



JOINT ORGANISATIONS REVIEW

JOINT ORGANISATION PROFILES – VOLUME 2

**THE NSW OFFICE OF LOCAL
GOVERNMENT, DEPARTMENT OF
PLANNING, INDUSTRY AND THE
ENVIRONMENT**

OCTOBER 26, 2021

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work was completed with the assistance of the Office of Local Government in the New South Wales (NSW) Government Department of Planning, Industry and the Environment.

We would like to thank the many participants from joint organisations and other stakeholder groups. We thank them for their time and insights and trust that their views are adequately represented in this report.

The full list of those consulted is provided in Section 2.3.

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1. INTRODUCTION TO THE JOINT ORGANISATION PROFILES

1.1 PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

In 2017, the NSW Parliament passed the *Local Government Amendment (Regional Joint Organisations) Act 2017*, to establish a network of joint organisations (JOs). The JOs are local government entities with legal powers to enable councils to work together at a regional level and with state agencies and other organisations to achieve better planning, economic development and service delivery outcomes in regional NSW.

The Office of Local Government (OLG), Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (DPIE) contracted ARTD to review the JO framework. The overall objective of this review was to ensure the effectiveness of the JO framework, so that JOs can deliver their core functions.

The **Terms of Reference** for the Review were:

- Analysis of what has worked in the establishment of the JOs, and what barriers exist to good governance.
- How effective the JO model has been in supporting JOs to deliver against the core objectives of advocacy, strategic leadership and better outcomes for regional communities.
- How the delivery of core objectives can be measured.
- How other NSW and Commonwealth agencies work with the JO network and value the contribution of the JO network.
- Overview of JO achievements and opportunities to share learnings from those achievements.
- How the \$150,000 capacity building funding has been used and the value of that funding program to the ongoing sustainability of JOs.
- Identification of barriers to success of the JO model.
- What a successful JO network looks like and how it can be realised.

Volume 1 provides an overview assessment of the JO model and key findings against the terms of reference.

This report (Volume 2) provides detailed information about how each of the 13 JOs is tracking against the core functions of the JO model.

1.2 METHODS

This was a mixed methods review, including collection and analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data sources (Table 1).

TABLE 1. SUMMARY OF METHODS AND DATA SOURCES FOR THE REVIEW

Method	Sample size	Details
Document review	23 documents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Peer-reviewed publications describing good practice in regional governance to understand how the JO model compares with other approaches to regional governance. Policy documents, including regulatory and compliance documents and NSW Audit Office reviews. Demographic and financial data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics and Office of Local Government about JOs and their member councils
General Manager survey	51 responses (59% response rate)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Online survey distributed by email to general managers of all JO member councils (n=87).
Key stakeholder interviews	82 interviews	Semi-structured interviews with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Office of Local Government staff, including Council Engagement Managers and senior strategic policy staff (n=5) JO Chairs (n=13) JO executive officers (n=13) Member council mayors (n=5) Member council general managers (n=13) Other JO project staff (n=2) Regional Directors (Regional NSW) (n=4) NSW state agency representatives, including the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (DPIE) Water (n=4), Regional Planning (n=4); Destination NSW (n=1); Resilience NSW (n=6); Western Catchment Management Authority (n=1) JO associate members, including peak bodies (n=7) Regional Development Australia committees (n=4)

Data for each of the JO profiles draws on information from all of the relevant documentation and all interviews conducted with stakeholders for each JO. To preserve the confidentiality of interview participants, we have not presented the views of any particular individual, rather, we have sought to synthesise the information provided by all interviewees for each JO.

In addition, we have reported the findings of the survey of general managers at the JO level as an indication of sentiment on a range of issues across the JO. In some instances, where the number of respondents is very low for a particular JO, we have not been able to report findings due to the imperative to maintain confidentiality.

1.3 THE JOINT ORGANISATIONS

There are 13 joint organisations, with members from 87 regional councils (Table 2).

TABLE 2. JOINT ORGANISATIONS AND MEMBERSHIP, JULY 2021

Joint organisation	Council members
Canberra Region	Bega Valley, Eurobodalla, Goulburn-Mulwaree, Hilltops, Queanbeyan-Palerang, Snowy Monaro, Snowy Valleys, Upper Lachlan, Wingecarribee, Yass Valley
Central NSW	Bathurst, Blayney, Cabonne, Cowra, Forbes, Lachlan, Oberon, Orange, Parkes, Weddin
Hunter	Cessnock, Dungog, Lake Macquarie, Maitland, Mid-Coast, Muswellbrook, Newcastle, Port Stephens, Singleton, Upper Hunter
Illawarra Shoalhaven	Kiama, Shellharbour, Shoalhaven, Wollongong
Namoi	Gunnedah, Gwydir, Liverpool Plains, Tamworth, Walcha
New England	Armidale, Glen Innes Severn, Inverell, Uralla, Moree Plains, Narrabri, Tenterfield
Northern Rivers	Ballina, Byron, Kyogle, Lismore, Richmond Valley, Tweed
Orana	Bogan, Gilgandra, Mid-Western, Narromine, Warren, Warrumbungle
Riverina and Murray	Albury, Berrigan, Carrathool, Edward River, Federation, Griffith, Hay, Leeton, Murray River, Murrumbidgee, Narrandera
Riverina	Bland, Coolamon, Cootamundra-Gundagai, Greater Hume, Junee, Lockhart, Temora, Wagga
Mid North Coast	Port Macquarie-Hastings, Kempsey, Bellingen
Far North West	Bourke, Cobar, Walgett
Far South West	Balranald, Broken Hill, Central Darling, Wentworth

1.4 ABOUT THE JOINT ORGANISATIONS

The 13 joint organisations are made up of member councils that represent enormously divergent populations, ranging from major coastal population centres with strong growth and diversified economies (e.g. Wollongong, Newcastle), through to very sparsely populated areas with extremely limited resources (e.g. Far West). The demographic profiling in this report highlights the importance of considering differing needs and challenges in each of the JOs.

Some key demographic features for each JO is presented in Table 3.

TABLE 3. JOINT ORGANISATION DEMOGRAPHIC SUMMARY

Joint organisation	Most common member classification	Most common Main industry employer	Sum of Population	Average median age (2016 census-quick stats)	Sum of JO Area (km2)	Average Population Density per capita/km2	Sum of Total Rate Revenue (\$'000)	Average Socio-Economic Index Ranking 2016	Average Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islanders Population (%)
Canberra	Regional Town/City	Healthcare & Social Assistance	292,901	45.4	63,321.5	6.7	210,511.0	71.3	3.4
Central	Large Rural	Agriculture	159,050	42.5	47,129.7	17.9	117,430.5	55.8	7.2
Hunter	Regional Town/City	Health Care and Social Assistance	740,676	40.7	32,748.1	154.7	546,281.0	61.9	5.5
Far North West	Large Rural	Mining, Agriculture	13,403	38.33	109,487.2	0.1	12,670.0	31.3	24.9
Far South West	Rural	Agriculture,	28,953	42.25	101,609.2	26.2	23,565.0	22.0	16.6
Illawarra Shoalhaven	Regional Town/City	Health Care & Social Assistance	415,688	43.25	5,655.8	229.5	302,101.0	79.0	3.4
Mid-North Coast	Regional Town/City	Health Care & Social Assistance	125,759	48	8,658.5	13.2	77,294.0	45.0	6.4

Joint organisation	Most common member classification	Most common Main industry employer	Sum of Population	Average median age (2016 census-quick stats)	Sum of JO Area (km2)	Average Population Density per capita/km2	Sum of Total Rate Revenue (\$'000)	Average Socio-Economic Index Ranking 2016	Average Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islanders Population (%)
Namoi	Large Rural	Agriculture	91,191	44.2	35,474.3	2.3	66,009.0	46.4	9.4
New England	Large Rural	Agriculture	95,740	43.14	64,168.7	1.7	89,702.0	38.1	9.8
Northern Rivers	Regional Town/City	Health Care & Social Assistance	251,002	46	10,277.7	45.0	155,091.0	53.2	4.3
Orana	Rural	Agriculture	50,644	43.5	56,571.1	1.0	44,591.0	33.8	13.4
Riverina	Large Rural	Agriculture,	113,319	43.13	33,461.3	3.4	79,464.0	60.5	4.3
Riverina and Murray	Large Rural	Agriculture,	150,042	43.55	72,867.5	19.3	109,737.0	47.0	5.1

CLASSIFICATION AND INDUSTRY

Each JO has been classified based on the median classification across all of its member councils. Eight of the JOs are classified overall as rural areas and the remaining five are classified as regional towns. While of course, the overall classification does not capture the diversity within each JO, it does provide a broad sense of the potential challenges for JOs that are overwhelmingly rural. Of the eight JOs that are classified as rural, all list agriculture as their primary industry, with only Far North West also listing mining. In JOs where regional towns predominate, primary industries are listed as healthcare and social support, indicating that these JOs have at least one significant regional service hub.

