

it Regional Development Australia

MURRAYLANDS Et RIVERLAND
SOUTH AUSTRALIA

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Digital Economy Strategy Team
Department of Industry Innovation and Science
GPO Box 2013
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Via email: digitaleconomy@industry.gov.au

To whom it may concern,

Re: Digital Economy Strategy

Thank you for the opportunity for Regional Development Australia Murraylands and Riverland (RDAMR) to provide input into the new Digital Economy Strategy being developed by the Australian Government.

RDAMR is the region's leading agency for economic development, and a major component of our role is to promote and facilitate growth. Our vision for the region is to become "A *vibrant resilient region that capitalises on change, embraces economic development and prosperity, and provides an inspirational living, investment and working environment*". The Digital Economy plays a fundamental part in all of the elements that make up our vision.

The Murraylands and Riverland regional economy is driven by primary production and value adding manufacturing. The region contributes conservatively \$2.2 billion of the States estimated \$15 billion gross food and production with focuses in the areas of fruit, milk, vegetable, meat and grain production and processing.

Key industries in the region include Agricultural products (23%); Manufacturing including value adding primary products (13.7%); Retail; Transport & Logistics; Tourism; and Health & Community Services.

Advances in technology and developments in the digital economy continue to provide opportunities for our key industries to be more productive. Examples include:

- The use of smart phones to access real time information to allow grain growers to make more timely marketing decisions whilst going about their usual work practices around seeding and harvest in the field,
- Regional retailers extending their offering outside their immediate geographical area via online stores and no longer having to rely on foot traffic through their premises alone;

- Tourism operators having access to better, low cost marketing tools to reach and interact with their target markets including social media platforms and harnessing the sharing economy as a distribution tool.

The benefits to business are many however, uptake and under-utilisation of the digital economy is a key issue which is a result of lack of understanding, confidence and knowledge.

We are seeing a polarisation of performance in the business community as some businesses are quicker to adapt and take advantage of the opportunities the digital economy offers whilst others are hesitant to utilise it through lack of knowledge and understanding and consequently are falling behind. An example of this is our retail industry being impacted with increasing trends towards online shopping.

Our communities can also benefit from the digital economy through improved connectivity. Greater access to information, social interaction and online services is enhancing the lifestyle of those in our regional population willing and able to participate. This will further be enhanced as the **NBN** continues to roll out in our region.

In the past distance to major centres has been a disadvantage to regional residents however through development of the digital economy our population can enjoy the lifestyle benefits that regional communities deliver whilst maintaining a standard of living comparable to our city counterparts in terms of access to services such as health care and education online.

Our vision for an Australia that thrives in a digital economy is centred on regional inclusion. We want all Australians including those that live in rural and remote areas to have access to the best digital technologies available and for uptake of these technologies to be amongst the top 5 globally.

For Australia to realise the vision outlined above the government needs to ensure access is available and uptake is strong. To achieve this the government will need to:

- ensure that Australia's digital infrastructure is fit for purpose, particularly in regions;
- provide a robust education program that will not only teach our children and future generations how to maximise the digital economy, but also our adult population including the aged, and our business community;
- foster innovation and capability building of our industries through delivering effective grant programs that promote learning and application of digital technologies to drive productivity;
- instil confidence in using the digital economy through managing security risks at a national level, including protection of data and privacy.
- Provide leadership to all Australian's by staying abreast of and communicating global best practice in the digital economy.

This is a rapidly changing space and we acknowledge the difficulty of the task ahead in developing the Digital Strategy. We look forward to hearing the outcomes of this consultation.

If you have any queries, please don't hesitate to contact me on (08) 8535 7170.

Yours sincerely,



Jo Podoliak
Chief Executive Officer