



An Australian Government Initiative



Regional  
Development  
*Australia*



**ORANA**

# ANNUAL REPORT

# 2022–23

August 2023

Local people developing local solutions [rda.gov.au](https://rda.gov.au)

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Regional Development Australia acknowledges First Nations peoples as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of Australia. We respect and celebrate the inherent strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and their commitment to the land, waters and their communities. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present.



# CHAIRMAN'S REPORT



**RDA Orana had another busy year in 2022–23, working closely with key stakeholders to identify challenges and opportunities across the region. We are lucky to live and work in an area with such a great outlook for the future, so many natural assets, and a high quality of life.**

Attracting and retaining a skilled workforce is vital to realising potential opportunities. The future growth of regional Australia is reliant upon regional migration to ensure there is enough skilled labour to complete the staggering number of future projects in planning. The Orana is the only regional area with a Designated Area Migration Agreement (DAMA) with Home Affairs. Not only does this help tackle our current skills shortage, but it is an alternative pathway to permanent residency for migrants, ensuring that our region continues to prosper well into the future. RDA Orana is committed to working with businesses to help settle their migrant workers to remain in the area long-term.

Throughout the year, RDA Orana promoted various government and non-government funding opportunities and assisted local organisations to apply. We engaged with businesses early to ensure they were grant ready when new funding opportunities were released.

The team at RDA Orana developed and launched several publications over the year, including:

- The third edition of Invest Orana magazine, a showcase of projects that are planned and in progress across the region.
- The Housing Provision in the Orana and Central Darling report provided a comprehensive analysis of issues around housing in the region.
- The Orana Strategic Regional Plan 2023–26, a strategic document to improve the region's growth and future sustainability.

RDA Orana hosted delegates from across the country and all levels of government, business and industry at several key events, including:

Resources Energy and Industry Innovation Forum (REIIF), now in its second year

- Orana Outlook Dinner
- Inland Growth Summit

Lastly, I would like to thank our outgoing CEO Megan Dixon for her service to our region since commencing the role in 2017. Megan has led the organisation through a remarkable period of change; she has transformed challenges into opportunities and established a strong regional presence for the organisation. On behalf of the Board, we thank her for advocating for the Orana region and wish her all the very best in her future endeavours.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Brad Cam'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Brad Cam  
RDA Orana Chair



# WHO WE ARE

## BOARD AND STAFF

**RDA Orana is an incorporated, not-for-profit association and registered charity, led by a regional board of industry and government representatives.**

We support economic development across the Orana region by building partnerships and working with all governments and agencies to respond to local priorities and needs.

Our region is the largest and most diverse region in the State, with 123,000 people living in an area covering 25% of NSW.

Extending from Mudgee in the east to Bourke in the west, our region includes the local government areas of:

- Bogan
- Bourke
- Brewarrina
- Cobar
- Coonamble
- Dubbo Region
- Gilgandra
- Mid-Western Region
- Narromine
- Walgett
- Warren
- Warrumbungle



### RDA Orana Board 2022–23



**Brad Cam**  
Chair



**Jeffery Caldbeck**  
Deputy Chairman



**Kerrienne Nichols**  
Board member



**Steve Hinks**  
Board member



**Ross Earl**  
Board member



**Megan Callinan**  
Board member

### RDA Orana Staff 2022–23



**Megan Dixon**  
CEO and Director of Regional Development



**Zannat Shrestha**  
Operations Manager



**Rowena Spink**  
Research Manager



**Kullanee Sasavat**  
Digital Marketing Specialist

# REGIONAL SNAPSHOT



**12**

local government  
areas



**\$10.8B**

GRP



**\$20B**

in projects



**\$22.8B**

output



**123,780**

people



**13,326**

businesses



**\$401.8M**

building  
approvals



**3.9%**

unemployment



**54.887**

jobs



**\$3.3B**

projects and  
investment



# RDA ORANA

## BUILDING THE REGION TOGETHER

### PURPOSE

To support the development of the Orana Region by facilitating industry collaboration, encouraging public and private investment and supporting cooperation between all stakeholders.

### VISION

A regional powerhouse recognised for production, value-adding, linkages and entrepreneurship.

### MISSION

Provision of regional intelligence to:

- Create connections and growth
- Grow industry and infrastructure investment
- Grow our workforce

### OUR APPROACH

#### Long game

Economic development, investment attraction and change doesn't happen overnight. We have the strength and persistence to absorb setbacks while applying consistent and purposeful actions towards achieving our long-term objectives.

