

# **Speaking up for Regional Australia**

## ***SEGRA 2007***

National Conference Communiqué  
Sustainable Economic Growth for Regional Australia

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## Executive Summary

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The annual, national ***Sustainable Economic Growth for Regional Australia (SEGRA)*** conference is now recognised as Australia's most credible, influential and independent voice on issues affecting regional Australia.

It is long recognised that social, environmental and economic well being of Australia's regional communities is critical to social, environmental and economic well being of Australia. Mining, agriculture and tourism; key economic activities are all largely regionally based and significant contributors to our GDP.

This document highlights eight themes emerging from the **SEGRA** 2007 Conference and the key issues discussed. It provides a number of policy action proposals and as such is of critical interest to all Australians.

Issues of high priority for action:

- The reform of governance arrangements to ensure appropriate acknowledgment, institutional arrangements and funding for regions in Australia. This could be achieved by a national statutory framework for regional coordination
- Need for improved cross jurisdictional relationships to ensure appropriate coordinated, transparent policy, regulatory and governance decisions regarding investment in infrastructure across Australia
- The need for capacity building across governments, business and industry and regional communities to adapt to climate and relate environmental changes.
- Urgent action to provide fast reliable broadband to regional Australia.

To build on Australia's prosperity it is essential that policy and action in regional Australia is recognised by government as fundamental issue for all Australians.



Kate Charters  
Director

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## The **SEGRA** Mission

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The **Sustainable Economic Growth for Regional Australia, SEGRA**, Conference was established in 1997 in response to growing concern about the absence of a single forum in which practitioners, business, government and researchers with a deep commitment to regional Australia could discuss issues and advance options and solutions. **SEGRA** is now an annual event drawing over 300 delegates from across Australia with a reputation as Australia's most credible and influential voice on issues affecting regional Australia.

**SEGRA** is committed to providing challenging, thought provoking keynote addresses by Australia's leading social, political economic and environmental thinkers, exemplars of some of Australia's outstanding regional development success stories and providing a mechanism from drawing together and advancing issues.

A hallmark of **SEGRA** is the commitment and passion of individuals to regional Australia. The **SEGRA** Secretariat is committed to profiling a different regional location each year to capture local flavour and enable greater participation from specific regions. In 2007 **SEGRA** was hosted in Wollongong, Illawarra Region NSW.

**SEGRA** 2007 was the eleventh annual conference. The event extended over three days with more than 90 speakers. A record number of delegates attended encompassing all levels of government, business, academia, regional bodies and community organisations from all states and territories. For more information about **SEGRA** see Appendix 1.

## **SEGRA 2008 will be conducted in Albury City NSW 18-20 August**



*Photo courtesy of Destination Albury Wodonga*

## Speaking up for Regional Australia

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**SEGRA** is the only regional conference that produces a regular Conference Communiqué. The **SEGRA** Communiqué includes key highlights from each conference and comments from delegates. The Communiqué provides a means whereby matters raised at the conference may be communicated to decision makers in government, business, and communities of space and interest across the nation.

Using the material distilled from the two days of the **SEGRA** Conference and workshop highlights, the Communiqué, together with other dissemination activities arising from the conference, helps to:

- focus the issues and challenges that are being faced in regional Australia;
- communicate what governments, industry sectors, business and regional development practitioners are thinking and saying;
- highlight the solutions that have been found and the resolutions that are being sought; and initiate processes that seek to influence the sustainable regional economic growth agenda in Australia.

## The 2007 **SEGRA** Conference Theme: Changing Regions: the road to success

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- Recognising the competing and different values of stability and change;
- Anticipating and preparing for change; and
- Building robust change strategies that are adaptable, flexible and responsive

*Appendix 2* summarises the specific session themes for **SEGRA** 2007 and keynote speaker and delegate profiles. Please visit [www.segra.com.au/segra](http://www.segra.com.au/segra) to view the full conference program.

