

Western NSW Regional Advisory Council

General Election Meeting Minutes

Tuesday 12 September 2023

Via Zoom

1 Welcome & Attendance

Matthew Irvine welcomed all those in attendance.

In attendance: Matt Irvine (Westhaven Ltd), Rob Drage (Rob Drage Consulting), Daniel Sutton (Business Orange), & Justin Enright (Oberon Business & Tourism Association).

Apologies: Ellie Brown, Ellie Brown Consulting

Staff: Vicki Seccombe (Regional Director – Western NSW)

2 Previous Minutes

The minutes of the General Election Meeting held on Thursday 30 September were confirmed.

3 Regional Director's Report

Vicki Seccombe reported as following;

Since our previous Annual General Meeting in 2021, Business NSW and the Western NSW region has continued to grow & evolve.

At our meeting in 2021, we had started to move away from COVID, but headed into skills and housing shortages, interest rate rises, increased inflation and the cost of doing business was increasing rapidly.

Investment into regions, particularly Western NSW, has been on the rise throughout this time – Central West REZ, Parkes Special Activation Precinct, and Critical Minerals Zone to name a few. But these investments have not come without issues including exacerbating the housing crisis and workforce shortages, and affecting tourism and agricultural land in some areas. These are issue we are still grappling with currently.

Staffing for the WNSW office has remained with just the Regional Director, but this will shortly boosted to include a Strategic Partnerships Manager.

Membership

At the 2019 AGM our numbers were sitting at 1469 members, in 2021 our member numbers total 2,570 and in 2023 our membership numbers are 3092.

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The current member numbers are split up as following (as at 11 September 2023);

62 voting members (18 local chamber alliance partners)

1121 MyBusiness members

1909 Local Chamber members

Total member numbers: 3092

It was positive to see growth in members, particularly via our local chambers and the MyBusiness membership segment. Voting members have stayed steady.

The responsibility for membership in the regions moved to a central team in HQ in 2020. Moving forwards, HQ will continue to be responsible for growing and retaining Business Insights and other legacy memberships, and the Regional Leader membership program will be the main focus within the regions.

As each of the RAC members know, we have just begun to launch the Regional Leader program and we look forward to developing the program further.

We will work with the central team in HQ to increase our voting members across the region, as this will help us increase our numbers on the RAC and in particular include more members from different parts of the region.

We were pleased to welcome Warren Chamber of Commerce on board as an Alliance Partner. Whilst we were disappointed that Broken Hill Chamber of Commerce a number of years ago, we are pleased to advise that we are continuing to work closely with them now to get the chamber back up and running.

Meetings with local chamber President's has dropped off in the past year or so, with only 3 to 5 President's in attendance at most meetings. I'll be reviewing this and seeing if I able to create a more attractive opportunity to connect.

Over the past year, some of the highlights have included;

Policy & Advocacy

There have been a range of submissions and thought leadership pieces, including;

- Regional Telecommunications Review – September 2021
- NSW Electricity Infrastructure Roadmap – October 2021
- Review of Infrastructure Australia – August 2022
- Securing Australia's Gas Supply – August 2022
- SIRA's Review of the self-audit process – February 2023 – where Business NSW submitted that it would prefer a rolling set of audits being conducted by the regulator.
- The NSW Governments Independent Review of SafeWork NSW – February 2023 – where Business NSW stated its concerns that SafeWork NSW is

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becoming increasingly focussed on outcomes of incidents as opposed to driving safe behaviours.

- Annual Wage Review – March 2023 – Business NSW set out recommendations for 3.5% increase in the National Minimum Wage, in addition to the 0.5% increase in the Superannuation Guarantee.
- Perceptions and status of the Vocational Education and Training Sector – March 2023 – Business NSW set out the concerns of members and poor perceptions on the status of the VET sector.
- Housing Now Alliance – Launched September 2023 and a range of Thought Leadership pieces to be launched shortly, including Workers Compensation, Insurance and Business Risk protection, and Managing Mental Health in the Workplace

Workforce and Housing affordability/availability across the regions continues to be a major concern and we continue to advocate with both levels of governments for different levers to be pulled.

In addition to these components, we continued our 'business as usual' submissions towards State and Federal Budgets, Productive Commissioner Reviews, Local Government Planning, and WHS.

There was a change in both the Federal and State Governments to Labor, which has meant a lot of new faces and a change in our working environments and waiting for the State Budget to drop shortly as to ascertain where funding will lie.

We are continuing to meet regularly with our local State and Federal MPs, plus build our connections with Labor Ministerial offices.

With the introduction of the Regional Leader program, we will continue to build a more stronger local advocacy platform.

Western NSW Business Awards

The Western NSW Business Awards have been run in 2022 and 2023 since our last meeting and 2023 was our largest yet being held in Orange. There were 210 attendees with 71 finalists. Our aim is not to be the largest awards, but to be the Regional Awards with a high calibre of entrants that are predominantly being fed in from our Local Chambers.

Building awareness of Business NSW

With the change in name and branding in early 2020, it has taken some time for people to become familiar with Business NSW, but it continues to grow and whilst this is a hard one to quantify, a snapshot of the media coverage, regular meetings with key stakeholders and increases to the social media networks is as following:

Media coverage

Media is monitored via HQ and the process to monitor the media has changed since our last AGM and it is no longer a point score system, but a "mentions"

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system. Coverage across all mediums in Western NSW is sitting at 81 mentions for the last financial year.

Topics included Regional Business Awards, Infrastructure, Reducing Red Tape, Workforce Skills, Skilled Migration, Budget announcements, Business Confidence Survey, Christmas retail spending, local NSWBC events and attendance at local chamber events.

Social Media

Regular posting on social media channels has seen the increase of followers in 2021 to 2023 as following;

Facebook from 1244 to 1621

LinkedIn – there was a larger focus on my personal LinkedIn, rather than the company page – so this is sitting at around 200 followers. But I have started to work on this page again and will continue to build the page moving forwards.

Twitter – We closed the Twitter account during this time.

I would like to take the opportunity to acknowledge a number of key people;

- Rob Drage, as our previous Regional President and Mathew Irvine, as our current Regional President for their support and representation of our regional members
- Ellie Brown, as our very knowledgeable and Board Representative,
- And finally, I would like to thank all of you for your contributions as councillors. Your support is greatly appreciated by all of our members and I am looking forward to working with you.

4 Election of Regional Councillors

Vicki Secombe declared that a total of 4 nominations have been received for the Election of Regional Councillors. All nominations are financial members, have been endorsed by 2 financial members and the number of candidates is not greater than 20. All nominations (as listed below) were duly elected as Regional Councillors.

Matthew Irvine, Westhaven Ltd
Rob Drage, Rob Drage Consulting
Daniel Sutton, Business Orange
Justin Enright, Oberon Business & Tourism Association

5 Other Business

There was no other business.