

*Proactively shaping and creating a prosperous future for the  
RAPAD region of Outback Queensland*

# RAPAD State Election 10 Point Policy Plan

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**RAPAD**  
REMOTE AREA PLANNING &  
DEVELOPMENT BOARD



## OUR RAPAD

The Remote Area Planning and Development Board (RAPAD) is the regional organisation of councils for Central Western Queensland proactively shaping and creating a prosperous future for its seven member councils and their communities at the heart of the Outback.

RAPAD has been in existence since 1992 and is now the state's most successful regional organisation of councils. Through its focus on innovation, creativity, consultation and collaboration RAPAD has an enviable track record of successfully partnering with local, state and federal governments, communities and private sector stakeholders.

RAPAD is the peak economic development body for the region; the lead advocate for its member councils; a registered training organisation and a proactive, credible and respected administrative body with a proven track record of delivery of federal and state government policy and program objectives.

## OUR REGION

The RAPAD region comprises the seven local government areas of Barcaldine, Barcoo, Blackall-Tambo, Boulia, Diamantina, Longreach and Winton.

These councils have responsibility for:

- a total land area of 396,650km<sup>2</sup> - 21% of the total State,
- a population of 10,500 (Census 2016) - 0.22% of the State
- 14,145km of local roads
- 5,932 water connections
- 5,478 sewerage connections, and
- 5,410 rubbish services.

Forty-two councillors and 688 employees serve these communities in sustaining and growing their economic, environmental and social wellbeing.

## OUR LEADERSHIP

All seven councils have been fully drought declared since 2014. The RAPAD region has been hard hit by the millennium drought, a contributing factor to its loss of 1,515 residents between 2011 and 2016 census. But leadership is the hallmark of RAPAD and its member councils.

Over the past two years RAPAD has undertaken extensive community consultation in planning for the future of the region. This has included:

- *RAPAD Pathfinder* Initiative undertaken by the Regional Australia Institute in conjunction with the Department of State Development.
- *Pathways to the Future: Community Workshops* undertaken by the University of Southern Queensland's Institute of Resilient Regions.
- *Central West Regional Transport Plan* in conjunction with the Department of Transport and Main Roads.
- *Regional Strategic Financial Review* in conjunction with the Queensland Treasury Corporation.
- *Community Consultation Report* undertaken by Glenworth GWI, and
- *Smart Central Western Queensland: A Community Enabled Digital Plan* developed in conjunction with the Department of Science, Information Technology and Innovation.

The recently released digital plan, a first in regional Australia, identifies the innovative and digital as well as non-digital transformational opportunities available to the region. This plan and the outcomes of the other studies have provided the basis for RAPAD's Strategic Plan 2018 - 2020 focused on not only maintaining but also growing and diversifying the region's economic, environmental and social wellbeing into the future.

**10,500 people**

**396,650 km<sup>2</sup>**

**21%**  
of the State

**7** local govt  
areas



## OUR PLAN

RAPAD on behalf of its seven member councils and the communities of the Central West now seeks support from the parties contesting the upcoming state election for the following regional priorities aimed at making the region more attractive for investment, lowering the costs of living and better able to attract and retain families for its future.

1

### GROWING BUSINESS AND COMMUNITY DIGITAL CONNECTIONS

#### 1.1 The continuation of the Advance Queensland program or a similar program.

This program, supporting start-ups, small business and platform technologies, in particular, drones and big data, is at the heart of innovation and economic diversification in the regions. Also of high priority are initiatives that support the regions such as the regional innovation hubs and creating regional tourism jobs through increased international visitors, development of innovative tourism packages and digital drive connections.

In addition, support is required for the ongoing implementation of RAPAD's *Smart Central Western Queensland: A Community Enabled Digital Plan*.

#### 1.2 Supporting the continued roll out of fibre optic telecommunications backhaul, mobile phone blackspots program and point-to-point radio connectivity.

This support is required to provide nationally comparable telecommunications connectivity and reliability to all communities in the Central West, fill in mobile phone blackspots and provide competition and choice in internet providers. This will enable the delivery of school curriculums, many eHealth and telehealth services, better disaster management, improve telemetry capability and bring down the costs to rural and remote customers.

In many cases, marginal telecommunications services, the high costs of improved internet connectivity, and expensive and limited data allowances are preventing agricultural and start-up innovation and entrepreneurship, attracting new and constraining established businesses, on-line education services and shared service opportunities between councils and collaboration with the private sector.

