

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE REGIONAL FUTURES PLAN

FINAL REPORT – JULY 2021

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

The Cradle Coast Regional Futures Plan (Futures Plan) was developed out of a community-based consultation process in the Cradle Coast Region of Tasmania in 2018, led by Cradle Coast Authority (CCA). The Futures Plan was endorsed by the Cradle Coast region's nine member Councils in late 2018 and forms the basis of a collaborative approach to economic development activities in the region. Some deeply embedded systemic, structural challenges in the region need to be overcome to ensure the population is well-placed to provide the skills and capabilities to take on the jobs that are available including:

- high unemployment rates,
- low educational attainment levels,
- shrinking working-age population,
- regionally dispersed population,
- significant labour demands.

The Futures Plan development drew together multiple organisations and community members to discuss the challenges, review the social and economic data and develop an approach to start addressing the issues. It determined that the Cradle Coast region had challenges due to:

- people not engaged in work or education will further entrench disadvantage,
- an aging workforce, static population and out migration of young people will cause economic and social change,
- a shortage of relevant skills in the workforce is limiting industries competitiveness and growth.

The Futures Plan received funding from the Tasmanian government for two years (July 2019 – July 2021) to support its implementation. The Futures Plan aimed to improve living standards in the region, boost regional growth, foster a more resilient economy, and create more jobs and better jobs for the people of the Cradle Coast region. The Futures Plan itself, and the governance arrangements adopted for its implementation, aimed to provide a platform for working collaboratively across sectors, organisations and boundaries to address complex challenges in the region that were not being dealt with effectively by organisations working separately.

REGIONAL FUTURES PLAN EVALUATION

Key Performance Indicators for the Futures Plan were set in mid-2019 and tracked to capture changes in the external environment since the start of the implementation. A summary of the actions undertaken by each of the Working Groups, Core Team and Steering Group is also provided in the attachment *Regional Futures Plan RFP Quantitative Final Report*.

The Futures Plan approach implemented an innovative governance arrangement for working collaboratively across sectors, organisations and boundaries on these complex challenges including establishing:

- an Investment Logic Map,
- a Regional Economic Development Steering Group (Steering Group).
- five Working Groups that cross organisational and geographic barriers,
- a Core Team of economic development staff from the nine Councils,
- an **Investment Framework** to establish a prioritised list of Regionally Important Projects,

"Being able to refer organisations to this regional-level information has been very helpful... Council...was able to manage the large number of requests by referring people directly to this source of information."

COVID 19 Impact

The Region Futures Plan project was interrupted by COVID 19 lockdowns in March 2020, nine months into the start of the two-year project. The impact was immediately felt on the ability of the Core Team to engage with the project. Council staff were consumed with responding to the uncertainty of COVID. Many of the core team were the emergency management contacts for their Council or involved in adapting events and community development plans to accommodate COVID 19 changes. The current work of the Regional Futures Plan was largely put on hold for five months and a different set of activities was pursued:

- the Investment Framework projects were reassessed for COVID Impact,
- the likely impact of COVID was analysed and reported,
- a survey of 125 regional businesses was undertaken to assess impact,
- the Restart Recovery Hub was launched with mentoring, grant funding and information resources,
- reimagining the region articles were written by CCA staff and published through the advocate, and
- reimagining the region visioning workshops were held with the Steering Group.

Collaborative groups under the Futures Plan were switched to online meetings and then resumed in a hybrid model.

"...there was stress for events staff during COVID; our big events were gone; so we asked ourselves, what else can we do for our community? We kept the Working Group active and supported each other. This showed our resilience and creativity during a time of great stress."

Quantitative Assessment

The Investment Framework developed by the project has been used to assess 18 submissions by the Regional Economic Development Steering Group. The resulting prioritised project list has been relied upon in conversations with State and Federal government on multiple occasions. Such as informing the:

- advocacy of CCA during PERSAC review,
- priorities for the State election in 2021,
- funding allocation for the federal governments Regional Recovery funding, and
- priorities for investment in the upcoming Federal Government election.

This framework is open to the public for project submissions and selects projects for investment support based on regional significance, readiness and alignment with the Regional Futures

Plan identified needs for economic investment. The Framework has a transparent and easy to use weighted criterion and provides a good basis for conversation, comparison and discussion about the project and infrastructure priorities for the region. Recent work has been completed to incorporate two new criteria concerning improving the environment and community engagement, to ensure that sustainable regional development is encouraged.

"We get a lot of feedback from Councils that they want to have their voices heard... It's really important that we have a voice from the region communicating local priorities."

The five established Working Groups, Core Team of economic development Council staff, CCA and the Steering Group delivered 16 activities over the two-year period and have 16 more that are underway, 12 activities will continue past the closure of this project with the others dependent on future funding arrangements.

The key successful activities delivered are:

- contributing to funding for Seedlab Tasmania to support 105 agri-food businesses through a two-day bootcamp and 40 businesses through six-month mentoring support, 15% of businesses were from the Cradle Coast,
- engaging Beacon Foundation to develop and run two Growth Industry Preparedness Programs on Renewable Energy industry with West Coast high schools,
- supporting two Honours projects with UTAS in Business appetite for Work Integrated learning and Apprenticeship decision making in the Construction Industry,
- undertaking a COVID Impact survey of regional businesses,
- undertaking analysis on the likely impact of COVID,
- writing a Renewable Energy Investment Prospectus for the region,
- establishing a Regional Jobs Board to promote opportunities to future residents,
- developing a population strategy,
- developing a regional register of arts assets,
- establishing an agreed list of major events for the region,
- showcasing the opportunities in the Cradle Coast through a revamped Choose Cradle Coast website and partnership with Regional Australia Institute's Move to More national ad campaign,
- establishing the Future Energy Hub to provide information to Cradle Coast residents on the renewable energy industry.

