENCE-BASED ADVICE TO THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT ON REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT ISSUES.**

<p><b>7.3.1 Regional Advice and Reporting</b></p>	<p>RDAMW&amp;G has participated in and where appropriate lead the development of submissions, briefings and face-to-face interactions that highlight issues and opportunities relevant to the region.</p> <p>Where appropriate available datasets have been used to highlight important trends and indicators that contribute to an understanding of the region and underpin business case and advocacy initiatives.</p>
<p><b>What did we do?</b></p>	<p>Provided anecdotal and evidence on the impact of Cyclone Seroja, skill and regional housing needs.</p> <p>Participate and facilitated the involvement of RDAMW&amp;G Board members in Regional Intelligence briefings.</p>
<p><b>Did It have an impact</b></p>	<p>Information provided has had input into policy formulation and the influence of federal programs.</p>
<p><b>Priority Performance Measures</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stakeholder awareness of regional issues.</li> <li>• Identification of the key indicators that support the RDAMW&amp;G program.</li> <li>• Support for a regionally coordinated capacity building program from the organisations and stakeholders for the initiatives critical to the regions’ prosperity.</li> </ul>



## 9.0 CASE STUDIES

### 9.1 CASE STUDY 1: DESIGNATED AREA MIGRATION ARRANGEMENT (DAMA) (BUSINESS CASE): REGIONAL GROWTH & INVESTMENT

#### 9.1.1 Background

Recognising that businesses throughout the region were finding it challenging to source labour coupled with declining and slow growth populations and requests from businesses to for a DAMA led RDAMW&G to establish a DAMA Steering Group comprising:

- Exmouth Chamber of Commerce and Industry
- Carnarvon Chamber of Commerce and Industry
- Mid West Chamber of Commerce and Industry
- Gascoyne Development Commission
- Mid West Development Commission, and
- Regional Development Australia Mid West & Gascoyne (Chair)

The DAMA business case was funded and coordinated by this group.

#### 9.1.2 Scope

From a geographical perspective the business case will cover employers located within the 20 Shires of the Gascoyne and Mid West region of Western Australia.

#### 9.1.3 Objective

The Australian Governments objectives for the DAMA program are:

- To provide a mechanism to address immediate workforce shortages.
- To enable employers who cannot fill vacancies from within the Australian labour force to supplement their workforce with access to overseas workers.
- To ensure that overseas workers receive terms and conditions that meet Australian workplace laws and are no less favourable than those provided to Australian workers.
- To facilitate the expansion of the regional economy through jobs growth.
- To support and promote the provision of targeted training programs for Australians.

#### 9.1.4 Business case scope

The business case covered:

- (i) The benefits that a DAMA will bring to the region as a method of attracting overseas people who have the skills that meet current and future needs of businesses.

Evidence that shows:

- That there is a labour shortage and the underlying drivers.
- The key industry sectors and how those sectors are impacted by labour issues.
- The industry sectors that would benefit from overseas workers utilising a DAMA pathway.
- The targeted occupations.
- An employer consultation process, to the extent that there is confidence that if a DAMA was established it would be utilised and supported by employers.
  - Employers understand what a DAMA is and is not.
  - Employer responsibilities are clear and acknowledged.
  - Responsibilities to DAMA applicants (employees) are clear and understood.
  - Costs and timeframes are understood and agreed.
- A Governance structure to oversee the DAMA and the relationship with the Department of Home Affairs.
- The processes to manage 'community integration' and settlement.
- A Designated Area Representative (DAR) has been identified and agreed.
- A business case to cover the operations of the DAR, as service, for the initial five-year agreement period.

#### **9.1.5 Method**

Following guidelines provided by the Department of Home Affairs the preparation of the business case included:

- Workshops with businesses in Carnarvon and Exmouth.
- Use of Census and ABS data to understand regional employment and demographic trends.
- A survey of business skills and employment needs.
- Direct approach to specific businesses.

#### **9.1.6 Summary: RDAMW&G role and leadership:**

*Regional Capacity:* Led the development of regional capacity by using its role to establish a Steering Group and regional body that can manage a project with multiple shared interests. Overtime, private and public sector organisations, will be able to participate in the DAMA to further its social, cultural and economic interests and objectives.

*Leadership:* Provided the environment and support to accelerate the development of the project.