#### Networked

We are ideally placed to facilitate strategic links between businesses and across supply chains to maximise our stakeholders' efficiencies, productivity and profitability. We listen and respond to stakeholder needs and use the aggregated information to advocate for positive change for our region.

#### Proactive

We use our regional intelligence to look forward, anticipating change and opportunities for our region. We collaborate, innovate, make decisions, and execute with speed and agility. Our constant pursuit of solutions makes a difference to the region we support.

#### Collaborative

We collaborate inside and outside the organisation to maximise our shared knowledge and bring greater value to one another and, most importantly, our region.

#### Entrepreneurial

Curiosity and the pursuit of insights fuel our productivity, and innovation drives our business. We boldly champion new, innovative, breakthrough ideas while attentively managing risks.

# CEO REPORT



**The 2022–23 year has been a solid year of consolidation for RDA Orana, building on past achievements and working towards future outcomes. We have continued supporting the region, working with businesses, industries and communities to deliver initiatives to create a more vibrant, prosperous and resilient region.**

Our focus for the reporting period was underpinned by three key priority areas outlined in the 2022–23 Business Plan:

- **Workforce** – businesses in the region have access to the workforce required to support growth.
- **Information** – businesses and governments have access to economic information, credible research and insights.
- **Leadership** – influence all levels of Government as a respected, apolitical and reliable advocate for the Orana region.

We investigated workforce issues in our region and delivered programs that support positive change. As part of our ongoing commitment to workforce goals, we conducted a study on the economic impact of migration and the relationship between migrants and businesses, economic growth and development in the region. The findings supported recommendations to the Australian Government

on migration reforms. We also ran several information sessions on the latest updates on the NSW Regional Skilled Migration Program for both business owners and migrants, as well as masterclasses on recruitment marketing.

As one of only a few RDA regions with a Designated Area Migration Agreement (DAMA) with Home Affairs, we further negotiated an agreement for the Orana Region that includes specific occupations and conditions that will assist our region in addressing our most acute labour shortages.

A highlight for the year was the RDA Orana Outlook Dinner, where keynote speakers provided insights into the future of business, investment, workforce and housing. At the event, we also launched the third edition of Invest Orana and the Housing Provision in the Orana and Central Darling report. The dinner was followed by the fifth annual Inland Growth Summit, a two-day conference investigating the economic impact and issues facing inland Australia. Participants at the Summit looked at the opportunities and challenges faced by communities in regional areas and had the first look at the Orana Strategic Regional Plan 2023–26.

The community living in the Orana region is resilient and ever-growing. The economic contribution and development of the region will continue to shape our state and nation. This year we focused on the opportunities and innovations around us and how they will impact the region's future. We released the Economic Performance Report, which saw growth in GRP, output, jobs and business - the job count alone increased by 5,000 since 2019.



The development of the Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone (REZ) will significantly impact our region in the coming years. We must value-add and build on what has already been invested in by Federal and State governments and industry. We want to ensure that regional NSW, especially the Orana region, doesn't miss out on emerging technology and new industries that bring job creation and economic growth. Our second annual Resources, Energy and Industry Innovation Forum (REIIF) created an opportunity for government, industry and business to discuss the challenges and opportunities of a low and zero emissions future, with more than 500 participants and nearly 65 speakers over four days attending the event.

We achieved a significant milestone with a successful grant of more than \$665,000 from the Regional NSW – Business Case and Strategy Development Fund to produce the Orana Hunter Connections and Beyond – Golden Highway Transport Study. The project is crucial to ensuring the Golden Highway remains a reliable and efficient transport link. The project is anticipated to provide broad benefits to the resources, energy, manufacturing, education and tourism industries, as well as the many companies in the Orana and Hunter regions that trade across NSW and globally.

University-industry collaborations also have a significant role in boosting workforce skills for the region. I'm so pleased that Charles Sturt University – Dubbo Campus has been a long-term partner with RDA Orana to achieve those goals. The announcement of the Commonwealth Register of Institutions and Course for Overseas Students (CRICOS) for

Nursing at CSU Dubbo Campus is a win for the region, allowing students to study and work and provide critical support for the health and aged care industry.

This will be my last report for the organisation as I move on to a new role in Local Government. Over my six and half years at RDA Orana with the Board, we've refined our strategy, transformed our information systems and improved our financial position significantly. We've also achieved outstanding outcomes for the region, including our leadership in the migration space and the introduction of the Orana DAMA.