## Core Themes Identified and Discussed at the **SEGRA** 2007 Conference

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- ◆ Federal State Relations
- ◆ The Sustainability of Local Government
- ◆ Managing Growth Areas
- ◆ Infrastructures
- ◆ Climate Change
- ◆ Economic and Social Change
- ◆ Indigenous Business
- ◆ Scenario Planning
- ◆ Regional Economic Development Practice

## 1. Federal State Relations

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Given that federalism and regionalism are intrinsically linked and the growing consensus that economic, environmental and social change require a strengthening of regional governance capacity this issue was of major consideration for delegates again this year.

### Key Points Included:

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- Practitioners engaged in regional development are frequently frustrated by the lack of links between spatial relationships and institutional arrangements leading to overlapping and duplication of programs, legislative bases and decision making. There is a general impatience with what is perceived as 'buck-passing' between jurisdictions, The expectation amongst delegates is that the Federal and state governments can and will cooperate to deliver integrated services and projects to regions. To this end there was a renewed interest in changed regional organisational structures and a statutory basis for regionalisation.
- The tendency for centralism in federal government systems was also discussed in terms of its political and administrative inevitability. It was also raised that regions seemed to be particularly vulnerable to a form of 'selective centralism', with the levels of Government taking a strong role on some things, but not in a consistent or predictable way. There was a desire for the Federal Government to articulate the bigger picture or direction more coherently in this regard.
- Delegates were very interested in the proposition that major change in Federal-state relations to the benefit regions, is still possible and that innovation in voluntary arrangements and service provision and management, need not wait on constitutional change.
- There seemed to be some consensus that environmental sustainability, community vitality and strong national social and economic fabric was increasingly reliant on policy formed and delivered at spatial scales that recognized regional identification. ( refer Brown AJ et al , Australian Research Council Discovery Project 2006-2008)

## Future Policy Actions

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- A proposal to have designated regional governance with the auditing and reporting of the performances of agencies, both state and Federal, on a region-by-region basis.
- A national statutory framework for regional coordination
- Greater on-the-ground implantation of regional economic development policies. This includes increased inter regional cooperation because of the need for regional entities to manage across boundaries
- Structural devolution of resources – it was suggested that 12% would be a reasonable target
- Mechanisms to deliver planning and community engagement, coordination and capacity building within regions.
- Develop tools to better measure and understand regional spatial relationships.
- Adopt broader frameworks for making decisions about changing landscapes and resolving land use issues. Again, this would seek to mainstream the consideration of a broad spectrum of biophysical and socio-economic considerations into strategic level environmental assessment for development projects. It would also entail enhancing the range of environmental factors to be considered through land use planning instruments.

**“Many thanks for another great *SEGRA* conference”**

## 2. The sustainability of Local Government

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Local government plays a very specific place in regional Australia with its links to understanding Australia regional attitudes, expectations, culture, engagement with government, social capital and regional institutional relationships. Local governments often have a shaping role which incorporates leadership, community engagement, networking and accountability in the processes by which organisations, governments and of course, regions, make decisions.

Given this another major issue, and related to the previous theme, was concern about the state of local government. The place of local government as the institutional voice of regional Australia is one of the critical governance debates at **SEGRA**.

Key points included:

- Concern that local governments are struggling to deal with broadening and deepening expectations, while in many cases having a limited revenue base;
- The use of administrative solutions for example, managing by postponing infrastructure spending merely defers the problem for the future;
- Subnational regionalism has been an enduring dilemma for the evolution of Australian Public Institutions There was considerable skepticism that amalgamations will solve financial problems and there is much stronger support for more devolution of authority and regulation to encourage greater use of alternative strategies such as resource and cost-sharing arrangements.



*Australia's Regions*

*Photo courtesy of [www.2abc.net.au](http://www.2abc.net.au)*

## Future policy actions

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- Recognising the importance of developing regions as distinct geographic entities (for example on catchment based spatial units) not just voluntary aggregations of Local Government Authorities (LGA's) or Regional Organisations of Councils (ROC's). This approach to regional delineation has been applied successfully in New Zealand.
- Establishing statutory supported mechanisms for collaborative regional priority setting including a broad spectrum of stakeholders.
- Monitoring the roles and responsibilities of governments in:
  - commissioning research and collating knowledge;
  - providing regional leadership;
  - alerting stakeholders to trends, problems and realities;
  - arbitrating across rent seeking vested interests; and
  - setting frameworks for social and business life.
- Re-evaluate regional funding arrangements. This would include giving consideration to the resource allocation arrangements, especially for local government in terms of capacity and resources.
- Provide professional development, training and instruments that provide clear incentives for highest level governance performance.