*Collaboration:* The DAMA will require a formalised governance structure to manage (i) the relationship with the Department of Home Affairs, and (ii) the operational delivery of the DAMA.

*Process:* The DAMA will require an operational delivery structure to manage DAMA applications, promotion, relationships with key stakeholders, administration and finances.

## **9.2 CASE STUDY 2: STORYTOWNS PODCASTS (GROWTH STRATEGIES FOR SMALL SHIRES)**

### **9.2.1 Background**

RDAMW&G had been looking for ways to capture unique stories and narratives from within the region and seized the opportunity to partner with the Storytowns company. Storytowns was established to create digital audio guides that told stories about things, events, histories and people in Australian towns that would not normally be found in standard tourist guides.

### **9.2.2 Objective**

Few of the 20 Shires in the Mid West and Gascoyne are destinations. Mostly, people drive through, often not stopping with little awareness of attractions and things to see and do. Whilst Storytowns is not a silver bullet, each narrative offers authentic insight into each community, creating curiosity and inspiring people to explore further.

There are many unique authentic stories in all our communities and the Storytown App sits alongside a broader of work that RDMW&G is undertaking to help promote the Shires, increase visitation and create interest from people who may choose to invest and relocate.

### **9.2.3 Process**

RDAMW&G arranged back ground briefings with local governments through the region, worked with Storytowns to develop a rate schedule, offered a financial subsidy for each podcast that was produced and assisted in the movement of the Storytown representative throughout the region.

Once the seventeen podcasts (from 14 Shires) were produced RDMW&G prepared a regional marketing program to support the launch of the podcasts. Each Shire was provided with brochures and leaflets to distribute, there were radio advertisements and radio interviews inc. ABC Mid West.

The Storytown podcasts are a community collaboration. Each community identifies what it wants to feature on the podcast, and the stories are told by locals, interviewed by one of the Storytown team.

Each of the Podcasts is available in the Storytowns App which is available from all App stores. A key feature of the Storytowns App is that it includes a Geo-locator, means that the audio plays automatically as the town is approached.

#### 9.2.4 Outcome

More than 4,700 stories from the Mid West and Gascoyne were downloaded in the 8 weeks following the launch.

Further feedback is being gathered and a second round of regional stories is being planned.

#### 9.2.5 RDAMW&G role and leadership:

*Regional Capacity:* Led the development of regional capacity by using its role to bring all the Local Government together and broker a relationship.

The marketing campaign integrated the stories from through the region, creating a 'Storytowns' trail.

*Leadership:* Promoted the opportunity to the local governments and provided financial support.

*Collaboration:* Managed the collaborative relationship between the local governments and Storytowns, created the regional marketing strategy and coordinated the delivery at multiple points to coincide with a regional launch date.

*Process:* Future editions of Storytowns will be managed through sub-regional working groups.

## 10.0 GOVERNANCE

### 10.1 GOVERNANCE PROCESS AND BOARD TRAINING

Oversight of the Business Plan has been provided through reports to each Board meeting in addition to:

- Project management protocols and the development of operational plans for each program area.
- Budget and financial review against programs,
- Regular meeting between RDAMW&G Executive Officer and the RDAMW&G Chair.

A calendar which outlines strategic, governance and operational activities is a standing item on the RDAMW&G Board agenda.

During the year the Board participated in an AICD Vital Signs Review and following this most Board Members participated in and completed an AICD online Foundations of Directorship program.

### 10.2 POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

The RDAMW&G has a range of financial, risk management, operational and health and safety policies and procedures. Policies and Procedures are a standing item on meeting agenda and are reviewed on a regular basis.

### **10.3 FINANCIALS & ACCOUNTS**

RDAMW&G accounts are managed under contract by offsite bookkeepers. The bookkeeper uses MYOB and most records are maintained in electronic form.

Financial reports are presented to each Board meeting and reports are reviewed at the end of each month.

The RDAMW&G Auditor is renewed on a 2–3-year cycle with regular communication of end of year requirements maintained between the Executive Officer, bookkeeper and Auditor.

### **10.4 CONSTITUTION**

The RDAMW&G Constitution is up to date (Associations Incorporations Act 2015) and registered with the WA Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety.

### **10.5 INSURANCES**

In addition to Public and Products Liability Insurance provided through the DITRDC&A, RDAMW&G has Business Pack Insurance that includes Public Liability Insurance, Burglary and Contents insurance.

