



Institute for
Resilient Regions

Pathways to the future: building local strategies for regional resilience and sustainable development in central western Queensland

**Blackall-Tambo Regional Council Workshop
27 February 2016
Report**



1.1 Workshop Context

In Central Western Queensland the current drought emergency has stimulated a range of responses including the Community Drought Leadership Groups with their toolkits enabling communities to develop drought response plans and make the most of existing resources.

Building on these initiatives and recognising the importance of assisting regional communities focus on longer term thinking and planning, the Remote Area Planning and Development Board has invited USQ's Institute for Resilient Regions to conduct a series of workshops to engage community participation in a creative process structured around the following questions:

- What is the longer term future for central western Queensland?
- What are the options for sustainable development in our region?
- How do we make our communities as resilient as possible?

1.2 Background

By working cooperatively across the region with key stakeholders in each local authority district the aim of the workshop series is to assist in strengthening community resilience by elevating leadership focus beyond the current drought emergency to the opportunities that might be developed sustainably and which inevitably would involve innovation of some form or another.

There is no one possible or even plausible future for the region. Regional development is the outcome of a complex interplay of a myriad of factors, reflecting in part the capacities of local leadership and decision-making as well as community understanding and involvement in developing the narrative and exploring the possibilities. Compounding these considerations is the magnitude of innovation happening more generally in the world which bears directly on the future for regional communities.

Sustainable development means development that takes account of the needs of future generations as well as today's. Sustainable means to continue indefinitely. So by definition, sustainable development for central western Queensland will be long term in its ambition and capacity, resilient, and possible for today's communities. The human capital factor is crucial to building sustainable development, making regions resilient and achieving a preferred future for the people. In itself resilience is not

an end, but is actually a function of a thriving regional system. To build resilience, crucial enabling factors in a region or community have to be assured and developed. These include:

- Awareness – *people understand what's going on*
- Diversity – *has more than one talent, asset or strength*
- Integration – *connectivity is strong to ensure the community draws on all the resources available including all its people*
- Self-regulation – *the region/community can make decisions for itself, take the initiative and partner with others*
- Adaptive – *region/community/individuals can learn, develop alternatives, change and innovate.*

1.3 Workshop format

A day long workshop involving XX community participants from across the Blackall-Tambo region was convened in the Cultural Centre, Blackall on Saturday 27 February 2016. After a short welcome by Mayor Cr Barry Muir, the facilitator John Cole outlined the workshop aims, key assumptions, the principles and protocols used when working together using the Appreciative Inquiry Framework. Key themes likely to shape the future over the coming decades at the global, national, and regional levels were canvassed and the function and character of resilience in regional development was also explained.

Participants were advised that the day would be framed around a recognition that human systems “grow and construct their future realities in the direction of what they most persistently, actively, and collectively ask questions about”ⁱ and that “...people [communities] and organisations are full of assets, capabilities, resources and strengths that can be located, affirmed, leveraged and encouraged.”ⁱⁱⁱ In that context the workshop focused on three strategic questions:

- 1. Where/what/who are we now?**
- 2. What do we want to go for?**
- 3. What and how will be the best way to get there?**

Participants were advised that positive or appreciative inquiry worked in community planning and development by:

- Choosing the positive as the focus of inquiry
- Inquiring into stories that give life to the region

- Locating themes and drilling deeper into causality and linkage creating shared images of a preferred future
- Applying knowledge of what works and what's possible
- Imagining boldly and finding innovative ways to create that future
- Collaborating and building collective capacity by sharing insights, information and resources

1.4 Individual expectations from the workshop

After the introduction, participants were canvassed about what they wanted to get out of the day. Most participants indicated an interest in sharing and learning. Responses included:

- Ensure the future sustainability of the region.
- Learning tactics, idea sharing.
- Communication.
- Learn about each other and what our goals are.
- Share and learn.
- Come together and hear where everyone is at; learn what the go is.
- Also looking for fresh ideas from visitors/presenters.
- Ensure our community can continue to progress and be productive, so that our kids can stay, or come back, if they want to.