### 3. Managing Growth Areas

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In line with government and public concerns of the time, early **SEGRA** conferences focussed on strategies around responding to regional areas losing population and investment, and once again in 2007 a number of papers focused on initiatives and ideas for sustaining such communities.

In the last 2-3 years, however, there has been an additional stream of discussion on managing the growth areas of the coast and hinterland.

Key points included:

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- Coastal growth seems to be continuing apace and has not yet peaked, given the impending acceleration in baby boomer retirements. It was however noted, that there was population 'churn', with some people moving to and then later leaving these areas;
- The need to consider that current residents value the 'seaside' atmosphere, including the current built landscape in some coastal towns, and development can seriously affect that amenity.
- Other trends like the ageing of Australia's population are having a direct impact on metropolitan, rural and remote regions.
- Another age related issue is mobilising productive ageing as enterprising social capital. Many of those over 55 years have considerable wealth, are generally in good health and represent an untapped source of human capital. Experience has shown that many may wish to return to the workforce in a range of different ways and present an opportunity for new enterprise activities built on existing and new skills.
- Those who are retiring or relocating to coastal regions are contributing to upward pressures on property prices

## Future Policy Actions

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- State governments give consideration to the establishment or enhancement of growth coordination/management agencies.
- A more proactive approach to socio-economic analysis. For example, greater use of improved planning instruments and approaches that give mainstream consideration of demographic trends when evaluating settlement patterns and dwelling densities.
- Provision of decentralised and additional funding to regions to allow more responsive actions to meet emerging demands. This includes strategies to allow regional transitions to occur, especially for those areas facing decline.
- Developing a more strategic approach to support stronger regional centres. This includes developing decentralised workplaces for e-commuting as well as reviving declining rural towns with retrofitting of decentralised water and energy services.
- Review carrying capacity of specific biospheres. This may entail consideration of population caps for some fast growing regions (eg Noosa Shire in Queensland). Such mechanism may be needed to maintain the quality on life and the urban and peri-urban amenity that attracted people to an area.
- Providing assistance incentives to encourage the diversification of regional economies so that there is less reliance on population growth and the construction industry as primary main economic drivers. Diversification is essential for sustaining regional and local economies.

**“I would like to thank you very much for organising a wonderful conference. I gained so much out of it and having been to other *SEGRA* conference this was by far the best as it was relevant to what is happening around us. It also gave me the chance to know that I am not alone in my quest to get things do for regional Australia.”**

## 4. Infrastructure

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As usual, infrastructure was a significant concern, both for keeping pace with the growth areas and servicing rural and remote areas. There was an expectation that the strong economy provided an opportunity to fund some major port, road and rail transport, as well as water, energy and fast accessible broadband networks

The impact of rising energy costs and supplies on population movement and infrastructure received some attention. For example rural-urban commuting may be less viable and limit the attraction of some near-urban regions for the development of satellite towns. This raises the question: Will people still commute 200 kilometres a day if the price of oil doubles in the next decade? Tourism, both domestic and international may also suffer with future increases in the cost of energy.

Nevertheless, some positive aspects of rising energy costs and supplies may be as follows:

Higher fuel prices might lead to a more 'buy local' response by consumers and reinvigorate local business that is actually owned by locals. Localised food production could be spurred on. After all, those complex supply chains and logistics that the major food retailers rely upon may become unsustainable in the future.

### Future Policy Actions

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- Need for improved cross jurisdictional relationships to ensure appropriate coordinated, transparent policy, regulatory and governance decisions regarding investment in infrastructure across Australia
- Improved mechanisms for assessing risk, costs and benefits of infrastructure investment at a national level
- Independent mechanism for effective strategic planning, audit and review processes with a national oversight.
- An expansion of the use of market based mechanisms to address infrastructure including public and private sector partnerships.