"The first is the formation of a group that is thinking about Arts and Culture from a regional perspective. To my knowledge this has not been done or even attempted previously and in itself is a huge success/represents a significant opportunity for our region."

Qualitative Assessment

Swinburne University was engaged in late 2020 to undertake a qualitative evaluation of the Regional Futures Plan approach. They conducted workshops with Working Groups, the Core Team, Steering Group and General Managers and interviews with community leaders who had past involvement with the Futures Plan: details are available in the attachment *Regional Futures Plan Evaluation* (Eversole et al. Swinburne University, 2021).

The Swinburne University report highlights the most significant changes that were observed by participants in their own learning and in the communities understand, such as the recognition of the:

- need for a strategic coordinated community engagement in the renewable energy industry,
- importance of collaborative regional development.

- importance of arts and culture in regional development.

The Swinburne University report highlights the most significant changes observed in the community such as:

- increased engagement from schools, industry and community around work pathways and support for young people,
- increased and welcomed migration from overseas,
- increased pride and confidence in the region.

Overall, it was the process of implementing the Regional Futures Plan, rather than the Plan itself, which has made a difference to regional development capacity and capability in the Cradle Coast region. While it has been a relatively small-scale process and only in operation for two years, the five cross-sector Working Groups, Core Team and Steering Group have provided valuable mechanisms for building the capacity, capability and confidence of individuals and organisations to work together to achieve a common vision for their region. The process of bringing a paper plan 'to life' has manifested in improved capacity for collaboration and engaged a group of passionate regional community leaders in shaping regional narratives and strengthening regional resilience. This process has surfaced opportunities that were not captured in the original document and begun to demonstrate the potential for locally led regional development solutions, laying vital groundwork for future change.

"There is positive energy around the region, coming out of COVID, and a very big pride of place. We have never seen that before; this has changed enormously. People are working together so much better. Before, people were staying with their groups, but now there is more extensive networking."

FUTURE ACTION

The evaluation has found that the Regional Futures Plan implementation has contributed to resilience, confidence and capacity building in the region. It is important that the Regional Futures Plan implementation continue and provide a framework for regional collaboration into the future. CCA support will continue for the:

- Steering Group,
- professional development and collaboration of Council economic development staff,
- Education and Training Working Group and
- Arts & Culture Working Group.

This will provide opportunity to build community leadership and increase collaboration, networking and advocacy for the region.

This ongoing commitment will encourage community engagement and aims to realise the potential of coordinated regional development. Opportunities for externally funded project delivery will be pursued for projects that support the aims of the Regional Futures Plan such as collaborations with university partners and in building employment and education pathways in local government. Work through the Future Energy Hub will continue.

"In spite of all of the dire predictions about the likely impact of COVID for young people, once people in the region have been able to get together, the response from the community has been unbelievable. In particular, there has been strong engagement of industry and

community with schools. There has been a sense of urgency post-COVID and strong participation; people are enjoying the opportunity to connect."

New funding was negotiated with the State Government for preliminary work on regional land use planning that will bring stakeholders together on regional planning in late 2021. This will help the region prepare for the formal review of the Regional Land Use Strategy by the Tasmanian Planning Commission expected in 2022 and will contribute to strategic planning for housing solutions and future sustainable land use development in the region.

CCA will continue its work in recognising the advantages, successes and achievements of the region by employing a communications manager to promote our economic and natural resources. CCA will also maintain the excellent resources built and enhanced during this project such as the:

- Choose Cradle Coast website,
- social media site,
- Regional Jobs Board,
- alliance with Regional Australia Institute to support the national media campaign encouraging people to move to Australia's regions,
- developing two online introductory resources explaining the Renewable Energy industry,
- capturing career development stories from the Renewable Energy industry,
- distributing the results of collaborative PhDs on entrepreneurship, sustainable development goals and supporting education in the Cradle Coast,
- sponsorship relationship with Seedlab Tasmania to promote and support agri-food entrepreneurship, and
- continuing our bid for the SEGRA conference in 2022.

The Regional Futures Plan will deliver deep cultural change in the region. This will take investment over a significant length of time to see results. This project is early implementation and ongoing commitment is needed to experience the full benefit of the approach.

Living the Regional Futures Plan is at the heart of what we're trying to do. It is the lever, and we need to have the right lever. It is about a stronger region, being able to make good choices about our careers and have options"

Thank you to all the participants of the Regional Futures Plan over the two-year period, particularly those who volunteered their time to build networks and enhance collaboration across the region: Council, State Government and Federal Government staff, community and industry leaders.

We acknowledge the Aboriginal people as Tasmania's First People and the traditional and original owners of Tasmanian lands and waters. They have been custodians of the Cradle Coast region for far longer than Cradle Coast Authority and continue to make a unique and lasting contribution.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Regional Futures Plan RFP Quantitative Final Report
2. Regional Futures Plan Evaluation - Swinburne Report
3. Regional Futures Plan – Income Statement as at 1 August 2021

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