2

### SECURING ESSENTIAL INFRASTRUCTURE TO SUPPORT ECONOMIC GROWTH AND COMMUNITY WELLBEING

#### 2.1 Increased funding of the Transport Infrastructure Development Scheme (TIDS), with a revised contribution methodology for rural and remote councils.

The TIDS program is the long standing mainstay of funding on local roads of regional significance across the region and continued growth in these funds is required to support increased freight movements and improve network safety. The 50-50 matching requirement for local roads under the Roads and Transport Alliance is difficult for an increasing number of rural and remote councils. A revised formula recognising need and capacity to pay would be welcomed by these councils.

#### 2.2 Continuation of the Western Roads Upgrade Program

Continuation of this program or a similar program is necessary with a focus on upgrading gravel roads to all weather standard and finishing essential freight network connectors to create a "total network" – east to west as well as north to south in the Central West. These connections are essential to improving drive tourism opportunities and providing residents with safe and reliable access to education and health services.

**14,145km**  
of local roads...  
around the distance from  
Brisbane to Chiacago, US.



**2.3 A referral to the Queensland Productivity Commission to undertake a review of passenger and freight services for rural and regional Queensland including rail, air and bus services.**

The inequitable and prohibitively high cost of air fares to the Central West unfairly impacts on private health, education and recreational travel as well as small business operations. It is also a factor in the difficulty involved in the attraction and retention of staff and families in the regions. The continuation of rail freight services from Winton to Rockhampton and the ultimate upgrade of the line need to be addressed in the referral to the Commission.

**2.4 A dedicated co-investment program to ensure the security of supply of drinking water and sustainable sewerage services to rural and regional communities.**

Urban water supply and sewerage services are essential for community health and liveability. Across the RAPAD region there are 16 communities with these services – 11 have treated water and nine have sewerage services. Many of these services are approaching the end of their useful lives and replacement is beyond the resources of the councils. Originally constructed with State Government support a similar program is now required to assist with their upgrade and/or replacement.

3

### HELPING COUNCILS MANAGE COMMUNITY ASSETS AND MAINTAIN WORKFORCES

**3.1 Establish a grants and subsidies framework by July 2019 that enables greater certainty and long-term planning for rural and regional councils to better manage their assets, revenue forecasts and sustain their workforce and communities.**

Rural and regional councils rely heavily on external funding to sustain their communities. Short term grant and subsidy programs do not support strategic and focused infrastructure investment or asset management. The hit and miss nature of annual funding programs also places at risk the stability of council workforces, the backbone of many smaller and remote communities.

**3.2 Maintain a state-wide dedicated allocative annual fund for local job creation linked to maintenance and capital works similar to the Works for Queensland Program.**

This highly successful and welcomed approach should be continued during the transition to the systemic grants and subsidies reform currently being developed by the Local Government Association of Queensland and the Department of Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning. The guaranteed funding and flexibility available under this program have enabled a quick response to job creation opportunities and work programs acknowledging the diverse nature and requirements of communities across Queensland.

4

### PROTECTING THE RURAL ECONOMY

**4.1 Continuation of the co-investment Queensland Feral Pest Initiative or a similar program enabling an expansion of the RAPAD Cluster Fencing Program by a further \$10 million over four years.**

Funding of \$7.6 million over the past two years under this program together with landholder co-contributions has already proved its worth with an independent assessment demonstrating the economic, social and environmental benefits of cluster fencing to the region and Queensland's economy. This assessment shows a \$3.76 regional benefit for every \$1 of Government expenditure. The long term goal is for this funding to be the catalyst for growing jobs and achieving significant improvement in the profitability of regional businesses both rural and non-rural.

**4.2 Increased funding and regionally coordinated control measures for prickly acacia and weeds of national significance.**

The RAPAD region, lying within the Lake Eyre Basin Catchment, relies economically and socially on its rich, culturally important, agricultural sector. As pest animals and plants hinder, and in some cases destroy, productive agricultural performance RAPAD seeks increased, regionally coordinated, and long term funding for continued pest animal and plant eradication and control measures, especially for the highly invasive prickly acacia.

5

**GROWING TOURISM TO DIVERSIFY THE ECONOMY**

Increased State Government investment in Regional Tourism Organisations and a stronger focus on partnership and collaboration between the State Government, Local Government and private sector in tourism product, market and infrastructure development.

