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RAPAD REGION TO DELIVER \$1.5b

In a recently completed report undertaken by the Regional Australia Institute (RAI), on behalf of the Remote Area Planning and Development Board (RAPAD), modeling suggests that up to 37.5% of jobs within the Central Western Qld RAPAD region are at risk due to digital disruption.

Despite this, the RAI modeling indicates through focusing on key strategic priorities and a commitment to a long-term vision, the region has the potential to deliver an annual output of \$1.5 billion in Gross Value Added (GVA) by 2031.

“While digital disruption is the new norm, the challenge for the region will be how we adapt and race ahead with technology, rather than against it”, said RAPAD CEO, David Arnold.

“The digital revolution will be a catalyst for this disruption, and the job market of 2031 is likely to be very different to what we see now”, said Mr Arnold.

“In particular, low skilled jobs and even some high skilled but routine jobs are likely to disappear, while new jobs requiring new skills are likely to be created”.

“RAPAD, businesses, governments, the entire community, need to be at the forefront of fostering the environment that supports and facilitates the creation of, and up-skilling for these jobs over the decades to come”, said Mr Arnold.

The Pathfinder Report, funded by Queensland Governments Department of State Development, identifies six priority areas that the RAPAD board can focus its efforts on, to help bring this economic potential to fruition.

“While RAI investigated six priority areas, these are by no means the only areas that councils, communities, businesses or RAPAD should pursue going into the future”, said Mr Arnold.

Informed by the Pathfinders preceding Future Factors Report, community consultation undertaken by Professor John Cole in 2016 and RAPADs recently completed digital strategy and its associated community consultation, the six areas were consensually agreed on by RAPADs seven mayors. Those six areas represent a broad and regionally significant range of focus areas.

The report outlines the opportunities, challenges, actions and payoffs for these six priorities and which will help grow the region to 2031. The six priorities are:

- Bringing back the sheep;
- Tourism growth;
- Infrastructure connections;
- Energy and water security;
- Healthy aged care living, and;
- Improved telecommunications.

Not surprisingly the report identifies that the region’s industry strengths of agriculture, in particular beef and sheep production, will be a major driver of future growth.

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RAI Pathfinder Project leader, Dr Leonie Pearson said, “Increasing demand from Asian markets for clean, green meat coupled with strong brand recognition of Northern Australia’s high quality produce puts the RAPAD region in a strong position. Strategies to increase sheep meat and wool production to supply international markets for example, will be an important priority however agriculture alone will not deliver the region’s full potential”.

The report indicates that collectively, industries including tourism, public services (education, health, and public administration), construction and IT will contribute the biggest share to future economic growth.

Dr Pearson said, “up-skilling and developing greater capacity across these industries, for example in tourism, health and digital skills, will be key to these industries reaching their full potential”.

The report identifies that in both 2008 and 2013, the average productivity of the RAPAD region was more than 28 per cent higher than the Australian average. Traditionally low levels of unemployment and high specialisations in agriculture, wholesale, civil engineering construction and recreation services jobs have formed the basis for a healthy labour force. The RAPAD region also has a higher share of public sector jobs compared to the rest of the state. These labour force characteristics are key competitive advantages for the region, and building on them will be vital in the face of new challenges.

“Enhancing the capability and capacity of the region will help to build on its already highly productive workforce”, said Dr Pearson.

Other challenges, such as a growing older population will require the region to address issues such as the location of age-specific services, while climate change will continue to have disproportionate effects on the RAPAD region, which is dependent on industries such as agriculture. “Working proactively to mitigate these challenges and building on the region’s strengths will be crucial,” said Dr Pearson.

“RAPAD is currently undertaking its own three yearly strategic planning and this report and others recently received, will inform the board of RAPADs future strategic focus areas”, said Mr Arnold.

The report can be found at www.rapad.com.au under ‘Pathfinder’ and at <http://www.regionalaustralia.org.au/home/remote-area-planning-development-board-rapad-pathfinder-project/>

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The Central Western Queensland Remote Area Planning and Development Board (RAPAD) is a regional development organisation and regional organisation of councils which aims to foster, facilitate and promote the sustainable growth and development of the Central Western Queensland region. RAPAD has been in existence since 1992 and has proven to be a cohesive and collaborative organisation, proactively working in partnership with government and non-government stakeholders at the local, state and federal level. RAPAD is a not-for-profit entity owned by, and representing the seven local governments of the Central Western Queensland region. Governance is via a board of directors from and representing those member local governments, vis-a-vis Barcaldine Regional Council, Barcoo Shire Council, Blackall-Tambo Regional Council, Boulia Shire Council, Diamantina Shire Council, Longreach Regional Council and Winton Shire Council.