## 5. Climate change

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Environmental concerns are always an important focus of **SEGRA**. They have received renewed emphasis given the current water crisis and the implications of climatic variability and climate change on regional economies and lifestyles. The implications of global warming means that climate change and the suite of associated environmental changes will have increasing prominence in relation to economic growth and the costs of adaptation.

For some years now climate change has been a major theme at **SEGRA**. This year the discussion has moved from considering the possibility of climate change to a strong focus on the range of tools and methods for adapting to and managing the impacts. It was noted that this is an issue that cuts across all areas of regional development.

There were key presentations from the Murray Darling Basin Commission on the issues they are managing and the responses they are initiating.

### Key discussion areas:

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- An appreciation of the science and terminology of climate change and the relationship between science and sensationalism. The need to maintain issue awareness and avoid cynicisms and issue fatigue.
- Approaches to adaptation including risk/vulnerability identification and reduction;
- Green house gas mitigations and carbon emissions trading.
- The rate of government planning approvals made without any assessment of the implications of climate change at the regional and local scales is alarming. It was felt that overall limited consideration is given in development approval processes to climate induced risks or the sustainability issues relating to climate variability and extreme weather events. This includes risk from fire in extremely dry seasons or risk from flood. Much new infrastructure e.g. ports is not giving adequate consideration to proactive planning for climate change.
- Currently there is an over-reliance on institutional frameworks for action to adapt to climatic induced changes. This is not good enough as institutions tend to be reactionary rather than proactive.
- Climate science, risk and vulnerability assessment, and adaptation processes and procedures are not exact. Thus, there is a need 'court proof' guidelines embedded in planning to avoid a 'field day' for the legal professions.

- There is an inherent danger of the public debate progressing faster than the governance and distorting the delivery of planning based responses to perceived risks. Water resources are now a priority national issue and one that has long confronted regional Australia. Water issues raised include the following:
  - Competition between urban vs regional areas and residential vs industry use are going to become more intense.
  - Regional areas overly dependent on irrigation are going to become more vulnerable;
- Responses to the water crisis by way of desalination, water recycling, and pricing need to be considered in regional contexts.

### Future policy action:

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- Wide access to tools and techniques for integrated assessment and management This will include initiating demonstrations and undertaking case studies at national, state/territory, regional, local community and site specific scale.
- Mitigation and adaptation should work concurrently and co-operatively not against each other. Currently there is an institutional tendency to separate them. This is an issue that needs to be taken up at the local level by both public and private sector interests;
- Strengthening the essential links between perspectives and policy and tools and techniques for reducing risks and impacts;
- Capacity building across governments, business and industry and regional communities to adapt to climate and relate environmental changes. Experiment with different ways to respond to climate risk and vulnerability and let communities choose the right mode of adaptation. There is no 'golden bullet' solution in seeking adaptive responses. Geography, governance and community will be key factors dictating responses.
- Some impacts should be dealt with on a reactionary basis and some proactively. There is a need for firm responses to readily identified vulnerabilities on a case by case basis whilst at the same time moving to anticipate emerging areas of issue.
- In order to support changes to the planning regimes there is an immediate need to improve regional and local scale climate scenarios and projections.



*Photo courtesy of allposters.com*

- Currently there is considerable inconsistency in planning schemes across Local Government jurisdictions. This is a combination of the location of the LGA's and the planning regimes of the states. Consistency across LGA needs backing by the State and the Northern Territory governments.
- Partnerships are needed between climate scientists and the communities of space and interest. Mainstreaming adaptation approaches and solutions needs to reflect regional and local environmental conditions by 'one size fits all' planning is not the way forward
- Partnerships between agencies are needed to avoid duplication and to strengthen action. As an integral part of the partnership process there is a need to develop open communication from national-state-regional-local institutions and agencies.
- The need to broker regional and economic interests with environmental concerns continues to be a major issue in relation to resource development projects. New intergovernmental and community consultative mechanisms are needed to facilitate agreement rather than conflict.