I want to thank the staff and the Board for their commitment and efforts over 2022–23, and I look forward to seeing what the organisation will achieve in the future.



Megan Dixon

CEO and Director RDA Orana

# HIGHLIGHTS

## PRIORITIES OVERVIEW

RDA Orana identified the following key priorities during 2022–23:



### Workforce

#### Priority

Businesses in the region have access to the workforce required to support growth.

#### Results

- 311 migrant assessments
- 25 DAMA assessments resulting in 104 new positions
- Regional youth engagement: 2 engagements addressing 60 advisors on jobs of the future



### Information

#### Priority

Businesses and governments have access to economic information, credible research and insights.

#### Results

- 9,600 newsletter subscribers
- 109 emails sent to 338,777 recipients
- 550 new contacts
- 3 regional research projects announced: housing, migration and transport



### Leadership

#### Priority

Influence all levels of government as a respected, apolitical and reliable advocate for the Orana region.

#### Results

- Adoption and endorsement of the 2023–26 Orana Strategic Regional Plan
- 3 major events, 750 attendees, 120 speakers

# WORKFORCE

**Businesses in the region have access to the workforce required to support growth.**

**Migration assessments**

**DAMA assessments**

**Regional youth engagement**

## Key activities undertaken:

RDA Orana continues to support migration to the region with 311 491 visa applications approved. This was a decrease compared to the 2021–22 year due to a reallocation of numbers by the State Government.

We helped support migrant settlement in the region by publishing a new edition of Welcome to the Orana Region, a guide to living and working in the area. More than 243 were distributed in the 2022–23 reporting period.

In 2019, the Federal Government approved the Orana Region Designated Area Migration Agreement (DAMA). This 5-year agreement allows employers to sponsor skilled overseas workers in specified industries in the region experiencing critical skill and labour shortages. It includes 73 occupations, including childcare workers, hospitality supervisors and disability workers. In 2022–23, the Orana DAMA helped 25 businesses to fill 104 positions.

Supporting youth and school engagement, our CEO presented at two Department of Education Future Skills conferences addressing more than 60 careers advisors in Mudgee and Cobar on jobs required for the future and demand for skilled labour in the region.









# CASE STUDY 1

## Migrant support workers help the childcare sector

**The early childhood sector is facing major staff shortages with an estimated shortfall of 17,000 early childhood educators across the state, forcing some centres to turn away children and cap enrolments, according to the Australian Childcare Alliance NSW.**

### The challenge

Peppercorn Child Care Centre in Dubbo is a family-owned and operated early education centre which was experiencing a skills shortage, that currently affects a large part of the industry.

Coupled with an increase in demand for services and low unemployment, the Centre found filling vacancies extremely difficult.

### The solution

In an aim to overcome the employment shortfall, owners Nick and Danielle Sykes looked at employing skilled migrant workers with the assistance of RDA Orana through the Orana Designated Area Migration Agreement (DAMA).

The Orana DAMA is an agreement between the Australian and State governments and local businesses that determines what occupations are in demand that does not exist on the state skilled occupation list and that can be sponsored by an employer.

### Benefits

Through the assistance of RDA Orana, Peppercorn Child Care Centre was able to apply for a labour agreement, which enabled the business to sponsor employees. Nick explained that the Orana DAMA opened a pool of qualified people and allowed the business to run at full capacity offering Dubbo families placements that were previously unavailable, which in turn resulted in a flow-on effect in the community by allowing parents to return to the workforce.

### Outcomes

In the past five years, Peppercorn Child Care Centre has been able to employ four staff through the scheme and three through a previously owned child care centre, resulting in seven migrant workers calling Dubbo home.

*“Not only has the Orana DAMA assisted us in filling early educator positions and allowing us to work at full capacity, but it has also provided the children with a multicultural perspective in the classroom – it has been a win – win for all involved. The process does take up a large amount of time and there is significant cost involved in the sponsorship process, however, I would recommend the scheme to other operators in the region.”*

### Nick Sykes

Owner - Peppercorn Child Care Centre

RDA Orana strongly advocates that employment should be offered to Australians first. However, where there is a skills shortage, we believe skilled migrants are critical to supplement the local workforce.

# INFORMATION

**Businesses and governments have access to economic information, credible research and insights.**

## Key activities undertaken:

During the reporting period, RDA Orana published the Orana Region Economic Impact of Migration Report. This report highlighted the drivers, opportunities and barriers within existing migration schemes and strategies. It outlined several recommendations to ensure that the migration system provides successful outcomes for communities and industries, particularly inland regional and rural NSW.

