COMMUNIQUE NOTES: Remote Regional Hubs: nodes and networks

Context: joining the dots

The single industry and service towns' challenge most effectively scoped the issues and provided a simple framework for developing a better understanding of hubs, nodes and networks. Four types of Single Industry Towns (SIT's) were identified, namely:

- primary industry dependent
- mining and/or mineral processing dependent
- regional/local administration and support service provision
- coastal towns that are built on wealth and lifestyle

All were seen as having special attributes depending on the industry that gave rise to the SIT. Physical geographic and demographic conditions and communication networks (eg roads, air links, ports and shipping, telecommunications) were seen as important in characterising the regional setting for SIT's. Most SIT's reflected the single industry region in which they were located (eg livestock grazing, mining, support services).

Additionally, key questions were raised such as:

- Why would you support a SIT; surely it should sustain itself?
- What does 'single industry' mean in order to make a SIT when it is obviously servicing itself?
- Does size of a SIT matter if it is the type of dependency that makes it vulnerable?
- Are we qualified to ask whether a SIT should or should not survive?
- What can be done to make singe industry towns more sustainable and how do we know whether or not the actions will work?

Supporting SIT's: towards self sufficiency

From the group discussion in preparing the case for 'the challenge', participants agreed that SIT's could become more self-supporting through the following strategic actions:

<u>Ensuring resource optimisation</u>

- Inventorying and assessing the condition and value of the natural resources and the built and heritage assets of the town and region
- 'Stocktaking' and valuating the human resource assets of the town and region
- Maximising the utilisation of the inherent natural geographic attributes and built infrastructure

<u>Fostering economic consolidation</u>

- Building on the inherent economic strengths
- Invigorating and innovating the underpinning industry sector activities

- Diversifying the economic base
- Value-adding to the raw materials being extracted or grown
- Fostering mutual support networks for commercial enterprises at local and regional scale
- Encouraging collaborations and strategic partnerships
- Promoting vertical integration of commercial activities

Sustaining the social capital

- Ensuring the community 'knows and appreciates the situation' in terms of socio-economic vulnerabilities and opportunities
- Supporting formal and informal information dissemination mechanisms
- Valuing champions and thanking them for their efforts
- Mobilising the productive, entrepreneurial and enterprising aging
- Fostering 'social magnets' to attract and hold people in the town
- Developing 'Keep -in touch-tools' help people maintain links with the town
- Nurturing 'belief' in the future of the town and the region
- Making sure all visitors stay and extra night
- Celebrating success at the personal and community scales

Embracing technological take-up

- Embracing sustainability technologies to reduce costs for utility services and sustain decentralised residential and commercial developments
- Optimising communications technology to attract and support 'foot-loose industries' and new 'techo' residents
- Fostering the adoption of 'foot-loose' commercial and industrial technological innovation that breaks with traditional regional SIT dependencies be they either mineral or primary industry sector based

Practitioners Round Table

The Practitioners Round Table synthesised core elements of the *Regional Service Centres* presentations and the *Single Industry and Service Towns* challenge to capture key observations, ideas and thoughts. This provided a foundation from which to explore some of the essential ingredients for sustainable regional towns and settlements including:

- maximising industrial diversity and employment opportunities
- infrastructure provision through soft and hard networks – air links, roads, coastal shipping and the 'ether'
- supporting liveability through health, education and volunteering
- establishing sustainable utilities – renewable energy and water supply and waste water treatment

A key objective was to build on the input for the 'challenge' to produce a generic implementable action framework to guide sustainability initiatives for rural and remote regional service towns and settlements.

The focusing questions that emerged from the synthesis were:

- What can you do internally to build connections? Specifically, in terms of"
  - Communal communication networks
  - Strengthening leadership bonds
- What are the networks or linkages between similar places and how can we build on them?
  - Inter-regional industry sector connectivity's to share issues scaping and problem resolution experiences
  - Industry peak body liaison and support
- How can we improve the quality of influence? And this needs to be seen in terms of it being:
  - Evidence based
  - Containing a diverse information mix
- What can we buy from local businesses that help to keep money in the town?
  - Technical and professional services
  - Co-operative buying power

Principles to guide sustainability initiatives for SIT's and regions were summarised as follows.