## 6. Economic and Social Change

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This year, delegates discussed some of the anticipated social and economic trends that could lead to major change.

These included:

- Continuing globalization and need for regions to be linked to global markets.
- The role and impacts of an emerging middle class in India and China
- A parallel trend to localization, whereby people look for the connections to the familiar;
- The ageing population, which brings services demands but also people will have much longer working lives.
- Continuing overseas demand for minerals and agricultural products. While currently this may be good for many remote and rural regions, where such industries dominate, one question to be addressed is: How sustainable are the current levels of resource export and what will happen in the mineral regions should there be reduced demand?
- Continuing demand by Australians for overseas manufactured goods. Arguably, this is adversely affecting the nation's balance of payments and current account deficit. The ongoing question is: What can be done from a regional economic management perspective to reduce or reverse this trend?
- Greater overseas ownership of enterprise. Coupled with this is the ongoing issue of more offshore decision making thus undermining local and regional autonomy.
- Increasing dominance of key industry sectors by a few large firms. This is an readily observable trend that can exercise considerable impact on regions (eg food chains).
- Over-reliance on land and asset price booms and consumer demand as the prime driver of economic development for some regions (eg sea change areas) without underpinning this by other industry development.
- Also, the assets price boom has had adverse impacts on regional economic development by:
  - increasing capital costs for farming;
  - converting productive land to non-productive uses (eg housing);
  - adversely affecting housing affordability in some regions where low paid and casual employment is a feature (eg tourism);
  - increasing debt levels; and
  - reducing rates of return on investments.

## Future policy actions

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- Better selection of regional indicators for triple bottom line and other spatial and temporal assessment of the effects of biophysical and socio-economic change. This entails more effective measurement of trends in environmental change. Ensure more effective economic tools for environmental management. This would include a greater use of market based tools for improving environmental management.
- Enhance regional economic planning and assessment. Regions need improved economic planning and assessment arrangements in order to set clearer goals and to retain and attract investment that maximises returns. Devolution of decision making to the regions and reducing 'metro-centricity' is an important step in the direction of enhanced regional economic planning. This needs to be coupled with regional development mechanisms that have a degree of permanence as illustrated by Regional Development Commissions in Western Australia which have been established by a statute that emphasises an economic imperative.
- Refocus on the economic basics. For example, regional economic policy players need to remember that:  $\text{cost} + \text{investment} + \text{government inputs} + \text{exports} - \text{imports} = \text{gross domestic product [ie wealth]}$ . When refocusing it is important to consider two things. First, that economic growth is not just a function of population and consumer demand. Second, that Australia in general, and regions in particular, have clearly identified products to sell (ie have to give emphasis to export based activities that are wealth generating rather than wealth consumption).

**"I enjoy *SEGRA* and am always able to bring something back to my region when I attend"**

## 7. Indigenous Business

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Indigenous enterprise issues, once an area of limited interest, has gained increasing prominence at **SEGRA** and needs to be seen in the context of a major emerging driver of regional economic development in rural and remote

Delegates heard about some initiatives to develop indigenous business and employment but the issue of institutional complexity, with multiple levels of governments and agencies, as an impediment was also discussed. There was also a paper on performance measurement of the economic status of remote indigenous communities.

### Key Issues

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Absence of appropriate methods and benchmarks to assess the progress and success of government interventions and to better target government spending and optimise program implementation (Western Australian government is currently developing a framework of indicators for measuring and reporting on Indigenous disadvantage (SCRGSP 2006))

### Future Policy Actions

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- Promote greater indigenous enterprise development. This has been shown to be a most effective mechanism in rural and remote regions and can be linked to skills enhancement programs that help to reduce reliance on fly-in-fly-out workforces. By developing and enhancing the indigenous labour force through new enterprises it will be possible to make communities more self sustaining.
- To not just create employment opportunities with a community but to ensure the disadvantaged individuals are encouraged to apply for positions, become hired, remain in paid work and achieve high level personal satisfaction.
- To recognised that for some indigenous Australians rural and remote locations can exacerbate issues of access and distance.
- Forster education – business partnerships for example school students sign onto contracts with business who can give them the offer of a job or vocational placement
- To integrate whole families in schooling

- To ensure employment longevity of people who have re integrated through personal development programs erg in self confidence and social participation
- Need for multidisciplinary approaches the include creating employment and training opportunities and personal development programs.
- Develop strategies and protocols that increase business capacity to see re integration of socially disadvantaged groups as a longer term staged activity.

