

Intersecting Spotlight Beams: Coupling rendezvousing with sustainable economic futures and sustaining production landscapes

Spotlight 6, rendezvousing with sustainable economic futures was underpinned by the contention that successful economic development is driven by vision, principles and process for developing an investable business case. Critical factors playing out through this include community values, institutional requirements and arrangements and business alignment. Regional geographic realities also influence the successful outcomes of economic initiatives. This is seen in the inherent fertility of soils, availability of water for irrigation and the attractiveness of rural and remote areas for human settlement. Factors such as changing climatic conditions including extreme weather events, prolonged droughts, cyclonic storms floods and bushfires may have far greater impacts on primary production than they do now.

Through a series of case studies, this session focused on the interplay of these factors and explored a range of possible responses to the challenges and highlighted success factors that have broad implications for maintaining and enhancing sustainable economic development in regional Australia. Specifically, the discussion generated by the presentations demonstrated that to be successful, economic development requires clear statements of an agreed vision coupled to active participation and commitment to managing changing biophysical, social and economic conditions.

Critical to this is engagement of communities of space and interest. For example, the case examples presented by the *Spotlight Panellists* reflected how geographic realities provide opportunities for active, participative recreation; port visitation and geotourism. In this context panellists highlighted that key challenges to be addressed include (for example):

- vocal unwillingness to accept change
- poor participation by affected communities
- inadequate use of the range of available engagement techniques.

The suite of case studies presented in **Spotlight 6** provided an interconnected overview of examples of big picture engagement of communities in new economic development opportunities. As such, it provided an opportunity to peruse some of the issues relating to regions transitioning towards low carbon economies and emerging opportunities.

The session concluded with a discussion about appropriate engagement techniques to identify opportunities and harness community commitment to enable them to rendezvous with their sustainable economic future.

The focus of **Spotlight 10** was on existing and emerging production landscapes and the constraints to and opportunities for sustainable regional development. The underpinning rationale was that increasingly there is recognition of the importance of safeguarding our productive landscapes and the options we have available to do so. This was addressed by the panellists through their individual presentations that collectively reflected links to the bigger picture as framed through the focusing question: *how do we sustain production landscapes?*

Team discussion ranged broadly and was captured in terms of potentially actionable topics for further evaluation. Arguably, these topics provide the conduit for coupling rendezvousing with sustainable economic futures and sustaining production landscapes. This coupling highlights the biophysical, social and economic implications of various options for rendezvousing and sustaining production landscapes. Also, it raises questions such as:

- what we can afford?
- why we need to invest?
- what we will be the short and long term results of these investments?

When rendezvousing and seeking to sustaining production landscapes we need to factor in changes to landscapes due to:

- continuing land clearing and degrading soil fertility due to farming and grazing practices
- changing climatic conditions resulting in reduction in soil moisture and water in storage systems
- vegetation loss from droughts and bushfires.
- cost imposts of externalities by way of availability of diesel fuel
- escalating production and labour force prices.

Panellists and participants in **Spotlight 10** agreed that when seeking to sustain economic development these factors need to be viewed in the context of demographic changes in peri-urban areas, country cities and towns, rural and remote population nodes and on maintaining the viability of farming and pastoral properties across the regional landscapes. And this needs to be done as proactive responses to natural and market forces.

On the other side of the equation, there was agreement that we have rapidly emerging opportunities from:

- market demands for existing and new horticultural and agricultural products
- renewable energy such as 24/7 CSP for irrigation pumping, commercial activities and domestic purposes
- expanding and maintaining network infrastructure for transporting water, agricultural supplies and produce.

Participants agreed that without doubt, the list of factors is innumerable. And all this combines to create a rich canvas on which to visualise coupling rendezvousing with sustainable economic futures and sustaining production landscapes. The basic elements for this picture are:

- Dimensioning regional landscape forcing factors
- Assessing food and fibre production landscapes
- Safeguarding landscape potential
- Optimising coastal production and settlement landscapes

In this context, panellists and participants who had participated in both sessions recognised that there were a range of topics that were common to **Spotlight 6** and **Spotlight 10** and that the listing below is to some extent a simple framework for coupling rendezvousing with sustainable economic futures and sustaining production landscapes with a set of actions.

Dimensioning regional landscape forcing factors

1. Sustaining land surfaces

- Fostering erosion prevention and abatement
- Undertaking vegetation augmentation, maintenance and conservation

- Accelerating soil restoration and improvement
2. Weather and landscapes
 - Acknowledging the challenge of changing climatic conditions
 - Adapting to droughts, bushfires and flooding rains
 - Acknowledging the links between extreme weather and environmental and population health risks
 3. Watering landscapes and people
 - Working with rainfall and runoff realities
 - Accommodating surface and subsurface storage challenges

Assessing Food and Fibre Production Landscapes

4. New production on old land surfaces and renewed landscapes
 - Balancing dry land horticulture and cropping with changing climatic conditions
 - Optimising irrigated horticulture, cropping and pasture
 - Identifying and exploiting new and niche markets
5. Innovation and economic opportunities
 - Fostering innovative production techniques
 - Focusing on higher value products
 - Value adding at farm and community scales
 - Initiating projects to capitalise on inherent and human established ecosystem services

Safeguarding Landscape Potential

6. Rural and peri-urban landscapes
 - Proactively address diverse threats to high value arable land
 - Catalyse changes to rural settlement patterns
 - Assess and mitigate impacts and risks from metropolitan area spill-over
 - Develop innovative planning frameworks for integrated action
7. Securing water supplies
 - Ensuring adequate secure and safe water for rural and remote communities and properties
 - Encourage stormwater harvesting, water recycling and reuse
 - Use the Murray Darling Basin as a lesson for Northern Australia
8. Sustainable energy for production and populations
 - Investigate the geographic realities for 24/7 renewable energy
 - Optimise alternative energy sources for irrigation pumping, minerals processing and waste water treatment
 - Identify fundable project opportunities from 24/7 renewables for decentralised supplies

- Acknowledge and work to reduce liquid carbon fuel vulnerabilities
- Foster the use of renewable energy for desalination opportunities

Optimising Coastal Production and Settlement Landscapes

9. Natural pressures on coastal systems

- Raise community and governmental awareness and understanding of the dimensions of rapid changes to coastal systems
- Seek to maximise conserving biodiversity
- Champion the appropriateness and adequacy of adaptive responses
- Initiate innovative geomorphic driven coastal engineering

10. Human pressures on coastal systems

- Review and mitigate the adverse impacts of settlement patterns and coastal sprawl
- Foster tourism and active recreation appropriate to the geographic and demographic realities
- Encourage cost effective proactive planning responses
- Champion conserving coastal ambience
- Optimise aquaculture potential