POPULATION

The total populations for each JO range from just 13,403 in the Far North West JO, up to 740,676 in the Hunter JO which takes in the major population hubs of Lake Macquarie and Newcastle. Population size has major implications for the revenue available to the JO as well as issues such as a strong local skills base from which to draw. Areas with higher populations are more likely to have better access to a range of services and have greater potential for realising economies of scale in local government administration.

LAND SIZE, POPULATION DENSITY

The largest JO in geographic terms is also the smallest in population. Across an area of over 109,000 square kilometres, the Far North West JO has a population density of 0.1 people per square kilometre. While the Far South West JO appears to have a substantially higher population density, the inclusion of Broken Hill which accounts for 61% of the population, masks the otherwise very low population density. JOs with very low population density are likely to face significant challenges in providing services equitably across vast geographic areas. The Illawarra Shoalhaven JO has the smallest land mass of any JO and the second highest population overall, giving it by far the highest population density of 229.5 people per square kilometre.

AGE AND ETHNICITY

Notably, the average median age in every JO is higher than the NSW median age of 38, indicating that issues of an ageing population are likely to be felt more strongly in the regions.

Similarly, the average percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians across every JO is higher than that of NSW overall. Far West, Far North West and Orana JOs have substantial proportions of their population who are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (between 13% and 24%) with implications for specific needs that are different.

TOTAL RATE REVENUE

The total rate revenue for each JO was calculated using data from the NSW Local Government publicly available data set for 2018/19¹².

This measure is a proxy for understanding the extent to which member councils of JOs are financially able to support the costs of running a JO. The data presented in Table 3 shows that there are discrepancies between JOs that are financially relatively robust and those which appear more vulnerable. The Far North West, Far South West and Orana JOs have the lowest available rate revenues of all the JOs. Conversely, Hunter, Illawarra Shoalhaven and Canberra JOs have the highest rate revenues.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC INDEX RANKING (FOR NSW)

ABS provides relative rankings for advantage and disadvantage, based on the Socio-Economic Index for Areas (SEIFA), for all local government areas (LGAs) in NSW. The ranks were given from 1 being the most disadvantaged LGA (Brewarrina), to 128, being the least disadvantaged LGA (Kuringai) in NSW. The rankings provided in Table 3 show an average of the member councils' rankings. The JOs with the lowest rankings (Far North West, Far South West and Orana) are also those with the lowest rate revenues, low population density and highest Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations.

SUMMARY

The demographic data highlights the extent to which the JOs are each operating from different starting points in terms of the revenue available to support them and the range of challenges they are facing.

The chapters that follow are brief regional profiles for each of the JOs.

¹ <https://www.olg.nsw.gov.au/public/about-councils/comparative-council-information/your-council-report/>

² By finding the sum of 'Total residential rate revenue', 'Total farm rate revenue', 'Total business rate revenue' and 'Total mining rate revenue' for each member council, a total rate revenue for each member council was calculated. These totals were then added together to calculate the total rate revenue available to the JO.

2. PROFILE OF CANBERRA REGION JOINT ORGANISATION

BACKGROUND

The Canberra Region JO takes in an extensive area of NSW that surrounds the Australian Capital Territory (ACT). The Canberra region is the most southern JO and with 10 member councils it has one of the largest memberships. Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional has the largest population but Snowy Monaro Regional has the largest council area. The 10 member councils cover a diverse geography of coastal, metropolitan, peri-urban, rural and remote locations. Larger member councils in this JO have played an important role in supporting the smaller councils taking on a hosting role for the JO staff. The geographic diversity is consistent with its socio-economic diversity with rankings of advantage across the JO ranging from low (32 in Hilltops) to high (109 in Yass Valley).

The operational funding for the Canberra Region JO is sourced from member council contributions, grants and other income sources.³

³ According to the CRJO Revenue Policy other income sources includes project income, procurement rebate administration, other revenue and MV private use. The report is available here <https://crjo.nsw.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2019-2020-CRJO-Revenue-Policy.pdf>.

TABLE 4. PROFILE OF MEMBER COUNCILS, CANBERRA JOINT ORGANISATION

Canberra JO members	Classified as	Main employer	Sum of Population	Median age (2016 census-quick stats)	Sum of Council Area (km ²)	Average of Population Density per capita/km ²	Sum of Total Rate Revenue (\$'000)	Average of Socio-Economic Index Rating 2016	Average of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islanders Population (%)
Bega Valley	Regional Town/City	Health Care & Social Assistance	34,348.0	51	6,278.9	5.5	23,608.0	57.0	3.1
Eurobodalla	Regional Town/City	Health Care & Social Assistance	38,288.0	54	3,428.2	11.2	29,906.0	40.0	5.6
Goulburn Mulwaree	Regional Town/City	Health Care & Social Assistance	30,852.0	42	3,220.1	9.6	19,963.0	52.0	4.0
Hilltops	Large Rural	Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	18,782.0	44	7,140.9	2.6	12,420.0	32.0	4.4
Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional	Regional Town/City	Public Administration & Safety	59,959.0	38	5,318.9	11.3	36,407.0	108.0	3.1
Snowy Monaro Regional	Regional Town/City	Accommodation & Food Services	20,733.0	43	15,163.5	1.4	15,761.0	90.0	2.2
Snowy Valleys	Large Rural	Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	14,532.0	45	8,959.0	1.6	9,045.0	34.0	4.4

Canberra JO members	Classified as	Main employer	Sum of Population	Median age (2016 census-quick stats)	Sum of Council Area (km2)	Average of Population Density per capita/km2	Sum of Total Rate Revenue (\$'000)	Average of Socio-Economic Index Rating 2016	Average of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islanders Population (%)
Upper Lachlan	Large Rural	Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	7,961.0	48	7,127.4	1.1	6,922.0	91.0	2.3
Wingecarribee	Regional Town/City	Health Care & Social Assistance	50,493.0	47	2,689.3	18.8	46,459.0	100.0	2.0
Yass Valley	Large Rural	Public Administration & Safety	16,953.0	42	3,995.3	4.2	10,020.0	109.0	2.5
Overall	Regional Town/City	Healthcare & Social Assistance	292,901.0	45.4	63,321.5	6.7	210,511.0	71.3	3.4

STRATEGIC PLANNING AND PRIORITY SETTING

The Canberra Region JO has matured in its development and is transitioning from infrastructure projects to issue-based priorities. Of the 13 JOs in the network, the Canberra Region JO is celebrated by some state agency stakeholders as a stand-out in achieving regional strategic planning and delivering on those plans. There is evidence of vertical alignment between local, sub-regional, regional, and State priorities, particularly for transport infrastructure prioritisation (See Major Projects for examples).

The Canberra Region JO has identified six priorities in its Statement of Strategic Regional Priorities. Priority actions are directed at achieving the following priority goals within the Canberra region:

- Canberra Region JO is a recognised leader in regional advocacy and the regional delivery of regional programs
- The economy is strong and diverse, with extensive business and job opportunities
- The Canberra Region is connected and serviced by infrastructure that meets contemporary, emerging and future expectations
- The community is resilient and feels informed, connected, capable and valued
- The environment is valued and enhanced for future generations
- The Canberra Region operates seamlessly across all boundaries.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL COLLABORATION

The Canberra Region JO experienced what is described by regional stakeholders as ‘furious agreement’ on regional priorities. The JO footprint aligns with how the ACT Government sees the region. The JO is well supported by the ACT Government, for example the ACT Chief Minister has attended the JO Board meetings, and a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) supports collaboration between the ACT Government and JO. The JO supports the ACT Government to have a clear governance model for engaging with Councils in its sphere of influence and particularly those that are not in bi-lateral relationship.

The Canberra Region JO engages small and large councils and other spheres of government. The key mechanisms for inter-governmental collaboration are Memorandums of Understanding, the JO Board and working groups, cross-border commission, and the Regional Leadership Executive (RLE). Attendance of senior agency staff such as the Regional NSW secretary (at JO Board meetings) has been highly valued by the Canberra JO. The outstanding quality of regional staff (NSW Government) is cited as a key feature of the success of the collaboration between the JO and the NSW and ACT Governments. The Canberra Region JO has working arrangements with both the NSW and ACT Governments.

CRJO has two local governments from outside the region that are associate members: Wagga Wagga (NSW) and East Gippsland (Victoria). The third entity with associate membership is Canberra Airport. Wagga Wagga Council sees advantages in its association with the CRJO because they perceive it to be a highly functional regional governance body that has strong working partnerships with the ACT and NSW Governments.

Joint projects (and shared services like joint procurement) demonstrate the value of their JO membership to smaller councils. JO will not seek grants if that competes with members applying for the same grants. The JO Board meetings rotate to different areas around the region. A strength of the JO is

its recognition of the ACT's cross-border communities and the many formal arrangements for working across boundaries and governments.