## 8. Regional Economic Development Practice

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### Key issues for discussion:

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Throughout the program a large range of models and strategies were presented including: Rational Comprehensive Economic Policy Development Model; Scenario Planning Model; Governance Model; Evidence Based Policy; Skill Ecosystem Approach; Community Consultation; Sprawl Pattern Analysis; Project Planning; Value-Adding; Implementation.

A range of 'tools' and approaches were also presented including: Community Engagement; Risk Assessment; SWOT analysis; Cost Benefit Analysis; Whole of Government; Survey Methodologies; Data Analysis and Forecasting; Performance Measurement.

A focus of **SEGRA** this year was how scenario planning for regional Australia tomorrow impacts on strategic planning for economic success today.

There was also discussion around organizational structures, strategic plans and operational activities through which regional economic development organisations delivered outcomes to regions.

### Future Policy Actions:

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- To implement a formal Scenario Planning Project involving a number of regions in Australia to learn collectively and pool resource in order to foster an in –depth understanding of regional Australia, in oared to explore, map and plan specific adaptive and generative responses to key influences of change.
- To analyses leading regional economic development organisations in order to understand and establish appropriate benchmarks for regional economic development agency performance
- To develop improved methodologies to establish base level criteria for determining economic potential, and measure well being and associated Key Performance Indicators. This was seen as a critical gap in attracting funds to progress a project particularly through public private partnerships.
- As a follow on to the preceding action the need to develop community learning promotion and leadership packages was also identified.
- To provide increased opportunities for Regional Economic Development Practitioners to access professional development and training opportunities.

**“Scenario Planning for Regional Australia tomorrow impacts on strategic planning for economic success today”**

## **SEGRA 2008 – Albury NSW 18-20 August**

### **Creative Solutions: expect them to be different**

Situated at the regional cross roads of south east Australia Albury provides a geographically accessible position for delegates to **SEGRA 2008**, with direct flights from Sydney, Melbourne, and Canberra and a regular Virgin Blue route including Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth coming on line in February.

Located on the Murray River and surrounded by agriculture Albury is also a major transport hub and the centre of a regional community servicing a population of over 100 000 people. In selecting Albury as the host region, the **SEGRA** Committee was impressed by the regions willingness and ability to embrace difference, to ask the hard questions that lead to inspired solutions, to take risks and to engage cooperatively and entrepreneurially with business.

The capacity to see opportunity and find ways to deliver that opportunity will be one of the key themes of **SEGRA 2008**.

If you or your organisation would like to offer further ideas for **SEGRA 2008** or showcase your creative solutions please contact Kate Charters at the **SEGRA** Secretariat by:

phone on 07 3210 0021; or  
email: [info@segra.com.au](mailto:info@segra.com.au)



*Photo courtesy of Destination Albury Wodonga*

## **SEGRA 2007 Conference Proceedings CD-Rom**

*SEGRA 2007 Conference Proceedings CD-Rom is available for purchase. Please*

*contact Jessica Shelton at (07) 3210 0021 for an order form or visit*

*[www.segra.com.au/segra](http://www.segra.com.au/segra)*

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**“It was a very successful outcome. The *SEGRA* mix of people and ideas made a deep impression. Congratulations on the event.”**

**“It was a great conference and I got so much out of it this year!!”**

**“I was really impressed with all aspects of the conference and the presenters”**

# Appendices

## About **SEGRA**

Since **SEGRA** started in 1997 some 2,300 delegates have attended **SEGRA** conferences and workshops over the past decade. Participants have heard from 680 speakers drawn from federal, state and local government, academia, industry, business and most importantly, the regions themselves.

