



22 September 2017

Thank you for your ongoing interest in the Wimmera Southern Mallee Regional Partnership and in our 2017 Regional Assembly which took place in Horsham on 2 August, 2017.

At that meeting, which was attended by around 200 people, I pledged to keep all in the room, and those who had expressed interest in the Partnership, up to date with developments and abreast of time lines.

With that in mind, I am taking this opportunity to write to you as Chair of the Wimmera Southern Mallee Regional Partnership.

### **The 2017 Assembly in summary**

The 2017 WSM Regional Assembly was the Partnership's second major opportunity to consult with the community.

Not only did we have a wealth of local residents, businesses and organisation representatives in the room, our Assembly was also attended by four Victorian Government Ministers; the Premier Daniel Andrews, the Minister for Regional Development Jaala Pulford, Special Minister of State Gavin Jennings and the Attorney General Martin Pakula. Minister Pulford reinforced that she and other Ministers were in Horsham to listen to regional voices and to hear about our vision for the future of our region.

While the 2016 Assembly was a first chance to explore priorities for the region, 2017 gave us the chance to explore issues deeper and in more detail. Discussions at the 2017 WSM Assembly were focused on seven key themes: Health, Environment and Energy, Education, Transport, Economic Development, Social Welfare and Local Infrastructure.

We were interested in gaining insight from young people in our region and presented the short animation of their views at the Assembly. A link to the animation is found here: <https://engage.vic.gov.au/wimmera-southern-mallee>

The evening was full of conversation and interesting discussion, and generated many ideas which the Partnership will filter and review. Some of the emerging ideas that were heard across themes include:

- The need for better planning and integration of service delivery across all sectors, and to explore establishing an 18th DHHS & DET service area in the WSM;
- Continued lobbying for improved transport connectivity, including funding for a business case for the return of passenger rail services to Horsham;
- Simplify land use & planning complexities which stifle development & industry;
- Focus on region-wide preventive health programs, with a special focus on positive health outcomes and reduction in obesity;
- Attract, retain and ensure appropriate training is available to maintain & develop our skilled workforce;
- Advocate for improved network capability within the power grid, to attract further investment in renewables in our region;
- Improve local government infrastructure including regional roads, tracks, trails and bike infrastructure;
- Continue to advocate to improve mobile and digital connectivity;
- Deliver an Early Years integrated services trial for the WSM;
- Oversee the business cases and planning for the Grains Centre of Excellence and the further development of tourism potential in the WSM.

A graphical snapshot of the 2017 WSM Assembly is also attached.



### **Moving forward**

As a Partnership, our role is now to take the messages and learnings from our 2017 Assembly, distil them down into a handful of tangible priorities from the WSM region, and to then present them to the Rural and Regional Ministerial Committee later this year.

Last year, I spoke to that Committee about the need to secure vital community infrastructure, create a networked grains centre of excellence, support a vibrant tourism industry across the whole WSM, improve mobile and digital connectivity across our region and improve early childhood development, and I am pleased to say that in this year's Budget in May, the following funding was announced:

- \$1 million across the state to co-operatively develop a program with rural and regional councils to help them respond to external financial pressures and structural issues;
- \$250,000 towards developing a business case for a Networked Grains Centre of Excellence to build on its industry networks;
- \$500,000 to develop a tourism plan for WSM to boost visitors and diversify the economy;
- \$45 million towards improving digital technology and infrastructure across Regional Victoria through the Connecting Regional Communities Program; and
- \$39 million for Stage two upgrades of the Ballarat line as part of the Regional Rail Revival package, which will see improvements on the Ballarat line as well as an additional 9 services per week between Ararat and Ballarat.

In addition, the Premier announced at the 2017 Assembly, that a WSM Early Years integrated service trial will take place to address the poor early years outcomes in our region. We are very grateful for this additional announcement.

As you can see, our Partnership is already having an impact and our voice is being heard.

The Partnership is also taking forward initiatives to boost Partnership links across all three levels of Government and business and community to support our priorities.

### **On going consultation**

Though our 2017 Assembly is now behind us, the Partnership is very keen to continue the consultation process and the ongoing engagement with the community.

With that in mind, our Engage page <https://engage.vic.gov.au/wimmera-southern-mallee/> will be open for further comment and we would encourage you to get on the page and let us know your thoughts and ideas and follow up for the region, or email us directly at [wimmerasouthernmallee.partnership@rdv.vic.gov.au](mailto:wimmerasouthernmallee.partnership@rdv.vic.gov.au)

Over the course of the next few months, we will look to host further focus groups and working teams to sharpen ideas, progress and identify new priorities and to also hear from groups we feel have been absent from our conversation to date.

We will of course also keep you abreast of announcements relevant to our region, via email and also on our Partnership Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/WSMRP>

I want to take this opportunity to again thank you for giving of your time in August, whether by attending the Assembly, a pre-meeting or being active on our Engage page. Each of your views is incredibly valuable in this process and means our region is heard right at the heart of Government.

I look forward to keeping the conversation going,

Regards

David Jochinke  
Chair  
Wimmera Southern Mallee Regional Partnership