REGIONAL LEADERSHIP AND ADVOCACY

The proximity to the National Capital and the good working relationship between the JO and the NSW and ACT Governments combine to enable effective regional advocacy. The regional leadership in the JO is evidenced in smaller member councils as well as the larger ones. Regional leadership is enhanced as the 10-member council general managers provide peer to peer support and share their skills and strategic capabilities with each other. Given the range of councils (large to small), the sharing of skills is appreciated as it builds the capacity, insights, and problem-solving abilities of all councils. Like other JOs, the strategic capacity of the executive officer is viewed as critical to the success of the Canberra Region JO.

MAJOR PROJECTS

Canberra Region JO Transport and Freight Planning – The Canberra Region JO manages the complexity of working across jurisdictions including the Territory and Victorian Government boundaries. The Transport and Freight Infrastructure Prospectus is an example of an aligned advocacy document that recognises the hierarchy of transport needed to service all parts of the region and compliment the flow of goods and people from the centre (east-west) throughout.

Southern Lights – Essential Energy is working with the JO to ensure better, safer, cheaper lighting for regional communities across 41 LGAs.

NSW Export Capability Program – the JO has committed to improve freight and export opportunities at Canberra Airport.

Waste and resource recovery – NSW EPA funds the JO to act as the auspice through a shared service arrangement to provide waste and resource recovery services for member councils

KEY CHALLENGES

- Aligning of regional plans and priorities is an ongoing challenge however the development of stakeholder relationships, structured networks and MOUs have gone some way to mitigating these challenges.
- The JO boundaries do not always align with state agency boundaries as they can often change over time. For example, the NSW planning boundaries do not include Snowy Valleys Council. However, the Snowy Valleys Council strongly believe that it has more in common with the Canberra Region JO than the Riverina JO. Snowy Valleys Council successfully gained Ministerial approval to join the Canberra Region JO.
- Implementation of plans requiring NSW State Government support in infrastructure investment has proven challenging.
- The Canberra JO stakeholders cite financial sustainability (core funding) as limiting their capacity due to concerns for long term security.

- State agencies value and understand that the Canberra Region JO is well situated to undertake consultation with member councils on a range of state and regional issues. However, providing resources to support this role is an ongoing challenge.

SURVEY RESPONSES

There was an excellent response rate from Canberra JO general managers (GMs) to the survey with seven out of ten completing the survey (70% response rate). Overall, the GMs had very positive attitudes towards the JO. All respondents agreed that the JO is important for addressing needs in the region and that it is an innovative way of solving problems and providing leadership for regional communities. They also agreed that the benefits of the JO outweigh the efforts needed to maintain it and that the JO can document the outcomes of its collective work.

There was no consensus amongst GMs within the Canberra JO regarding the effectiveness of state government support and engagement processes.

3. PROFILE OF CENTRAL NSW JOINT ORGANISATION

BACKGROUND

Central NSW JO has 10 diverse member councils including two regional towns (Bathurst and Orange) and several smaller rural communities. Agriculture is the predominant employer in the region. The JO members have a long history of collaboration having worked together as the Central NSW Regional Organisation of Councils (ROC) for many years prior to the establishment of the JO. The member councils have diverse levels of socio-economic advantage ranging from 19th most disadvantaged in Cowra, to 97th most disadvantaged in Cabonne. The JO was a pilot JO and has matured with the number of projects that it has capacity to undertake. The JO now has 5 full time equivalent (FTE) staff across 6 positions and has a range of ongoing projects and strong strategic focus. The JO has an informative website that provides further information about all of the projects mentioned in this profile.

The operational funding for the Central NSW JO is sourced from member council contributions, grants, investment revenue and interest and other income sources.⁴

⁴ According to Central NSW Joint Organisation's 2020 Annual Performance Statement other income sources includes procurement rebates, vehicle leaseback, management of aggregated electricity procurement fees, copyright licence fees, training fees, regional tourism group other income, other revenue and gain on disposal of asset. The report is available here https://www.centraljo.nsw.gov.au/content/uploads/Annual-Performance-Statement-2020_FINAL.pdf.

TABLE 5. MEMBER COUNCIL PROFILE, CENTRAL NSW JOINT ORGANISATION

Central JO members	Classified as	Main employer	Population	Median age (2016 census-quick stats)	Council Area (km2)	Population Density per capita/km2	Total Rate Revenue (\$'000)	Socio-Economic Index Ranking 2016	Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islanders Population (%)
Bathurst Regional	Regional Town/City	Education & Training	43,206.0	37	3,817.9	11.3	25,674.0	84.0	5.4
Blayney	Large Rural	Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	7,342.0	42	1,524.6	4.8	8,583.0	74.0	3.7
Cabonne	Large Rural	Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	13,680.0	43	6,022.3	2.3	10,126.0	97.0	3.7
Cowra	Large Rural	Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	12,767.0	47	2,808.8	4.5	6,746.0	19.0	7.9
Forbes	Large Rural	Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	9,910.0	42	4,710.1	2.1	7,239.0	39.0	11.1
Lachlan	Large Rural	Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	6,151.0	40	14,964.3	0.4	6,541.0	25.0	17.7

Central JO members	Classified as	Main employer	Population	Median age (2016 census-quick stats)	Council Area (km2)	Population Density per capita/km2	Total Rate Revenue (\$'000)	Socio-Economic Index Ranking 2016	Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islanders Population (%)
Oberon	Large Rural	Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	5,408.0	45	3,625.0	1.5	4,020.5	59.0	3.4
Orange	Regional Town/City	Health Care & Social Assistance	42,056.0	37	284.2	148.0	32,072.0	77.0	6.3
Parkes	Large Rural	Health Care & Social Assistance	14,894.0	41	5,957.6	2.5	13,702.0	28.0	10.1
Weddin	Rural	Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	3,636.0	51	3,414.9	1.1	2,727.0	56.0	3.1
Overall	Large Rural	Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	159,050.0	42.5	47,129.7	17.9	117,430.5	55.8	7.2

STRATEGIC PLANNING AND PRIORITY SETTING

The Central JO has a clearly articulated strategic plan⁵ which identifies four priorities, corresponding key strategic areas and activities and timeframes and responsibility delegations against these activities. The JO has established multiple working parties to assist with undertaking work set out in the plan which was developed in consultation with all 10 member councils. The regional priorities identified in the Central JO strategic plan are:

- Inter-council co-operation
- Regional prosperity
- Regional transport and infrastructure
- Regional water security.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL COLLABORATION

Central JO is involved in several collaborative projects with a range of state government and other agencies. State agency stakeholders who have worked collaboratively with Central JO report that the JO is a highly effective mechanism by which they have been able to work efficiently and effectively at a regional level. Stakeholders said there were opportunities to further engage with state agency stakeholders to leverage the JO's potential.

The JO EO holds a very clear and firm position that intergovernmental collaboration needs to be purposeful and beneficial for member councils and have an appropriate regional scope. All potential collaborations are assessed with this lens to ensure efficiency in the work of the JO.

REGIONAL LEADERSHIP AND ADVOCACY

Central JO has a formal MOU in place with the Regional Development Authority working in the same region and have clearly defined their respective roles and the areas on which they should work independently and where they can effectively work together, including a workplan for collaborative activities. The cooperative relationship is seen to strengthen both organisations. Having an MOU is intended to provide some protection against relationships being entirely dependent on individuals, provide a clearer understanding of roles and responsibilities, and increase credibility when either or both organisations make approaches to funding bodies.

The JO has had increased engagement with the Regional Leadership Executive relative to the ROC and this has underpinned much of the core work of the JO as well as some of the key projects listed below.

MAJOR PROJECTS

Best Practice in Aggregated Procurement - collaborative procurement for the region to achieve a substantial cost saving (approximately \$1.8 million per year according to JO stakeholders) compared with each council doing it separately. The cost savings are able to be used to fund the JO.

⁵ The plan is available on the website. <https://www.centraljo.nsw.gov.au/content/uploads/FINAL-Centroc-JO-Strategic-Plan-edited-3-March-2020.pdf>

Culture Maps Central NSW – to support local arts and tourism and make art and culture accessible within the region.

EV charging toolkit – identifying key locations to install EV charging stations and helping local businesses to navigate the process of installing charging stations for EVs.

Visiting Family and Relatives Regional Campaign – digital media tourism campaign encouraging visitors to support local businesses while they are there.

Online WHS Contractor Inductions – as an approach to shared services, the JO provides online Workplace Health and Safety inductions for new staff from across all member councils.

Water and Wastewater training – with the Central JO Water Utilities Alliance to support the assurance of high-quality drinking water in regional communities.

Bridges Assessment – a project to assess the safety of 167 bridges through work with the Department of Transport. The JO reports that this delivered a cost saving to the department of 30%.

Southern Lights – this is a project that is working across 41 LGAs. Essential energy is working with the JO to ensure better, safer and cheaper lighting for regional communities.

Renewable energy project – are working with the Dept of Planning Industry and Environment (Sustainable Councils Project) in support of the State Government's target of net zero emissions by 2050. Member councils are developing plans to move to at least 50% renewable energy with next procurement cycle – some councils moving to 100%.