**SEGRA** was initiated at a time of waning political interest in regional economic development. Indeed, at that time, with a growing focus on globalisation many in the public and private sectors regarded regions and their socio-economic development as largely irrelevant. This lack of regard for regions and their development has been proven wrong. Speakers and participants at **SEGRA** conferences have demonstrated that regional development can make a difference both economically and socially and in doing so helps to maintain the quality of the physical, biological and built environment.

Thinking and operating regionally has been one of the underlying themes pursued at each **SEGRA** conference. Over the decade, **SEGRA** has been held at Geelong, Beaudesert, Sunshine Coast, Ballarat, Thuringowa, Queanbeyan, Gold Coast, Alice Springs, Rockhampton Capricorn Coast, Launceston and Wollongong in 2007. From each of these conferences there has been an unambiguous message that Australia's regional, rural and remote regions are not only different, but they respond to socio-economic drivers and pressures in many diverse ways. These differences and diverse responses contribute to economic strength and resilience. Difference and diversity also characterises the distribution of vibrant communities, the maintenance of enjoyable lifestyles and the pursuit of sustainable societal outcomes in regional Australia. **SEGRA** conferences provide an unmatched opportunity for practitioners from the public and private sectors to share experiences in addressing the challenges that they have in common from this situation.

### The **SEGRA** Difference

**SEGRA** seeks to be an important advocate for regional Australia and is different from other regional forums in several respects.

## **SEGRA Themes**

Each **SEGRA** conference has a clear theme to provide focus and a systematic approach to regional issues. The conference theme is developed from ongoing monitoring of regional issues and trends and is decided upon in close collaboration with the 'host region'.

Previous themes have been:

- Changing regions: the road to success
- Adaptable Regions: open minds open opportunities,
- Sustainable Regional Development: Getting Down to Business
- Regions Driving Decision Making: Raising Regional Profiles
- Regions Taking Control: Maximising Regional Potential
- Smart Paths to Regional Growth: Servicing Regions for Economic Growth
- Big Ideas for Regional Australia: Breaking New Territory
- Building Regional Resilience: Actions for a Sustainable Future
- Developing Regional Industry Policy
- Vision and Imagination: Driving Regional Development
- The State of the Regions and the Need of Key Industry Sectors: Attracting Business to Your Region

First, though welcoming sponsorship from governments and business, **SEGRA** has established an independent agenda for promoting regional economic development. This is done in ways that are:

- conducive to innovative research and objective analysis of the latest information;
- cognitive of changing trends; and
- responsive to delegate input.

This rigorous and open-minded approach makes **SEGRA** an unmatched independent national forum for discussing sustainable economic growth issues of global, national and local importance. Thus, **SEGRA** has been able to focus on issues that really matter to regional Australia.

Second, **SEGRA** actively seeks out speakers of standing, reputation and expertise as well as providing a forum for offered papers from regional practitioners. This ensures that **SEGRA** has the right combination of topics, regional views, knowledge and currency. Moreover, through its evaluation processes **SEGRA** strives to make improvements so that learning, networking and interaction among delegates is maximised.

Third, **SEGRA** has a program of practical workshops to promote further discussion on emerging issues, bring academics and practitioners together, and promote real skill development.

Lastly, **SEGRA** is the only regional conference that produces a regular Conference Communiqué. The **SEGRA** Communiqué includes key highlights from each conference and comments from delegates. The **SEGRA** Communiqué provides a means whereby matters raised at the conference may be communicated to decision makers in government, business, and communities of space and interest across the nation.

The **SEGRA** Communiqué, is forwarded to all those who advise, make and implement decisions on regional issues and includes the following:

- Local, State and Federal elected leaders and representatives.
- Senior staff in Federal, State, Territory and Local government agencies that impinge on regional issues.
- Non-government bodies involved in regional development issues.
- Peak industry associations.
- Regional interest groups across both business, unions, and non-government sectors.
- Professional associations involved in working and delivering services to regions.
- Lobbyists and other advocates of industry policy, regional development and related areas.
- Academics, research centres and institutions with sustainable regional development as one of their priority areas.