- Identify, use and enhance the networks
- Be smarter and better at lobbying
- Adapt models for co-operation to suit geographic and demographic realities
- Strengthen community relations from within
- Localise and link utility services
- Optimise connectivity
- Integrate the local skills and knowledge sets
- Know what you have: inventory social capital and regional/local assets and distribute
- Look at ecosystems services as revenue generators
- Celebrate success

Arguably are all Australians are in this together because the key generators of national wealth are located in the rural and remote regions and there is an inextricable socio-economic link between SIT's, service hubs and nodes and Australia's metropolitan regions.

Generic Sustainability Project Action Flow Sheet

On the basis of the round table discussions a set of key attributes were identified that can be linked to produce a *Generic Sustainability Project Action Flow Sheet*. The flow sheet is shown schematically at **Attachment 1**. The core components are:

- Strategic actions in terms of developing:
    - strategic appreciation of the situation
    - agenda influencing strategy
    - community engagement and communication strategy
    - public/private sector project proposers & champions identification strategy
    - funding source identification and access strategy

- Standard project tasking in terms of:
    - scoping and scanning
    - prioritisation and documentation
    - completing proponent or council project evaluation, decision making, endorsement and funding commitment processes
    - addressing formal planning and environmental assessment and management processes
    - implementation using adaptive life cycle assessment and management processes

- Project supporting mechanisms for:
    - awareness and communications programs
    - natural resources, built heritage and cultural asset inventory and evaluation
    - social capital inventory and evaluation
    - project evaluation and adjustment
    - new project roll-out and building on success

Key Learnings

Agreed key learnings from the challenge session and the practitioner's round table can be summed up as follows.

- One size won't fit all-all: situations need tailored solutions
- Obtain tool kits for the job in hand (eg effective engagement or adaptive management or modelling change)
- History and geography tell us that not all towns will survive

Where to Next?

Two remote regional shires that share common 'single industry sector' characteristics and problems have indicated a willingness to further this initiative. They are Etheridge in Far North Queensland and Wiluna in Western Australia. Specifically, they are going to look at how to utilise the product of the Practitioners Round Table and the input from the 'challenge'. The success of this 'action adoption' will be reported at SEGRA 2015.

Generic Sustainability Project Action Flow Sheet
for
Rural and Remote Regional Service Hubs and Single Industry Towns

STRATEGIC APPRECIATION OF THE SITUATION

AGENDA INFLUENCING STRATEGY

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

PUBLIC/PRIVATE SECTOR PROJECT PROPOSERS & CHAMPIONS IDENTIFICATION STRATEGY

Project Awareness & Communications Program

PROJECT SCOPING & SCANNING

Preliminary Technical, Commercial, Environmental Feasibility & Risk Assessments

Natural Resources, Built Heritage & Cultural Asset Inventory & Evaluation

Social Capital Inventory & Evaluation

FUNDING SOURCE IDENTIFICATION & ACCESS STRATEGY

PROJECT PRIORITISATION AND DOCUMENTATION

PROJECT PROPONENT OR COUNCIL PROJECT EVALUATION, DECISION MAKING, ENDORSEMENT & FUNDING COMMITMENT PROCESSES

FORMAL PLANNING & ASSESSMENT AND MANAGEMENT PROCESSES

Detailed Feasibility Studies, Statutory Environmental, Planning and Risk Assessments & Standing Operational Procedures and Management Systems

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION USING ADAPTIVE LIFE CYCLE ASSESSMENT AND MANAGEMENT PROCESSES

New Project Roll-Out & Building on Success

Project Evaluation & Adjustment