KEY CHALLENGES

- Central JO does not have membership of all councils in its Planning Region. Lithgow Council chose not to be a member, which was a substantial loss for the JO given the size and population of that LGA.
- A key challenge for this JO is ensuring that its prolific work is not creating excessive workloads for the GMs of member councils who are often tasked with providing input or overseeing project work.
- As a JO that takes in both regional towns as well as very small rural centres, a challenge is balancing the need to provide all members with relevant information, with the need to ensure that providing the information is not creating undue burden especially for staff of smaller councils.
- There is concern from member councils that the JO model is less flexible and more costly to administer than the ROC that came before it.

SURVEY RESPONSES

Five out of ten general managers completed the survey (50% response rate). The GMs who completed the survey agreed that the JO is addressing important needs in the region and that there was great value in the member councils working together. The GMs had varying views on JO governance and maturity. Some Central JO GMs indicated that there were some concerns with the extent of the additional workload that the JO was generating, some of which they believed was due to the formal requirements for documentation under the JO model.

4. PROFILE OF HUNTER JOINT ORGANISATION

BACKGROUND

The Hunter JO has 10 member councils making it one of the largest of the JOs. The socio-economic rankings for advantage indicate that the region is very diverse with rankings as low as 12 (Cessnock) and up to 96 (Newcastle). None of the rankings are in the top 25% of LGAs in NSW. The JO includes major population centres including Lake Macquarie and Newcastle as well as rural and mining communities such as Singleton and Muswellbrook.

JO member councils have a long history of collaboration under the former Hunter ROC. The Hunter ROC developed a number of strategic business units that now operate independently of the councils themselves. The business units provide local government training, regional procurement services and local government legal services that work with local governments from across NSW. These business units were developed to focus on building capacity and skills for local councils, generating cultural and employment opportunities and assisting councils and communities to derive the best possible outcomes from local endeavours.

The operational funding for the Hunter JO is sourced from member council contributions, grants, interest and investment revenue and other income.⁶

⁶ The financial statement for the Hunter Regional JO is available here https://www.hunterjo.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Hunter-JO-Annual-Performance-Statement_2019-20_Optimised-web-copy.pdf.

TABLE 6. MEMBER COUNCIL PROFILES, HUNTER JOINT ORGANISATION

Hunter JO members	Classified as	Main employer	Population	Median age (2016 census-quick stats)	Council Area (km2)	Population Density per capita/km2	Total Rate Revenue (\$'000)	Socio-Economic Index Ranking 2016	Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islanders Population (%)
Cessnock	Regional Town/City	Health Care & Social Assistance	59,101.0	38	1,965.2	30.1	37,020.0	12.0	7.2
Dungog	Large Rural	Construction	9,346.0	45	2,250.0	4.2	5,573.0	83.0	5.0
Lake Macquarie	Regional Town/City	Health Care & Social Assistance	204,914.0	42	648.6	315.9	131,301.0	89.0	4.1
Maitland	Regional Town/City	Health Care & Social Assistance	83,203.0	36	391.5	212.5	62,262.0	75.0	5.3
Mid-Coast	Regional Town/City	Health Care & Social Assistance	93,288.0	52	10,053.9	9.3	75,567.0	20.0	6.2
Muswellbrook	Large Rural	Mining	16,383.0	35	3,404.9	4.8	14,643.0	22.0	8.3
Newcastle	Regional Town/City	Health Care & Social Assistance	164,104.0	37	186.8	878.5	147,381.0	96.0	3.5
Port Stephens	Regional Town/City	Health Care & Social Assistance	72,695.0	45	858.4	84.7	41,888.0	70.0	4.8
Singleton	Regional Town/City	Mining	23,422.0	36	4,892.7	4.8	20,002.0	85.0	5.7
Upper Hunter	Large Rural	Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	14,220.0	41	8,096.1	1.8	10,644.0	67.0	5.1
Overall	Regional Town/City	Health Care and Social Assistance	740,676.0	40.7	32,748.1	154.7	546,281.0	61.9	5.5

STRATEGIC PLANNING AND PRIORITY SETTING

The HJO Strategic Plan (Aspire Act Achieve) covers the period 2018-21. The JO is currently undertaking an analysis of the *Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework for Local Government*, and associated timelines, with the aim of proposing a new approach for the Hunter JO to more effectively integrate with the strategic planning processes and timeframes of member Councils. This aims to ensure that support provided to Councils and the relationships between the Hunter JO and Councils moving forward is strategic, proactive, inclusive; and creates improved strategic alignment between the Hunter JO and Council's IP&R Framework in areas of shared interest. The Hunter JO Strategic Plan identifies six interconnected priority areas. Actions are directed at achieving the following priority goals within the Hunter region:

- Communities stay inclusive, proud and safe and celebrate diversity
- The Hunter's enviable environment is protected for future generations and its resources are used efficiently
- The economy is multifaceted, resilient and is Australia's leading regional economy
- People and products move across the region easily on integrated and accessible transport networks
- Educational facilities support and encourage young people and foster lifelong learning
- People have access to the full range of health care fostering active and health communities.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL COLLABORATION

Many of the major projects listed below are being conducted in collaboration with state government agencies. The JO is also pursuing a formalised partnership, between all three levels of government, to develop the region for the future prosperity of its people. The Hunter JO has presented a vision for Australia's first Intergovernmental Partnerships Project to the NSW and Australian Governments. The project includes developing a shared vision, based on clearly articulated principles for collaboration, under a Memorandum of Understanding, aimed at a collaborative governance approach for Greater Newcastle and the Hunter.

REGIONAL LEADERSHIP AND ADVOCACY

As is exemplified in the Hunter 2050 Foundation and Upper Hunter Diversification projects, the JO sees itself as having a very important role in advocating for the interests of its region's people well into the future.

MAJOR PROJECTS

Disaster Resilience Program – In collaboration with 11 partner councils, combat agencies, communication experts and the emergency broadcaster ABC, the JO is exploring the challenges in the region in communicating about disasters.

Regional Contaminated Land Program – Aimed at developing regionally consistent contaminated land policies to create a liveable and sustainable Hunter and Central Coast region.

Regional Waste and Resource Recovery Program – focused on avoiding waste creation as well as final disposal of materials. Key strategy themes include: Waste avoidance, resources recovery, diversion of waste from landfill, problem wastes, reducing littering, reducing illegal dumping, governance /leading by example and infrastructure and planning.

Small Acts Big Change – a digital education campaign aimed at empowering and educating the community to avoid creating waste and improving recycling habits.

Circular Economy Program – the aim is to reduce waste and extend the lifetime of products by recycling in new and innovative ways.

The Hunter 2050 Foundation – the JO is in the process of creating plans for the establishment of a Regional Foundation to lead economic transformation and diversification in the region.

Upper Hunter Economic Diversification – to assist in the long-term prosperity of the communities of Upper Hunter an integrated suite of policies will be developed in collaboration with the NSW Government and the University of Newcastle.

KEY CHALLENGES

- Managing the diverse interests of all ten member councils is a key challenge for Hunter JO.
- The preceding ROC had well established incorporated entities that produced income to financially support the ROC. Some JO members and stakeholders do not see additional benefits from the JO model.
- Stakeholders acknowledged the potential benefits of the JO legislative and regulatory framework however believed that this had yet to be fully embraced by the full range of state agencies with whom the JO could work.

SURVEY RESPONSES

Five out of ten general managers from the Hunter JO completed the survey (50% response rate). All of the GM survey respondents agreed that the JO is addressing important needs in the region and that the member councils working together are able to achieve more than they could on their own. The GMs also agreed that the right business model is in place to sustain the JO. The responses with regard to effectiveness of state government support and engagement processes were mixed.

5. PROFILE OF FAR NORTH WEST JOINT ORGANISATION

BACKGROUND

The Far North West JO has only three member councils, (Bourke, Walgett and Cobar), but covers a vast geographical area over 100,000 square kilometres. The JO has the highest proportion (24.9%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of all JOs. The JO's largest LGA by population (Walgett) is ranked as the third most socio-economically disadvantaged in the state. The JO has a very small (and declining) population and limited rate revenue base. Members of the Far North West JO have a history of collaboration working as part of the former Orana ROC which took in 12 Councils, now split between Orana JO, and Far North West JO. Brewarrina Shire Council which is situated geographically between Walgett and Bourke opted not to join the JO.

The Far North West JO administers a major project to deliver air services to the region. This project has a total funding of \$9 million and allows the JO to utilise a portion of the funding to cover administrative costs. This project funding is a substantial component of the operating budget for the JO. The JO employs an EO on a part-time basis. The EO works remotely from Tamworth and travels to towns within the Far North West JO for board meetings.

The operational funding for the Far North West JO is sourced from member council contributions, grants and interest and investment revenue.