Workshop Outputs

2.1 Valuing the best of the Blackall-Tambo region

In this session participants were encouraged to consider a range of questions aimed at building a positive narrative while attuning the thinking in the group to positive appreciation. The aim was to tell stories that appreciated the best about life in the Blackall-Tambo region while and creating group awareness of “our region, our community – its strengths, values and enablers”.

Participants were asked to make observations on the following:

- What’s great about the region?
- What’s unique about our communities?
- Why do we like living where we do?

In response to these questions, there was a range of observations:

- Abundance of space – it’s a norm and there’s free artesian water and clean air
- Great grazing country
- Great heritage, remarkable history – interesting and unique, pioneers had grit
- Community is small, know everybody, friendly, great ability to connect, welcoming.
- Great place to raise a family – everyone will help.
- We are able to have a positive impact on our own community – it’s easy to contribute.
- Couldn’t imagine living anywhere else.
- People – friendly, inviting, welcoming – maybe because it’s not so busy – we know a lot about each other and we do a lot together.
- Housing is affordable

2.2 Positive examples of regional strength, capacity and success - past and present in the Blackall-Tambo region

Turning to stories of success and achievement the following questions were used as prompts:

- What are the successes of our region?
- What are we really good at? Why?
- Why was something particularly a regional highpoint?
- Where and when has innovation worked locally?
- What has been an exciting community achievement?

In response participants offered specific examples:

Economic

- Wool industry has a famous history with the wool scour, black stump, Jackie Howe providing a basis to heritage tourism
- Primary industries – beef and sheep

Social

- Elderly people feel safe and connected with great aged-care facilities.
- Good education facilities with high school to year 12.
- Healthy, thriving arts and crafts scene – a creative community – wonderful talented artists.
- A vibrant social calendar: something on every weekend, busy social life.
- Lots of voluntary work – people are passionate to contribute.
- Great connections to movers and shakers in the wider world, people who have been here.
- Great asset – emerging young population.
- Amazing growth of the Uniting Church youth group – providing a place to learn, interact with adults.

2.3 Core themes emergent

Discussing the key themes in the stories that had been told during the discovery session the group concluded that:

- There is a strong sense of local community and belonging.
- We can and want to do things for ourselves.
- We have a rich history and pastoral industry.
- Our facilities are good but we could do a lot better with them.
- Blackall-Tambo is undersold to the broader world.

3. Imagining the region making the most of its strengths

The objective of this second session was to assist the group image what might be possible in the Blackall-Tambo region by building on the best of the successes and strengths outlined earlier.

The group was encouraged to boldly dream the possibilities by extending its thinking and harnessing the aspirations of each of the individual participants.

The group was presented with the following questions:

Taking account of what already is happening but imagining a stronger resilient more sustainable future for the Blackall-Tambo region...

- What would it be like?
- How would we and our region be different to what is now?
- What is a really good stretch idea that links the best of 'what is' with what we most desire as 'might be'?
- How does it involve the entire community?
- Can we do it by ourselves?

3.1 Key elements of a vision for the region's future

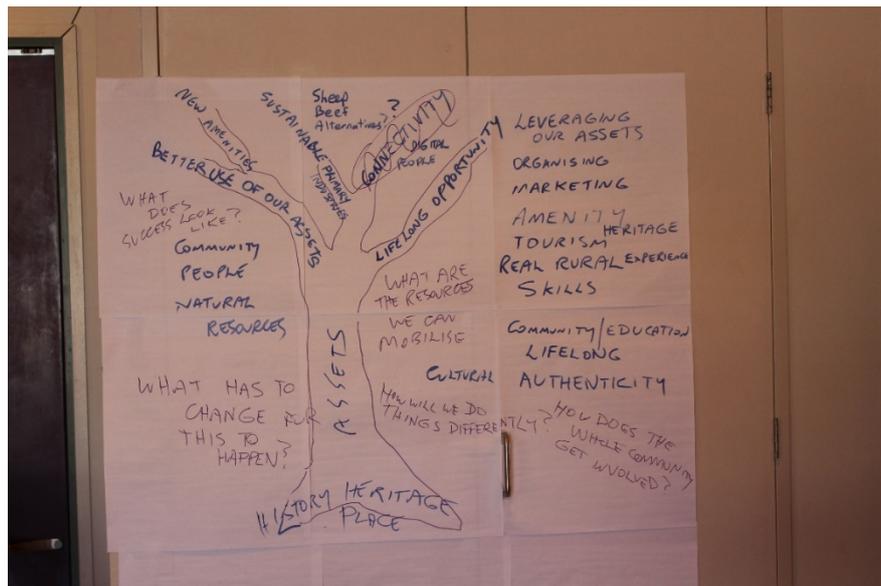
In response to these prompts, the group volunteered a range of observations starting with:

1. Tambo-Blackall is well promoted, well marketed and sign-posted locally to internationally.
2. Blackall-Tambo is strategic and targeted in its promotion achieving a wider awareness of what we've got to share here.
3. We have a stronger tourist industry, built on authentic, immersion experiences drawing on our heritage - pastoral, pioneers, landscape
4. Our towns are beautified and existing assets and resources are better utilised.
5. Water features improve the amenity of our main towns – Tambo Dam and Lake Blackall.
6. Organisations/structures for working better together across the Tambo-Blackall region are established and achieving closer community cooperation.
7. The 'leaving' mentality to seek opportunity elsewhere has changed and our kids can work here.
8. We are a community rich in and aware of its own capacities, training our people and children for the roles needed for the future here.
9. Our school and further education captures the imagination and the capacity of our children in ways relevant to the future of the region and we have the facilities to support the learning journey for our people who are training and studying.
10. Blackall-Tambo is more creative and inclusive in making better use of the people already here in our community
11. Our pastoral industry fits well with our natural environment and assets as a sustainable pastoral industry.

These points coalesced into a **shared vision** promoted by the group which the facilitator has summarised as:

Blackall-Tambo

- **is home to an active, inclusive and highly capable community creating lifelong opportunities and learning for its members;**
- **makes best use of its assets - human, natural and built resources - providing great amenity for locals and facility for a regional tourism industry attracting visitors internationally;**
- **draws on its heritage in the further development of an innovative and sustainable primary industries sector.**



4. Designing how the vision for the future will be realised

We create pathways to the future and new capacity by building on what we have discovered and imagined for our region. The focus of this post-lunch session was on the changes needed to make a reality for the main elements of the group's vision for the future of the Blackall-Tambo region.

4.1 Priority goals for the future

At the start of the session the group prioritise the core themes of the vision for further development/design of goals and strategies. The core themes were:

- 1. Blackall Tambo is home to an active, inclusive and highly capable community creating lifelong opportunities and learning for its members.**
- 2. Blackall Tambo makes best use of its assets - human, natural and built resources - providing great amenity for locals and facility for a regional tourism industry attracting visitors internationally.**

Two sub-groups were established, each one focussed on a particular priority core theme. They were presented with two questions to answer:

- What strategies and actions would help us achieve our vision goals?
- How can (we) I do things differently to help achieve our vision?

4.2 Blackall Tambo is home to an active, inclusive and highly capable community creating lifelong opportunities and learning for its members

The sub-group first identified a number of areas of emphasis that in its view could frame further action essentially by drawing on existing resources and making better use of community members to provide grounded skills training:

1. Build a local community development and learning cycle by shifting thinking and encouraging increased communication and cooperation between people learning and local business owners and managers.
2. Promote involvement and volunteerism as a catalyst for getting experience.
3. Draw on existing knowledge and capacity by establishing mentor relationships between older and young people in the community.
4. Appoint people as ambassadors and role models for a lifelong opportunity and learning initiative.

Identifying things that members of the group and others in the community could do differently to assist realisation of the vision, prompted a range of suggestions focussed on personal development and engagement with others:

1. Help younger people find their capability.
2. Update my skills.
3. Share my skills.
4. Talk with young people and business owners to encourage new thinking and cooperation.

The essential theme here was that improving the community's capacity for lifelong learning and opportunity derived from individual disposition, capacity, connectivity and knowledge.

4.3 Blackall Tambo makes best use of its assets - human, natural and built resources - providing great amenity for locals and facility for a regional tourism industry attracting visitors internationally.