Our team researched and developed the Housing Provision in the Orana and Central Darling report, which provided a comprehensive analysis of issues around housing in the region.

The report presented findings that support the accelerated provision of housing to meet the growing demand and address the urgent housing needs of regional communities.

We launched the third edition of Invest Orana, outlining some of the successful projects recently delivered, announced, and in varying stages of development within the Orana region. The guide highlights opportunities for investors in the energy and resources, food and agribusiness, health, education, manufacturing and mining sectors.



# CASE STUDY 2

## Partnerships payoff with Charles Sturt University

**A collaborative partnership between Charles Sturt University (CSU) – Dubbo Campus and RDA Orana has resulted in the fruition of two programs that will help manage the critical shortfall in the teacher and nursing sectors for the Orana region.**

**University-industry collaborations have a significant role to play in boosting workforce skills and increasing the population in regional communities.**

### The challenge

A shortage of teaching and medical professionals in the region has led RDA Orana to work with partners to support innovative programs and projects that find solutions to the ever-increasing skills shortage.

### The solution

The two projects highlighted include the Collaborative Teacher's Aide Pathway (CTAP) program and the introduction of the Commonwealth Register of Institutions and Course for Overseas Students (CRICOS) for Nursing at CSU Dubbo Campus.

The CTAP program aims to upskill teachers' aides, Aboriginal education officers and other classroom support personnel currently employed in NSW and other schools to become qualified teachers in regional communities to help address the critical shortage of teachers in Australia. The program has been designed to fast-track the teaching qualifications of teachers' aides and other classroom support personnel by recognising their skills from time spent in the classroom and previous studies.

While the CRICOS nursing course, beginning in 2024, will offer 16 international students interested in pursuing a career in nursing to study the Bachelor of Nursing on campus at Charles Sturt University in Dubbo.

### Benefits

The CTAP program recognises previous study and experience, which not only cuts down the time and costs involved in study but helps teachers' aides to be employed as classroom teachers sooner.

The provision of a CRICOS registered nursing course, delivered in Dubbo, will bring 16 international students to study nursing, while at the same time benefiting the region by allowing the students to work in the industry to assist in areas such as aged care, while they are still studying.

### Outcomes

Since the CTAP program began in 2022, it is surpassing expectations and attracting a high number of student enrolments from across Australia. CSU had 390 job-ready teaching students on a pathway to fill the critical gap.

The introduction of the CRICOS nursing course at Dubbo will see a steady stream of people studying, working and transitioning to full-time employment in the region.





“The CTAP was originally incepted by extensive Community engagement in 2021. School and other stakeholders were instrumental in identifying the potential solutions to the Regional Teacher shortage. The University was able to work closely with Orana RDA to successfully attain a \$500,000 NSW Gov Industry and Collaboration Grant which effectively allowed the CTAP to scale in numbers and effectiveness.”

The ability of Orana RDA to be responsive also allowed the certification of the International Nursing Program to progress with Community and Industry support. Orana RDA through both its Executive and staff has been a key factor in making key workforce capability becoming a reality with both these initiatives.

**Charles Sturt University**  
Dubbo, Director External Engagement

Charles Sturt University  
Megan Dixon  
RDA Orana



# LEADERSHIP

**Influence all levels of government as a respected, apolitical, and reliable advocate for the Orana region.**

## Key activities undertaken:

Setting the strategic direction of the organisation, the Orana Strategic Regional Plan 2023–26 was endorsed by the Minister. The Plan consolidates the work RDA Orana completed to support the region's development, focusing on nine opportunity sectors and providing key strategies to achieve long-term goals.

RDA Orana hosted the third Orana Outlook Dinner, which provided an overview to business and community leaders on how the region was being transformed along with critical insights into the future of business, investment, housing and the workforce in the region.

The sixth annual Inland Growth Summit was held with the theme 'Bridging the Divide'. The annual event highlighted topics that affect the growth of inland Australia, with the ultimate goal of developing more robust policies and incentives for people and businesses who choose to make the Orana region their home.

The second annual Resources, Energy and Industry Innovation Forum (REIIF) was held in June 2023 and explored the theme 'Towards a Zero Emissions Future'. The four-day event explored how regional NSW could benefit from a low-emissions future with projects and initiatives driving greater economic growth and overcoming challenges including workforce, housing and community engagement.