TABLE 7: MEMBER COUNCIL PROFILES, FAR NORTH WEST JOINT ORGANISATION

Far North West JO members	Classified as	Main employer	Population	Median age (2016 census-quick stats)	Council Area (km2)	Population Density per capita/km2	Total Rate Revenue (\$'000)	Socio-Economic Index Ranking 2016	Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islanders Population (%)
Bourke	Rural	Education & Training	2,630.0	36	41,599.5	0.1	1,626.0	33.0	31.5
Cobar	Large Rural	Mining	4,722.0	36	45,579.3	0.1	5,627.0	58.0	13.7
Walgett	Large Rural	Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	6,051.0	43	22,308.4	0.3	5,417.0	3.0	29.4
Overall	Large Rural	No majority	13,403.0	38.33	109,487.2	0.1	12,670.0	31.3	24.9

STRATEGIC PLANNING AND PRIORITY SETTING

The Far North West JO has developed a statement of strategic regional priorities⁷ which identifies three core regional priorities and a range of strategies and actions for achieving each.

The priorities for the Far North West JO are to achieve the following goals:

- A diverse economy with efficient transport and infrastructure networks
- Exceptional semi-arid rangelands traversed by the Barwon-Darling River
- Strong and connected communities.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL COLLABORATION

The Far North West JO has worked in collaboration with state government agencies to deliver the single largest project managed by any JO, being the AirLink airline services to Bourke, Walgett and Lightning Ridge

REGIONAL LEADERSHIP AND ADVOCACY

The Far North West JO has had some success with advocacy around provision of health services. They successfully prevented a reduction in health service provision that would have seen regional hospitals without a doctor between 4pm and 8am. The JO was able to coordinate advocacy to prevent the reduction in services from taking place.

MAJOR PROJECTS

Western Airline services – JO has secured passenger flights between Cobar and Dubbo and a direct route between Cobar and Sydney with FlyPelican Airlines and between Dubbo and Bourke, Walgett and Lightning Ridge with AirLink. Special rates for tickets apply for residents in Bourke, Cobar or Walgett shires

Contaminated Land Project - JO has been awarded a grant to employ a contaminated land officer for up to three years to work with councils to manage contaminated land and underground issues.

KEY CHALLENGES

- Although this JO is performing well, the viability of the JO's funding is highly dependent on a single large project, with internal resources inadequate to support operation.
- The tyranny of distance in this JO, the small number of member councils, and the fact that Brewarrina is not a member means that the capacity for the JO to deliver on strategic regional priorities is compromised.

⁷ <https://www.farnorthwestjo.nsw.gov.au/f.ashx/%24358643%24201902014-Far-North-West-JO-draft-plan-ver-3-.pdf>

SURVEY RESPONSES

All three general managers from the Far North West JO completed the survey (100% response rate). The GMs agreed that the JO is addressing important needs in the region and that the benefits of the JO outweigh the effort required to maintain it. The GMs unanimously agreed that the processes in place to engage with state government agencies on joint regional priorities are clear and that the support provided by the state government for joint organisations has been helpful.

6. PROFILE OF FAR WEST JOINT ORGANISATION

BACKGROUND

The Far West JO takes in some of the most remote areas of NSW and covers a vast geographical area larger than the whole of Tasmania. Broken Hill is the largest regional centre but is located at the most distal point of the geographic spread of the JO. There are only four Councils that are members of this JO which has the lowest overall rate revenue of any of the JOs. The socio-economic rankings across the JO range from very low (2 in Central Darling) to moderately low (49 in Wentworth). The member councils of this JO had no previous history of structured collaboration, with the southern most members, Balranald and Wentworth Councils, having previously been a part of the Riverina and Murray ROC. As such, this JO faces a range of unique challenges.

Along with its seed funding the Far West JO, was tasked with administering a multi-million-dollar tourism project, however, difficulties with defining the project and finding appropriate personnel for the EO role have limited the extent to which the project has been delivered.

The operational funding for the Far West JO is sourced from grants and interest and investment income⁸. Since the publication of their most recent financial statements, member contributions have also supported operational funding.

At the time of the review, the EO role was being done voluntarily by the then EO of the RAMJO. This EO has subsequently resigned.

⁸ The financial statement did not include council member contributions. <https://www.fwjo.nsw.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/FWJO-Annual-Performance-Statement-incl-GPFS-2018-2020-min.pdf>

TABLE 8: MEMBER COUNCIL PROFILES, FAR WEST JOINT ORGANISATION

Far South West JO members	Classified as	Main employer	Population	Median age (2016 census-quick stats)	Council Area (km2)	Population Density per capita/km2	Total Rate Revenue (\$'000)	Socio-Economic Index Ranking 2016	Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islanders Population (%)
Balranald	Rural	Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	2,340.0	41	21,690.7	0.1	2,029.0	30.0	8.7
Broken Hill	Regional Town/City	Health Care & Social Assistance	17,734.0	45	170.1	104.3	15,500.0	7.0	8.5
Central Darling	Rural	Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	1,837.0	39	53,492.2	0.0	813.0	2.0	39.5
Wentworth	Large Rural	Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	7,042.0	44	26,256.2	0.3	5,223.0	49.0	9.6
Overall	Rural	Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	28,953.0	42.25	101,609.2	26.2	23,565.0	22.0	16.6

STRATEGIC PLANNING AND PRIORITY SETTING

Much work towards strategic planning and priority setting was undertaken in this region as part of the Far West Initiative, however, much of this work has not translated well to the JO context due to the change in definition of the region (Far West Initiative covered Far West and Far North West), and that the Initiative was a joint venture of the State and Federal governments compared with the State focus of the JOs. JO members appreciate that the JO model has provided them with a forum to meet with other remote councils and to plan together. Recently (since they have had the support of the Riverina and Murray JO EO), the member councils have come together with a clear intention to define and develop their strategic goals and interests.

The Far West JO has identified three priorities in its statement of strategic regional priorities. Strategies and actions are directed at achieving the following priority goals within the Far West region:

- Proactivity – a region that is future focussed and enterprising
- Prosperity – a prosperous growing region full of opportunities for business, industry and tourism
- Sustainability – a region caring for the environment and taking action when needed.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL COLLABORATION

The local RLE has not proactively engaged with the JO and there has not been consistency with Regional NSW attendance at the JO meetings. Nevertheless, there have been some sizable projects undertaken with State agencies.

The JO stakeholders we spoke with identified substantial issues with co-ordination of service provision in their region, from both State agencies and NGOs. For example, there are major housing issues in Central Darling with the state housing agency apparently unaware and failing to coordinate with local providers. Stakeholders noted that since many state government agencies have been re-centralised, there are few state agency employees based in remote areas.

Large NGOs are in some cases now delivering services that used to be delivered by government. JO stakeholders raised concerns that NGOs rarely collaborate with councils. Stakeholders identified the potential for the JO to provide a mechanism for this collaboration to be facilitated and could also co-ordinate with services already in place in remote areas and help redirect funding that would otherwise go to an NGO that would provide services on a fly-in-fly-out basis.

Stakeholders felt that the JO had very little status or standing with state agencies and that most agencies were continuing to reach out directly to individual councils and had expressed little interest in collaborating with the JO.

It was also noted that for some agencies with whom they had partnered, the State Government's definition of the region was not congruent with the JO membership. For example, Destination NSW has one region that includes Balranald and Wentworth, and another that covers Broken Hill and Central Darling.

REGIONAL LEADERSHIP AND ADVOCACY

JO stakeholders have identified that the JO model does offer an important opportunity for leadership and advocacy at a regional level. Some noted that there were advantages to working closely with the RAMJO as this provided a broader pool of councils with whom to share knowledge.

Stakeholders noted that existing mechanisms for regional leadership and advocacy was occurring through the twice annual meetings of the West Region Alliance of Councils where they meet with regional executives. Broken Hill Council is also part of the Regional Cities Alliance that looks at issues for regional cities as they relate to Federal Government issues.

It is notable here that the Far West JO lies across two different RDAs, and neither of these have engaged with the JO.

MAJOR PROJECTS

Tourism Infrastructure Project – the JO was awarded \$6million in funding for developing tourism in the region, however, the JO has not had the capacity to develop and implement the project.

Destination management plan – in collaboration with Destination NSW – this project was originally commenced when JOs were given \$150k to use for capacity building projects and was to include a website for Tourist information. The project stalled for some time but has recently been reinvigorated and there an RFQ has been released seeking an agency to develop the destination management plan.

Regional transport study – this study is looking at regional wayfinding, prioritising road development to support freight and tourism routes. For example, the study seeks to investigate how the regional airport at Broken Hill can be leveraged to develop good driving routes out to Central Darling and Wentworth. The JO is working with a private consultant on this project and hopes that it will become a useful advocacy document they are seeking funding for the airport being maintained or developed.

2025 Regional Waste Strategy – the FWJO will develop a strategy to “future proof” and minimise future operational costs for JO members with regards to waste management.

Other Achievements

Since the JO has been assisted by the RAM JO EO, a shared services arrangement has been put in place allowing the Central Darling Administration to access administrative support one day a week. All of the on-costs involved of hiring the staff member are covered by the Albury council, and the Central Darling is able to have one day a week of administrative support costed at an hourly rate.

