

July 1, 2021

## **Regional Data Hub Consultation Paper**

Regional Development Australia Southern Inland (RDASI) would like to thank the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications and the Bureau of Communications, Arts and Regional Research for the opportunity to provide feedback about its data needs and how these needs may be met by the proposed Regional Data Hub.

RDASI is part of a national network of 52 Regional Development Australia Boards across Australia and one of 14 in NSW. RDASI is a Federally funded, non-government body encompassing seven Local Government Areas: Wingecarribee, Goulburn Mulwaree, Yass Valley, Snowy Monaro, Hilltops, Queanbeyan-Palerang and Upper Lachlan.

Our Charter states that we are to:

- Facilitate regional economic development outcomes, investment, local procurement and jobs
- Promote greater regional awareness of and engagement with Australian Government policies, grant programs and research
- Improve Commonwealth regional policymaking by providing intelligence and evidence-based advice to the Australian Government on regional development issues
- Co-ordinate the development of a strategic regional plan, or work with suitable existing regional plans that will align with the Commonwealth's regional priorities

How we deliver against these objectives is by identifying opportunities for business development and by linking businesses and community organisations with information relating to government grants, programs and infrastructure investments and job creation.

Data plays an essential role in our ability to meet the requirements of our Charter. RDASI, therefore, supports any initiative that aims to provide government and community decision-makers with better economic, social and demographic data on regional Australia and more specifically regional NSW.

### **How do we use data?**

In determining its own planning, program and policy development, RDASI currently draws on collaborative discussions with other government agencies and subscriptions to various government and industry newsletters. RDASI also conducts desk research on economic modelling data provided by the government sector, such as *abs.gov.au*, and the private sector, such as *economy.id.com.au*.

Geographically, the priority data sets would be for the seven Local Government Areas that make up the RDA Southern Inland region, as mentioned above. From an industry perspective, RDASI supports all small businesses, as well as more established organisations in the agricultural, manufacturing, and telecommunications sectors.

### **What data do we need?**

In order to support business and community organisations in relation to the development of their operations and assisting them with applications for financial and other support, RDASI draws on economic, social, industry and demographic data. Typically, this data is drawn from reports, some of

which are publicly available and freely accessible and some of which are subscription-based, where the subscriber, such as the Local Council, has provided RDASI with access.

### **Data sharing opportunities**

In relation to regional data that RDASI holds, in recent years, RDASI has engaged external consultants with funding support from the NSW Government to undertake regional surveys, such as the Southern Inland Skills Audit (2018) and the Southern Inland Jobs and Growth Insight Report, both in 2018. In house, RDASI maintains a simple set of spreadsheets to segment and structure its important external region-specific stakeholders and contacts.

RDASI is a collaborative organisation and willing to share data that will facilitate regional economic development. There are a number of issues, though, that RDASI believes should be considered in designing the Data Hub:

- There is government commitment to ongoing management, security and maintenance of the site to ensure information is authentic, relevant and accessible to users.
- Access to information is free to relevant not-for-profit organisations.
- There is a user registration system that ensures data cannot be mined by private/for profit organisations for commercial gain.

In addition, RDASI believes that some of the barriers to sharing data relate to the availability of budget to create data and the expectations that some data owners may have that their data represents an asset that they have invested in and, therefore, that other stakeholders should pay to access. This is a complex issue, however we recommend this is a relevant consideration for when the system is designed.

The time-lag on data collection or collation can also be a considerable frustration when requiring the most up-to-date statistics and demographics to make sizeable investment decisions. We would, therefore, urge that the Hub is actively managed to ensure that data is uploaded in a timely manner.

### **How do we want to access data?**

A consolidated approach to investing in data-creation and an 'open platform' approach to data-sharing would overcome some of the hurdles mentioned above, enabling more regional support agencies, businesses and community organisations to develop their own skills and experience in identifying and utilising the relevant data for their unique purposes.

RDASI notes that the timetable for launch of the Hub is end 2021. This is fast-approaching and we consider it important that a pilot project be implemented to 'road test' the software beforehand. RDASI is keen to see the project succeed and would be willing to trial its use as part of a pilot program if this is useful.

Yours sincerely,



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