

Digital Economy Strategy Team
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SUBMISSION TO DIGITAL ECONOMY STRATEGY

Regional Development Australia Peel Inc. (RDA) provides this submission to the Digital Economy Strategy based on its knowledge of the Peel region of Western Australia and its experiences having developed a regional level Digital Strategy.

In 2009 the City of Mandurah and some adjacent areas were announced as early stage National Broadband Network (NBN) rollout sites. Seeing the economic and productivity benefits the NBN rollout could provide RDA set about developing *Building the Peel's Digital Future*, (BPDF) a strategy designed to enable the communities of the Peel to capitalise on the benefits of broadband and digital technologies.

The BPDF identified six strategies that the regional development organisations and local governments of the Peel should pursue to create its better future using digital technologies:

1. Lead and collaborate on digital technologies;
2. Extend access to digital infrastructure;
3. Celebrate and promote local communities;
4. Build household capacity and confidence;
5. Develop the small business sector's capacity;
6. Enhance access to local services.

Released in November 2012, the strategy was supported by a number of complementary actions by RDA. These included:

- Formation of a Digital Opportunities Sub Committee (DOSC) - RDA invited representatives from key stakeholder agencies to form a regional steering group. This transformed into *iPeel* — *Peel Digital Future Network* (comprising representatives from Governments, industry and community to act as a catalyst to identify and implement digital opportunities in the Peel region and identify digitally enabled projects that would benefit the Peel;

- Conducting a number of events to highlight the benefits of digital technology, including:
 - Digital Stakeholders Forum (06 June 2013) — Stakeholders, including local and state government officials, received a briefing on opportunities for the Peel's digital future from Explor Digital Futures, CSIRO and WA Department of Commerce;
 - Tradies event (30 July 2013) — Expo held to highlight technology use to tradespeople in the Peel so they could improve productivity;
 - Broadband Today Alliance Webinar & Workshop (11 September 2013) — Mandurah hosted BTA webinar and workshop regarding mobile communications;
 - Briefing from Telco's (23 October 2013) — Peel region stakeholders received briefings from Telstra, Vodafone and Optus on their mobile network rollout plans for the Peel region.
- RDA Peel, using funding from the then Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport developed the *digitalpeel* web site. This was a web site that:
 - Became a central site for all digital initiatives being undertaken in the Peel - one place community and businesses could visit to identify opportunities for their digital future;
 - Promoted the Digital Enterprise Program to SMEs and NFPs and encourage participation in the program;
 - Promoted the Digital Hubs Program to residents and encouraged participation in the program;
 - Became a repository for digital resources about local heritage and community stories;
 - Highlighted and celebrated digital innovation (through the *digitalpeel* e-newsletter).

The objectives of this project were to:

- Raise awareness of broadband within the Mandurah community;
- Present ideas and uses of the technology;
- Assist business with developing their digital presence.

In October 2014 RDA Peel discontinued their work in the Digital Futured area, citing:

- Lack of take up of digital opportunities by "exemplar" organisations such as Local, State and Australian Governments;
- Lack of take up by SMEs of digital technology;
- A lack of digital leadership shown by other stakeholders.

At that time the issues identified by RDA Peel were:

1. Government agencies and industry sectors such as Health and Education are involved in assessing, testing and delivering digital services in eHealth and eEducation, however these sectors and the relevant State and Australian Government agencies are not engaging with the regions or key stakeholders in them to ensure digital services meet regional needs;

2. There are insufficient resources being allocated by the Australian Government in the Peel region to provide support and information services for small businesses wanting to use digital technologies to improve productivity and increase employment opportunities.

3. The Australian Government, having committed to the NBN rollout, has not allocated funding programs or other resources to the development of key projects that will enable the regions to develop projects that will maximize opportunities presented by NBN infrastructure.

These issues have not changed significantly in the ensuing 3 years and have been supplemented by additional issues including the pace of change in the digital space that businesses are still struggling with. Anecdotally SMEs particularly are reticent to invest in technology changes that may have a short effective life before being overtaken by newer competing technologies. Further, business organisations are not equipped or resourced to provide leadership, encouragement, training etc to assist businesses in meeting these challenges constructively and in simply 'keeping up'.

More recently it has been identified that confidence in the NBN infrastructure and its capacity to deliver is being eroded, particularly by Retail Service Providers not purchasing sufficient Connectivity Virtual Circuit (CVC) capacity which is hampering customer accessibility. The emergence of competing products not reliant on NBN connectivity is also impacting on the perceived effectiveness of the NBN.

The recommendations of RDA Peel are that Governments must take the leadership in and commit more substantial resources to:

- highlight the productivity benefits of using digital technology;
- incentivise the take up of e-commerce opportunities beyond its deductibility as a business expense, by SMEs particularly in regional areas;
- investing in education and skills training beyond its current availability to young Australians, Women in STEM and older Australians;
- considering more effective use of the RDA network to deliver initiatives identified in the Digital Economy Strategy to regional Australia;
- developing a program of visiting expositions to the regions with suitable marketing and promotion, to ensure businesses and the wider community are much better informed about the challenges, opportunities and activities in the digital economy.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission. If you have any questions regarding its content or would like further information please contact:

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Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paddy'.

Paddy Creevey OAM
Chair

29th November 2017