KEY CHALLENGES

- The key challenges for the Far West JO relate to financial sustainability of the model for four small councils with very limited revenue and resources.
 - Two of the four councils are in administration and the other two are running deficit budgets.
 - GMs told us that some of these councils struggle to deliver their core functions such as reading water meters and collecting rates.

- Contributing to the cost of sustaining a JO is something which councils would like to see justified by tangible (financial) returns that are often difficult to identify in advocacy work.
- Engaging an appropriately skilled EO has also proven challenging for the JO, as it is difficult to attract and retain staff in small regional and remote locations.
 - Costs for engaging an EO need to consider the substantial expenses associated with travel within the JO region, with driving times of around four hours between some of the larger centres.
 - The EO who was originally engaged worked remotely and while this is possible, it did make performance management more difficult.
- There are also some substantial limitations to the extent to which the member councils can productively share costs and services. Given the vast distances between the regional towns that are part of this JO, there is limited scope for sharing staff or equipment.
- The Far West JO boundaries are poorly coordinated with the boundaries for both state agencies with whom they are attempting to collaborate as well as with RDAs. Some stakeholders have noted that the boundaries for the JO do not overlap with natural regional identities.

SURVEY RESPONSES

Two out of four general managers completed the survey (50% response rate). The responding GMs tended to agree that the JO provides leadership for regional communities and that the JO is an innovative way of addressing regional needs or solving problems. However, the GMs disagreed that there are sufficient resources for the JO to be viable and that the right JO business model is in place to sustain the JO.

7. PROFILE OF ILLAWARRA SHOALHAVEN JOINT ORGANISATION

BACKGROUND

The Illawarra Shoalhaven JO covers coastal communities on the south coast of NSW. It is geographically one of the smallest JOs and has just four member councils. Wollongong is the largest of the Councils with over 300,000 residents and it is located at the northern end of the JO. The JO area has a diverse socio-economic profile and with rankings ranging from a moderately low 50 in Shoalhaven to a high 106 in Kiama. It is the only JO with an Aboriginal Land Council as an associate member.

The Illawarra Shoalhaven JO was one of the pilot JOs. The Regional Organisation of Councils that preceded the JO was the Southern Councils Group which operated from 1985. That grouping had a membership of six local governments including the ISJO members and Bega Valley Shire and Wingecarribee Shire councils. The four member councils of the JO have a strong community of interest as coastal communities.

The operational funding for the Illawarra Shoalhaven JO is sourced from member council contributions, user charges and fees, interest and investment revenue, other revenues and grants.⁹

Only one out of four general managers completed the survey (25%). Due to this low response rate no JO wide trends can be observed.

⁹ The financial statement for the Illawarra Shoalhaven JO is available here <https://www.isjo.org.au/assets/Uploads/62dc6aa6b6/ISJO-Budget-and-Statement-of-Revenue-Policy-2020-2021-Final-v3.pdf>

TABLE 9: MEMBER COUNCIL PROFILES, ILLAWARRA SHOALHAVEN JOINT ORGANISATION

Illawarra Shoalhaven JO members	Classified as	Main employer	Sum of Population	Median age (2016 census-quick stats)	Sum of Council Area (km2)	Average of Population Density per capita/km2	Sum of Total Rate Revenue (\$'000)	Average of Socio-Economic Index Ranking 2016	Average of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islanders Population (%)
Kiama	Regional Town/City	Health Care & Social Assistance	23,006.0	47	257.7	89.3	16,652.0	106.0	1.8
Shellharbour	Regional Town/City	Health Care & Social Assistance	72,240.0	39	147.4	490.1	46,980.0	66.0	3.8
Shoalhaven	Regional Town/City	Health Care & Social Assistance	104,371.0	48	4,566.7	22.9	73,150.0	50.0	5.5
Wollongong	Regional Town/City	Health Care & Social Assistance	216,071.0	39	684.0	315.9	165,319.0	94.0	2.6
Overall	Regional Town/City	Health Care & Social Assistance	415,688.0	43.25	5,655.8	229.5	302,101.0	79.0	3.4

STRATEGIC PLANNING AND PRIORITY SETTING

For the Illawarra Shoalhaven JO, the members ‘try not to fight for the same thing’. They have shared interests in tourism and transport. The Picton Road extension to Western Sydney is an example of the JOs ability to work together with the NSW Government and Illawarra First for common goals. Picton Road is a major arterial road providing connection between the Hume Highway at Wilton and the Princes Highway near Mount Ousley, linking Port Kembla, the Illawarra region and the south coast with Sydney, Canberra and Melbourne. This is an important connection for the region and the JO lobbied for this road extension to be prioritised in the Illawarra Shoalhaven region.

The ISJO Statement of Strategic Regional Priorities identifies key themes and actions against these. They are:

- Economy, education and employment: addressing all sectors and contributors to the regional economy
- Infrastructure: addressing the region’s major infrastructure requirements and contributions
- Communities, housing and lifestyle: addressing regional liveability across the natural and built environments
- Environment: addressing preservation and improvement of the natural environment
- Governance and administration: addressing good governance and capacity building .¹⁰

INTERGOVERNMENTAL COLLABORATION

The Illawarra Shoalhaven JO values having the state agencies at the table. The Illawarra Shoalhaven JO participates in several regional networks and committees including the Illawarra Shoalhaven Leadership Executive, Western Sydney Illawarra Shoalhaven Roadmap to Collaboration, South Coast Marine Tourism Steering Committee, Regional Workforce Committee, Smart Regions Strategy and Regional Youth Task Group as well as the JO Board, GM and other working groups.

A recent example of collaboration with the NSW Government and Canberra Region JO is an initiative to install electric vehicle charging sites along the Princes Highway. This initiative is of interest to the Illawarra Shoalhaven JO as it supports regional tourism.

REGIONAL LEADERSHIP AND ADVOCACY

The Illawarra Shoalhaven JO Chairperson co-chairs the Regional Coordination and Monitoring Committee which meets regularly to track implementation of the (NSW Government’s) Regional Plan. The JO and RLE advocacy for hospitals has been very successful with the redevelopment of the Shoalhaven District Memorial Hospital.

¹⁰ https://www.isjo.org.au/assets/Uploads/c081c36cf7/ISJO_Statement-Strategic-Regional-Priorities-2017-20_20SEPT18.pdf

MAJOR PROJECTS

Youth Employment Strategy – a 12-month pilot project with Illawarra First, Regional SW and the ISJO.

Value of the Illawarra to the State – a 360 assessment of the region’s assets and internal and external value. This supports the four Councils to think regionally as they are positioned together in the context of their value to the State.

Western Sydney Illawarra Shoalhaven Roadmap to Collaboration – roads strategy with escarpment crossings, Picton Road extension and others.

South Coast Marine Tourism Strategy – it is aimed at increasing economic activity and job growth in the marine tourism sector.

Enabling Water Sensitive Communities – JO aims to increase the success and uptake of Water Sensitive Urban Design Systems across the rapidly urbanising areas of the region.

Regional Waste Strategy – with funding from the NSW EPA the JO is responsible for the development and coordination of a regional waste strategy.

KEY CHALLENGES

- There is some instability in the executive officer position with selection of a new EO being undertaken at the time of this review.
- The JO reports that they need more funding to attract highly skilled staff.
- The general managers are a small group of four and with many state programs and projects, there are not enough resources to collaborate with all of them.
- There is some confusion between the roles of the Regional Development Authority and the JO in regional representation and priority setting.
- Not all council members are persuaded of the value of the JO, other than providing the State with a collective local government arrangement, rather than working with four different councils.
- Like other JOs, the Illawarra Shoalhaven JO felt the audit and other compliance requirements were onerous for a small entity.
- There is a tension between advocating for the individual council operational matters (local issues) and the strategic regional priorities for Illawarra Shoalhaven.

8. PROFILE OF MID-NORTH COAST JOINT ORGANISATION

BACKGROUND

There are three member councils in the Mid-North Coast JO: Bellingen, Kempsey and Port Macquarie. The member councils are diverse, with a large rural council (Bellingen) and two very different regional towns, with Kempsey having the fourth lowest socio-economic ranking in the state, and Port Macquarie-Hastings with a considerably larger and more affluent population. The Mid-North Coast JO was to have included three additional member councils, however, Nambucca, Coffs Harbour and Clarence Valley Councils chose not to participate. As such, the JO membership represents a fractured region, that is missing its most populous and well-resourced intended member (Coffs Harbour). Five of the six councils which were to have been a part of the JO (excluding Clarence Valley) previously collaborated through the Mid-North Coast ROC for over 20 years. The JO members have committed to working with a regional focus and undertake projects that take in LGAs that are non-members.

Due to its small size, the JO has sought to minimise costs and has chosen to have no paid EO (though they have proposed employing a person to take the role in the future). Instead, the GMs of each of the member councils rotate through the role on a voluntary basis in addition to their existing GM responsibilities. The JO also employs a part time project officer. Despite these challenges, the JO members have collaborated closely and each of the member councils contributes financially as well as through the time contributions of their staff to maintaining the JO.