## **SEGRA 2007 Conference Program**

Theme: Changing Regions: the road to success

Plenary sessions:

- Connecting Regions to the National Agenda
- Delivering Sustainable Economic Development
- Driving Regional Australia's Future: key issues for the next decade
- Adapting to Vulnerability

Concurrent Sessions:

- Doing Business in the Regions
- Skills and Capacity Building – regional solutions
- Physical and Social Infrastructure – getting it right
- Dynamic Regional Communities Responding to Change
- Applied Regional Economic Development Strategies
- Regional Futures
- Data Analysis and Modelling – assisting regions
- Toolbox – the means to an end

Workshops:

- Climate Change Futures – risks, vulnerabilities and adaptation
  - Emissions Trading Simulation Workshop
  - Tools and Techniques for Analysis and Assessment
  - Strategic Response and Opportunities: learning from experience
- Scenario Planning
- Unlocking Bright Ideas for your Region using Focus Groups
- Lobbying for Regional Australia: strategies and steps
- Understanding Regional Economic Development

**SEGRA 2007** key note speakers by organisation:

- 11 Private Sector firms (34.3 % of speakers)
- 8 Research Institutions (25 % of speakers)
- 3 State government departments (9.4% of speakers)
- 3 Commonwealth agencies (9.4 % of speakers)
- 3 Non-Government Organisations (9.4% of speakers)
- 2 Regional Development Organisations (6.25% of speakers)
- 2 Local government authorities (6.25 % of speakers)

**SEGRA 2007** keynote speakers by state:

- 39% Queensland
- 36% New South Wales
- 7% ACT
- 5% Western Australia
- 4% Victoria
- 4% Northern Territory
- 2% South Australia
- 2% overseas
- 1% Tasmania

**SEGRA 2007** Conference Delegates

Close to 300 **SEGRA** delegates reflected a wide cross-section of regional Australia representing:

- 22% the private sector
- 21% local Government authorities
- 16.5% regional economic development bodies
- 16.5% regional economic development bodies
- 15% state Government departments
- 13% research institutions
- 10.5% Commonwealth agencies
- 1.2% non-government peak bodies
- 0.8% overseas

## About the Authors

**Geoff Cockfield** is the Deputy Dean, Faculty of Business, at the University of Southern Queensland. Previous to academic life, Dr Cockfield worked as a farmer and a rural journalist. His Masters Degree research was on rural adjustment and his PhD thesis was an examination of farm forestry policy. Dr Cockfield teaches Political Ideas, Environmental Policy, Government, Business and Society and Introductory Economics. His research interests include rural policy and sustainable production landscapes policy. He has undertaken funded research work on farm forestry, regional economic development frameworks and sustainable wool production. Geoff is a founding member of **SEGRA**.

**Peter Waterman RDF**, is the coordinator Climate Change, Coasts and Catchments (C4@USC) at the University of the Sunshine Coast (USC) in the fields of environment and climate change and the engagement of universities with their regions. Peter was the foundation Director of the Institute for Regional Development at the University of Western Australia. In his consultant capacity, Peter is also the Managing Director Environmental Management Services Pty Ltd. As a consultant, officer of government and university researcher he has had over 35 years professional experience in environmental management, strategic planning, governmental relations, regional policy development and implementation. Work has been undertaken for public and private sector clients on projects in metropolitan, rural and remote regions of Australia as well as in the USA, Europe and Pacific Island countries. Collectively, this has provided Peter with grass roots perspectives on roles of governments and the processes of regional policy development and governance. Peter has been actively associated with **SEGRA** since 2001.

**Kate Charters** has a long standing interest in public policy and in particular the institutional and stakeholder processes of agenda setting and change management. Having worked for nearly 20 years at senior levels of government, for the past 8 years Kate has been a Director of Management Solutions (Qld), and among other things provides the Secretariat to **SEGRA**. With particular experience in intergovernmental relations, policy community development and strategic planning skills, Kate is strongly committed to **SEGRA** providing an opportunity to discuss, debate and advance issues affecting regional Australia at a strategic and practitioner level.