This sub-group addressed the opportunities presented in Blackall-Tambo making the best use of its assets and the following ideas with a strong focus on building the amenity and tourism potential of the region emerged from discussion. *The first three ideas listed below were prioritised (voted) by the group as most pressing.*

1. Council appoint a dedicated tourism and events development officer focussed on the Blackall Tambo Regional Council area.
2. Develop more effective and targeted marketing of the region including to tourism organisations, government agencies and on the web.
3. Establish stronger and more productive local business networks including across the region, extending possibly the format of the Tambo Business and Tourism Board.
4. Beautify towns, improve street-scaping, fill Tambo Dam and re-purpose vacant buildings.
5. Encourage visitation by providing free camping permits and facilities.
6. Organise bird watch tours Stratford Blackall Tambo.
7. Develop tour packages based out of Blackall and Tambo from half a day to one week.
8. Utilise the wool scour as a centre of immersive pastoral and heritage focussed tourism, including developing a bed and breakfast facility in the old shearers' quarters.
9. Extend the utility of the wool scour by developing partnerships with the education (Universities/TAFE) and creative arts sectors to explore other options.
10. Build interpretative historical centres on the sites of old railway sidings (eg Jericho to Yaraka via Blackall) and design local loop tours.
11. Resettle refugees in vacant houses.
12. Encourage community ownership by cooperation, consultation, conversation and cooperative decision-making.

Focussing on what has to change for this to happen and what could be done differently, the group suggested that a strong focus on consultation and community inclusion in the process was paramount:

1. Develop interactive creative ways to engage people and gather feedback eg an application for IPAD, use of smart phone and other mobile technology to enable people to vote on ideas.
2. Engage the dis-engaged, listen respectfully and gather their views,
3. Continue this cooperative conversation in the community.
4. Foster pride by valuing our people.

5.0 Close and Next Steps

In closing the group re-formed into the whole and discussed what the priority steps should be for each of the major strategies identified.

In making best use of its assets, the group suggested next steps should include:

1. appointment of a tourism development officer;
2. preparation of an effective tourism and regional marketing strategy, and
3. detailed research be undertaken into possible markets including markets accessible by social media.

In launching the next steps on promoting local lifelong learning and opportunity, the group suggested that the following should be done in partnership between the Council and local business and community groups:

1. Create a tourism-business network in Blackall-Tambo.
2. Research and provide information for people seeking opportunities for further training.
3. A Blackall-Tambo Business Expo be held with a focus on creating Elder/Younger Skills Exchange.
4. Partnerships between local business and schools be extended and broadened to provide work experience for school students.

When asked about what type of follow-up they would like to see arising from the workshop, the group said that:

- 1.** This report from today should be provided to the participants.
- 2.** Group participants should talk to local business and to existing community groups and tell them about what we did today.
- 3.** This "future pathways" process should be opened up to other interested community members and could be linked also to the Neighbourhood Centres work being done for BTRC by Virginia Wacker and Ian Plowman.
- 4.** This type of process could be useful for sharing information between Blackall and Tambo communities.
- 5.** Each of us should speak about the possibilities of community doing things more broadly and collaboratively
- 6.** We want to stay involved in this process – we are all interested in being involved in continuing discussions.
- 7.** The Council must be involved.
- 8.** We should follow the lead of other successful community activities.
- 9.** Create the tourism business group in Blackall
- 10.** Speak positively about this discussion experience

Finally, at the closing of the workshop remaining members of the group were asked what the group and its participants should say when communicating about what we've done today?

- What did we do today?
 - We've shared our passions and information about our community and learned new things from each other.
 - We've developed and shared a vision for our region.
 - We've set some priorities and suggested some specific actions.
 - We've bridged Blackall-Tambo in our thinking, tried to act as one community, and considered things in a broader regional setting.
 - Brainstormed ideas for the future of the area, and it's exciting, you should join the journey
 - Saw the positives in the town and the region
 - We've got the ideas, we now need to not let it slip

- What was different about today?
 - We've been positive today, not negative

ⁱ Ludema, JD, Cooperrider DL, and Barrett, FJ Appreciative Inquiry: The Power of the Unconditional Positive Question. <http://www.2012waic.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Ludema-Cooperrider-Barrett-goed.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Bliss Brown, Imagine Chicago.