As of May 2021, the Mid-North Coast JO had attracted \$1,198,608 in grant funding including funding for projects which have a regional focus¹¹. The Mid-North Coast JO is also well recognised by other regional forums and has a high level of engagement with State government agencies.

The operational funding for the Mid-North Coast JO is sourced from member council contributions, grants, other income and interest and investment revenue.¹²

¹¹ See the *Mid North Coast Joint Organisation Sustainability Plan 2021* for further information

¹² The financial statement for the Mid-North Coast Jo is available here <https://mncjo.nsw.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/ANNUAL-PERFORMANCE-STATEMENT-FYE30062019-published.pdf>.

TABLE 10: MEMBER COUNCIL PROFILES, MID-NORTH COAST JOINT ORGANISATION

Mid-North Coast JO members	Classified as	Main employer	Sum of Population	Median age (2016 census-quick stats)	Sum of Council Area (km2)	Average of Population Density per capita/km2	Sum of Total Rate Revenue(\$'000)	Average of Socio-Economic Index Ranking 2016	Average of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islanders Population (%)
Bellingen	Large Rural	Health Care & Social Assistance	12,963.0	49	1,600.4	8.1	7,737.0	63.0	3.5
Kempsey	Regional Town/City	Health Care & Social Assistance	29,665.0	47	3,375.7	8.8	19,778.0	4.0	11.6
Port Macquarie-Hastings	Regional Town/City	Health Care & Social Assistance	83,131.0	48	3,682.4	22.6	49,779.0	68.0	4.0
Overall	Regional Town/City	Health Care & Social Assistance	125,759.0	48	8,658.5	13.2	77,294.0	45.0	6.4

STRATEGIC PLANNING AND PRIORITY SETTING

The Mid-North Coast JO completed its initial Statement of Strategic Priorities in 2018. The document identified six strategic priorities. Actions are directed at achieving the following priority goals within the Mid-North Coast JO region:

- An active, health resilient and safe community
- Enhance natural and cultural heritage
- A diverse and robust economy which strengthens existing and creates new industries and educational opportunities
- Vibrant, connected cities and centres
- Effective and efficient governance and regional leadership
- Effective relationships with NSW and federal governments to ensure the long-term sustainability of local governments in region.

Actions against each of the strategic priorities has informed the ongoing work of the Mid-North Coast JO and in May 2021, the Mid-North Coast JO developed a Sustainability Plan which both reports against actions completed and outlines a strategic approach to making the JO sustainable into the future.

In addition, the JO contracted the Centre for Local Government at UTS to conduct research into why local government matters in their region. The research assisted in identifying areas for future strategic planning.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL COLLABORATION

In its 2021 Sustainability Plan, the JO lists among its achievements collaboration with: Transport for NSW; Regional NSW, the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment; Local Government NSW; the Office of Local Government; the Auditor General; Destination NSW; Regional Development Australia, Local Government Procurement; Local Land Services.

In addition, the JO has established a 'Resilience Partnership' with Charles Sturt University and the local community which links University study to the development of resilience projects in the local community.

REGIONAL LEADERSHIP AND ADVOCACY

The Mid-North Coast JO actively advocates on behalf of its communities in relation to a number of issues including: the Emergency Services Levy, waste, water, infrastructure, housing, regional roads and protecting koala habitat.

Examples of advocacy include: preparation of a paper on Community Land Trusts for consideration at the JO Chair's meeting in advance of proposed meetings with the Minister for Housing and the Deputy Premier; representations to the Minister for Local Government in relation to the Emergency Services Levy; representations to State and Federal Government agencies in relation the condition of timber bridges across the area covered by the JO; representations to the Department of Planning, Industry and

Environment in relation to koalas in Bellingen; representations to Transport for NSW in relation to the transfer of regional roads back to the state government¹³.

Regional NSW, Destination NSW; the NSW Office of Local Government and Regional Development Australia (RDA) attend the General Managers Advisory Council and Mid-North Coast JO Board Meetings. The JO regularly participates in meetings of the RLE and other regional forums such as the North Coast Pests and Weeds Advisory Committee; and the Biodiversity Stewardship Committee.

The JO has also been asked to be involved in a series of workshops run by Health North Coast about healthy ageing.

MAJOR PROJECTS

Fixing Country Bridges – this project took in council areas including and beyond the JO membership. The project was a collaboration with federal and state government roads authorities and improved 100 timber bridges across the region.

Hastings-Macleay Koala Recovery Project – this project involved koala monitoring and habitat assessment in Port Macquarie and Kempsey.

Bushfire Community Resilience and Recovery Project – included sponsorship of a Disaster Preparedness Officer to provide advice and support to councils and to local communities in response to recent weather events (bushfire, drought and flooding). This project benefits all of the intended JO members.

Resilience Leadership Course – in partnership with Charles Sturt University, providing staff with training in community leadership for disaster recovery.

KEY CHALLENGES

- The Mid-North Coast JO stakeholders interviewed were all positive about the potential of the JO model, however, their key concern was the on-going financial sustainability of the organisation.
 - They recognised that it was not sustainable for the council GMs to take on this role in addition to their regular workload. The time required to manage the activities of the JO, including attending regional forums was substantial.
- As a JO that is missing half of its intended membership, there are significant related challenges both around capacity for financial sustainability, as well as limited gains for networking and collaboration as well as losses to effective regional coverage that compromise capacity to undertake region-wide planning.

¹³ See the *Mid-North Coast Joint Organisation Sustainability Plan 2021* for further information

SURVEY RESPONSES

Two out of three general managers in the Mid-North Coast JO completed the survey (67% response rate). The GM survey respondents were in agreement that the JO is addressing important needs in the region and that it is an innovative way of addressing regional needs or solving problems. However, the GMs disagreed that the correct business model was in place to sustain the JO. They also disagreed that the processes in place to engage with state government agencies on joint regional priorities are clear or that the support provided by the state government for the joint organisation has been helpful.

9. PROFILE OF NAMOI JOINT ORGANISATION

BACKGROUND

There are five council members of the Namoi JO. Tamworth is the largest service hub and population centre with over 62,000 people, which is more than two thirds of the total population of the region. The smallest of the councils has the highest ranking for socio-economic advantage (Walcha, ranking 80), while Liverpool Plains has the lowest ranking (15).

Namoi JO was involved in the JO Pilot as a six-member organisation (including Uralla, now part of New England JO), which reflected the original composition of the Namoi Regional Organisation of Councils.

The operational funding for the Namoi JO is sourced from member council contributions, grants, interest and investment income, user charges and fees and other revenue.¹⁴

¹⁴ The financial statement for the Namoi JO is available here <http://www.namoiunlimited.nsw.gov.au/content/uploads/2020/12/Namoi-JO-Financial-Statements-and-Audit-Response-2019-20.pdf>

TABLE 11: MEMBER COUNCIL PROFILES, NAMOI JOINT ORGANISATION

Namoi JO members	Classified as	Main employer	Population	Median age (2016 census-quick stats)	Area (km2)	Average of Population Density per capita/km2	Rate Revenue (\$'000)	Socio-Economic Index Ranking 2016	Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islanders Population (%)
Gunnedah	Large Rural	Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	12,661	40	4,987.0	2.5	12,826.0	46	12.8
Gwydir	Large Rural	Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	5,349	48	9,259.7	0.6	7,698.0	38	5.7
Liverpool Plains	Large Rural	Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	7,893	45	5,082.2	1.6	7,009.0	15	12.5
Tamworth Regional	Regional Town/City	Health Care & Social Assistance	62,156	40	9,884.4	6.3	35,073.0	53	10.1
Walcha	Rural	Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	3,132	48	6,261.0	0.5	3,403.0	80	6.0
Overall	Large Rural	Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	91,191	44.2	35,474.3	2.3	66,009.0	46.4	9.4
			(Sum)	(Average)	(Sum)	(Average)	(Sum)	(Average)	(Average)

STRATEGIC PLANNING AND PRIORITY SETTING

The Namoi JO developed its first strategic plan in 2018. The Namoi JO has identified three strategic regional priorities:

- Water for the future
- Enabled and connected infrastructure
- Engaged people seeking skills for the future.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL COLLABORATION

The Namoi JO chair attends every RLE, and the JO has a proactive EO. Representatives of the Namoi JO agitate for their member councils at OLG meetings and raise the bar for what is expected from government.

REGIONAL LEADERSHIP AND ADVOCACY

The Namoi JO has advocated on water through the DPI stakeholder advisory panel and regional jobs culminating in a regional job precinct worth \$1,000,000. It is perceived as successful by its stakeholders.

MAJOR PROJECTS

Water for the future – this project is focused on managing local water risks and identifying water needs for the region into the future.

Namoi Roads Network Strategy – this project is about identifying and improving transport routes and pinch points within the region that are impeding commerce.

Engaged people seeking skills for the future – this project is focused on identifying, promoting and engaging in opportunities that address skill shortages within the region.

Local Government's contribution to skills for the future – this project is about creating jobs for careers with Local Government.