# CASE STUDY 3

## Energy forum highlights exciting future for the region

**The second annual Resources Energy and Industry Innovation Forum, held in June 2023, brought together a powerhouse of thought leaders, scientists, inventors, industry and government representatives to share their thoughts and advice on how regional NSW could move forward into a low emissions economy.**

Some 64 speakers presented to nearly 500 participants over the four-day event following the theme 'towards a zero emissions future'. The event, held in Dubbo, was developed in partnership with RDA Orana and the Association of Mining and Energy Related Councils NSW, along with the support of 15 corporate sponsors.

### The challenge

The NSW Government has set an objective to deliver a 70% cut in emissions by 2035 compared to 2005 levels. A low-emissions future will require a change in most sectors of the economy and will affect all businesses – small, medium and large.

It's important that regional NSW industry and business come on board the low-emission journey and are prepared for the change that is coming.

### The solution

The Forum provided an overview of projects and initiatives that are driving greater economic growth, industry collaboration, research and innovation, as well as increased public and private investment within the resources and energy sector in regional NSW.

### Benefits

The forum highlighted the impacts faced by regional NSW and worked towards problem-solving around workforce, skills, housing and community engagement.

Being part of a renewable energy zone (REZ) puts the Orana region in an enviable position to value add and build on what has already been invested in.

### Outcomes

The forum allowed participants to identify opportunities and build connections to encourage collaboration on the big issues affecting communities now and in the future. Participants heard first-hand from experts in the field, to help navigate the changing landscape of what a low-emissions future looks like. The forum not only discussed the transition to low emissions, but highlighted the opportunities that will arise in the sector, including the development of new industries and jobs.



"A genuine opportunity for collaboration across industries, academia and government, as well as a fantastic demonstration of the innovation, opportunities and connection to Country in the Orana region of NSW"

**Scott Johnson**  
Aggreko

"We were thrilled to be a part of the RDA Orana Resources, Energy and Industry Innovation Forum...LAVO had the opportunity to present about the future of green energy and LAVO's technology. It was great to connect with industry leaders and professionals, including NSW Minister for Energy Penny Sharpe MLC, to share ideas and innovation towards building a zero emission future"

**Michael Sharpe**  
LAVO



# OUR COMMITMENT TO COMMUNICATE

## Building our brand

Support and promote RDA Orana's activity to build brand awareness, increase stakeholder enquiries and increased revenue.

- **766** Facebook interactions
- **90** Instagram interactions
- **959** LinkedIn interactions
- **54** Twitter interactions

## Extending our reach

Become a recognised regional voice that creates awareness of the region's capabilities and needs.

- **3** research projects undertaken
- **1** submission made
- **88** engagements with key policy makers

## Engaging and collaborating

Create genuine opportunities for RDA Orana to partner with businesses and other stakeholders.

### Orana Outlook Dinner

- **100** attendees
- **6** speakers

### Inland growth summit

- **150** attendees
- **38** speakers

### Resources, Energy and Industry Innovation Forum

- **500** attendees
- **96** speakers

## Attract talent and investment

Support and promote businesses to build and retain our regional workforce and deliver key projects.

- **2** case studies reflecting labour and work being undertaken to assist in skills shortages
- **2,480** regional jobs board posted
- **\$915,160** received in grant funding



# FUTURE PLANS

In 2023-24, RDA Orana will be focusing on four key areas: **Workforce, Information, Leadership and Sustainability.**

## Workforce

Businesses in the region have access to the workforce required to support growth.

- 491 Assessments for the NSW Government
- DAMA and 494 assessments
- Implement Inland Growth Summit Youth forum
- DAMA variation submitted

## Information

Businesses and government have access to economic information, credible research and insights.

- Grants hub published
- Ongoing data collection and analysis
- Active participation in regional consultations
- Weekly publication of the RDA Orana newsletter

## Leadership

Influence all levels of government as a respected, apolitical and reliable advocate for the Orana region.

- Implement Inland Growth Summit
- Deliver Orana Outlook Forums
- Publish success stories to build regional and employer confidence
- Finalise the Orana Hunter Transport Study

## Sustainability

Orana region is recognised as a net-zero emissions region.

- Support the Zero Hub Business Case
- Investigate Arena funding to support supply chain adoption
- Investigate PPA Group Buy facilitation for regional councils and businesses
- Support REIF 2023–24

# 2022–2023 FINANCIALS









An Australian Government Initiative



Regional  
Development  
*Australia*

**Get in touch**

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