The RAPAD region has a long history of successful innovation and entrepreneurship in the development of its tourism industry. To capitalise on this investment and to further diversify and expand product and market opportunities, particularly for increased international visitation and recognition as a global destination, the State Government needs to further support the region’s energy, expertise and commitment to tourism. Increased funding for skilling, tourism digitisation initiatives, the Outback Queensland Tourism Association, and all regional tourism organisations, and a stronger relationship and engagement with RAPAD will be of mutual advantage to all parties.



**FOCUSING ON A RENEWABLE ENERGY FUTURE**

The State Government, in partnership with RAPAD, investigates further expansion of the renewable energy opportunities available to member councils.

RAPAD has a long history of promoting the development of alternative energy sources in Western Queensland through its involvement in the development of geothermal exploration and production legislation. Recognising the potential for base load, zero emission and totally renewable energy sources and industry RAPAD welcomes the changing political environment for the emerging opportunities provided by these renewable and clean energy alternatives.

Longreach, Barcaldine and Winton have already embarked on solar and geo-thermal energy programs. If the RAPAD region was to meet the State Government’s renewable energy target of 50% through residential households and small businesses it can generate savings of more than \$70 million in foregone Community Service Obligation payments by 2031. The development of a renewable energy hub in the Central West taking advantage of rapidly improving battery back-up and storage, undertaken in collaboration with councils and the private sector, would create ongoing savings for the councils and reliable energy alternatives supporting existing and future business and community needs.

6



7

**RESPONDING TO THE ECONOMIC AND PERSONAL COSTS OF DROUGHT**

Continued State Government drought relief support for rural landholders and small businesses suffering the ongoing economic and personal hardships of the millennium drought in the Central West.

All seven local government areas in the RAPAD region have been drought declared since 2014 and despite some relief between 2011 and 2013 are now suffering a recurring cycle of worsening drought conditions. The region’s population loss between 2011 and 2016 is testament to the challenges faced by the landholders and their communities. State Government long term, low interest loans for rural landholders and financial support for community events is vital for the sustainability of rural industries and the mental health of residents committed to the region and its future.



**Savings of more than \$70M**  **through investment in renewable energy.**

**Financial support through drought delivers benefits across the region.** 



## DEVELOPING WORLD CLASS HEALTH SERVICES FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES

State Government and the local health service collaborate with RAPAD and member councils in the identification and development of world class health standards in rural and regional communities.

The RAPAD region is typified by vast distances and small isolated populations. Statistics indicate that in these regions life expectancy is lower and chronic disease is more prevalent than in urban areas. The RAPAD region is entitled to excellence in health care and seeks from government that they, the local health service and local government work together in consistent and collaborative ways to assist in building resilience, acting on chronic disease burdens and improving access to mental health support.

**Statistics indicate that life expectancy is lower and chronic disease is more prevalent than in urban areas.**



**The Central West is well placed to deliver cost effective aged care services.**

**RAPAD's Cluster Fencing Program delivered \$3.76 regional benefit**



**for every \$1 of Govt investment.**



## IMPLEMENTING STOCK ROUTE MANAGEMENT REFORM

Funding be provided to assist RAPAD and member councils proactively implement the new Stock Route Network Management legislation.

The *Stock Route Network Management Bill 2016* provides much needed reform to the management of the State's stock route network. Current inequities will be addressed by the new legislation but implementation will involve significant change for all stakeholders – councils, landholders and network users. State Government financial support is necessary to ensure successful implementation of the reforms in the interests of all parties.



## SECURING HEALTHY AGED LIVING SERVICES FOR OUR SENIORS

State Government collaboration with RAPAD and its member councils for improved coordination in the identification and delivery of healthy aged living services in the home and the community.

Rural and regional communities have been built by the passion, dedication and selfless hard work of many generations of extended families. At a time of declining population every resident, old and young, is vital to not only maintaining the foundations on which rural Queensland can be sustained, but also provide the springboard to the ultimate transition to a more diversified and value added economy. The provision of aged care facilities and services, for example, "Ageing in Place" infrastructure, domestic assistance programs, clinical care and community based services are vital and would benefit from improved coordination across governments, private sector and not-for-profit service providers.

The Central West is well placed to deliver cost effective aged care services not only to people whose roots are in the region but also to people and families who would welcome these services being provided in a smaller, more inclusive and hassle free living environment.