### **10.6 RISK MANAGEMENT**

The RDAMW&G Board is working on a risk management strategy that allows the organisation to identify potential risks and if necessary, put in place measures to manage and mitigate risks. Workers compensation insurance is paid annually.

Risk management process allows risks to be identified, analysed, evaluated, treated and monitored across a range of category areas that include financial, legal, political, governance, health and safety.

Cyber security is a risk area that is being closely monitored.

- There are redundancy procedures for operational files.
- Financials are held within the MYOB cloud protocols.
- Laptops have regular virus checks.
- All invoices are sent through the MYOB platform and email attached invoices are avoided.
- Unrecognised invoices and payee details are verbally authenticated.

## **11.0 COMMUNICATIONS AND MEDIA**

### **11.1 STAKEHOLDERS**

- RDAMW&G major stakeholders are the:
  - Business and general community,
  - 20 local government authorities,
  - Mid West and Gascoyne Development Commissions,

- State and Federal Government Departments,
- State and Federal politicians,
- Education providers including Geraldton Universities Centre,
- Other RDA's,
- Indigenous groups and organisations,
- Mid West and Gascoyne Chambers of Commerce
- Mid West Ports
- WALGA
  - Murchison Zone of WALGA
  - Northern Zone of WALGA
  - Gascoyne Zone of WALGA
- A broad range of working groups and committees.

Our Business Plans are aligned with relevant regional and decentralisation policies of the state and federal governments and the regional development commissions.

RDAMW&G listens to the voice of the regional and remote communities as this allows the organisation to provide advice to the federal government on regional priorities and allow consistent and aligned input from all stakeholders.

Face to face communications through regular visits and attendance at regional forums have been vital to success outcomes and adding value in the utilisation of scarce resources.

It is further recognised that alternative ways of communicating with our various stakeholders across a large and distributed region need to be considered. RDAMW&G has used social media tools including LinkedIn and Facebook, and our own website.

Regular updates of state and federal members have been envisaged and already issue specific approaches to Canberra and Perth are being discussed with key stakeholders.

## **11.2 WEBSITE AND SOCIAL MEDIA**

The RDAMW&G has recently undergone the second refresh in 3 years. This includes transition to a more adaptable and management host site. Refreshing and updating the contact using more contemporary images. Integration with RDAMW&G LinkedIn and Facebook channels

Increasingly the website and social media channels are used in a more integrated way to promote RDAMW&G and support the delivery of program and services.

As an example, the website contains a link to the regional Grant Portal and key information on the website is updated on a regular basis. The following table shows website visitation for June to August 2023.

*Figure 1: Summary RDAMW&G Website Visits*

	<b>Unique visits</b>	<b>Page views</b>	<b>Top active pages visited June, July, August 2023</b>	<b>Referring sites</b>
<b>June 2023</b>	172 (down 15% from May)	318	** Data from old site unavailable due to new site development and subscription cancelled.	** Data from old site unavailable due to new site development and subscription cancelled.
<b>July 2023</b>	196 (Up 13% from June)	335	<b>New Site Data &gt;</b> 1. Home (202) 2. Our Vision (37) 3. Mid West & Gascoyne Regions (35) 4. Grants Hub (30) 5. Storytowns (24) 6. Planning (21) 7. Assistance (19) 8. Small Shires: Growth & Liveability (17) 9. Grants Hub (16) 10. Murchison Georegion (14) 11. Mining & Community Partnerships (13) 12. Newsletters (13)	<b>New Site Data &gt;</b> Direct 124 Google 37 LinkedIn 7 Spatial Infrastructure 6 Others 10
<b>August 2023</b>	101 old site to 17 Aug & new site data >  161 unique visitors = 262 total (up 33% since July)	157 old site & new site data >  441 page views = 598 total (up 78% since July)		

#### **Facebook**

- Total page followers end August 2023: 469 (up 17 since mid-June)
- Post reach 5,672 (up 1,000% since June)

#### **LinkedIn**

- August 2023: 337 followers, 71 new followers since June 2023.
- 3,236 post impressions (14 Mar to 16 June)
- 59 unique visitors

#### **Storytowns**

- August 2023: 4617 app downloads in participating towns, since July 2023.
- Data does not include regional centre of Geraldton or non-participating Shires at present.

The RDA newsletter is distributed around twice times a year to a wide audience.