International Engagement Project, China – The aim is to develop a cultural and economic relationship with a region identified in China in order to articulate investment opportunities, develop business links and forge partnerships with innovators in agriculture.

KEY CHALLENGES

- A key concern for stakeholders of the Namoi JO is financial sustainability.
 - Stakeholders recognised that a lack of resources has made the Namoi JO very dependent on the financial commitments of each council member and therefore vulnerable to any reduction in membership.
 - Stakeholders were concerned that the current arrangement of funding streams meant that JOs might compete with their member councils for funding, undermining collaboration.

SURVEY RESPONSES

Four out of five general managers from the Namoi JO completed the survey (80% response rate). All GMs who completed the survey agreed that the JO is addressing important needs in the region and that the benefits of the JO outweigh the effort required to maintain it. The GMs generally had a positive view of the governance structures for the JO and its effectiveness as a vehicle for advocacy on regional priorities. There was no unanimous agreement (including tend to agree) or disagreement (tend to disagree) with regard to effectiveness of state government support.

10. PROFILE OF NEW ENGLAND JOINT ORGANISATION

BACKGROUND

There are seven member councils of the New England JO. The JO covers a large region which is mostly rural, with agriculture being the predominant industry. Armidale is the largest town in the JO and is a hub for education in the region. The socio-economic rankings across the JO are wide ranging – from 10 in Tenterfield to 87 in Armidale. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population across the JO is well above the state average at 9.8% and as high as 21.6% in Moree. Moree, Inverell and Tenterfield border with Queensland.

Six of the member councils of the JO have some history of collaboration, meeting regularly as the New England Local Government Group. Uralla was previously a part of the Namoi JO during its pilot phase. Uralla chose to join the New England JO because they believed that the Namoi JO did not provide enough opportunities for smaller councils to have their interests heard or prioritised.

While there is support for the JO model from New England JO stakeholders as an important mechanism for developing strategic work at a regional level, some member councils have expressed concerns that the JOs represent a fourth tier of government and that they compete with individual member councils. As is the case with a number of other JOs, there is a geographic gap between the two western-most LGAs and the other four LGAs, with Gwydir Shire Council located between them. As such, any project involving infrastructure or environmental catchment management across the JO will require collaboration with Gwydir Shire Council.

The position of EO was being filled in an acting capacity by a GM of a member council from May 2019 until November 2020 when a part time EO was employed. The same GM has resumed the role with a new part-time EO having been appointed in the last month.

The operational funding for the New England JO is sourced from member council contributions, interest and investment revenue, other revenue and grants.¹⁵

¹⁵ The financial statement for the New England JO is available here <https://nejo.nsw.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Reports-25-Nov.pdf>.

TABLE 12: MEMBER COUNCIL PROFILES, NEW ENGLAND JOINT ORGANISATION

New England JO members	Classified as	Main employer	Sum of Population	Median age (2016 census-quick stats)	Sum of Council Area (km2)	Average of Population Density per capita/km2	Sum of Total Rate Revenue (\$'000)	Average of Socio-Economic Index Ranking 2016	Average of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islanders Population (%)
Armidale Regional	Regional Town/City	Education & Training	30,707.0	36	8,620.7	3.6	18,180.0	87.0	7.4
Glen Innes Severn	Large Rural	Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	8,908.0	47	5,480.0	1.6	6,764.0	18.0	6.0
Inverell	Large Rural	Health Care & Social Assistance	16,844.0	42	8,597.2	2.0	12,278.0	11.0	8.5
Moree Plains	Large Rural	Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	13,350.0	38	17,906.5	0.7	22,688.0	24.0	21.6
Narrabri	Large Rural	Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	13,231.0	40	13,015.0	1.0	21,432.0	41.0	12.2
Tenterfield	Large Rural	Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	6,638.0	53	7,322.8	0.9	4,538.0	10.0	6.0
Uralla	Large Rural	Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	6,062.0	46	3,226.5	1.9	3,822.0	76.0	6.9
Overall	Large Rural	Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	95,740.0	43.14	64,168.7	1.7	89,702.0	38.1	9.8

STRATEGIC PLANNING AND PRIORITY SETTING

The New England JO developed a strategic plan in 2018 that identifies three regional priorities:

- Sustainable economic growth
- Educated, healthy and connected communities
- Investment in critical infrastructure¹⁶.

Strategies and actions have been developed under each and include working with other JOs for broader regional initiatives – such as the Northern NSW Renewable Energy Strategy.

The Capacity Building grant of \$150,000 was used to develop a road network strategy and tourism strategy.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL COLLABORATION

There has been some collaborative work with state government agencies. This has included the engagement of Transport for NSW, Department of Planning Industry & Environment and the Department of Premier & Cabinet as stakeholders in the development of the road network strategy.

New England JO stakeholders identified the local RDA as an organisation with whom they were positioned to compete and had not identified any opportunity to collaborate.

REGIONAL LEADERSHIP AND ADVOCACY

The JO has engaged to a limited degree with the Regional Leadership Executive and has appreciated that the JO has facilitated their membership to advocate directly with ministers and through the JO chairs forum.

MAJOR PROJECTS

New England Road Network Strategy – report identifying New England road network objectives and their alignment with NSW state government plans and identified strategic road network development priorities for the JO.

NEJO Tourism Project – the project is delivering increased tourism promotion within the New England Region.

Water Efficiency Advice – resources aimed at reducing water consumption within the region.

¹⁶ <https://nejo.nsw.gov.au/#about>

KEY CHALLENGES

- The New England JO has identified a key challenge with the financial sustainability of the JO.
- Although each of the member councils of the JO work together in a collaborative manner, there has been limited broader collaboration with agencies working at a regional level and few projects undertaken.

SURVEY RESPONSES

Four out of seven general managers in the New England JO completed the survey (57% response rate). There was no unanimous agreement (including tend to agree) or disagreement (tend to disagree) with regard to the impact of JOs or the effectiveness of state government support. However, respondent GMs were unanimous that resources available for the JO to be viable are not sufficient. They also disagreed that the JO provides leadership for regional communities.

11. PROFILE OF NORTHERN RIVERS JOINT ORGANISATION

BACKGROUND

There are six member councils in the Northern Rivers JO. The region takes in several moderately large population centres (Tweed Heads, Lismore, Byron Bay and Ballina) as well as rural areas. Geographically, Northern Rivers JO covers a small area compared with other JOs, though the socio-economic rankings of the member councils are diverse ranging from just six in Richmond Valley through to 98 in Byron Bay. JO member councils have some history of collaboration through the Northern Rivers ROC, however, the ROC has had varying success as a vehicle for collaboration. The Northern Rivers JO employs an EO at 0.6 FTE and meets regularly to discuss their identified regional priorities. The Northern Rivers JO has several associate members including local governments in neighbouring areas, including in Queensland.

The operational funding for the Northern Rivers JO is sourced from member council contributions, user charges and fees, interest and investment revenue, grants and other income.¹⁷

¹⁷ The 2019-20 Annual Performance Statement for Northern Rivers JO is available here <https://www.northernriversjo.nsw.gov.au/Documents/AnnualReports/annual-performance-statement-2019-2020.pdf>.

TABLE 13: MEMBER COUNCIL PROFILES, NORTHERN RIVERS JOINT ORGANISATION

Northern Rivers JO	Classified as	Main employer	Sum of Population	Median age (2016 census-quick stats)	Sum of Council Area (km2)	Average of Population Density per capita/km2	Sum of Total Rate Revenue (\$'000)	Average of Socio-Economic Index Ranking 2016	Average of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islanders Population (%)
Ballina	Regional Town/City	Health Care & Social Assistance	44,208.0	48	484.9	91.2	23,218.0	92.0	3.3
Byron	Regional Town/City	Health Care & Social Assistance	34,574.0	44	565.8	61.1	22,237.0	98.0	1.8
Kyogle	Large Rural	Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	8,870.0	50	3,584.2	2.5	6,750.0	13.0	4.3
Lismore	Regional Town/City	Health Care & Social Assistance	43,843.0	43	1,287.7	34.0	29,768.0	45.0	5.0
Richmond Valley	Regional Town/City	Manufacturing	23,399.0	44	3,047.4	7.7	12,187.0	6.0	7.2
Tweed	Regional Town/City	Health Care & Social Assistance	96,108.0	47	1,307.7	73.5	60,931.0	65.0	4.0
Overall	Regional Town/City	Health Care & Social Assistance	251,002.0	46	10,277.7	45.0	155,091.0	53.2	4.3

STRATEGIC PLANNING AND PRIORITY SETTING

The Northern Rivers JO developed its strategic plan in 2019 and identified five regional priorities to be achieved. Strategic actions are directed at achieving the following priorities:

- Thriving, health and biodiverse natural environments
- Improved community wellbeing now and into the future
- A physically and digitally connected region
- Innovative, sustainable energy, water and waste management
- A diversified, prosperous and sustainable regional economy.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL COLLABORATION

The Northern Rivers JO chair meets with state ministers in Sydney about four to five times a year and has found that the JO structure has enabled more contact with state government than what is possible for individual councils.

REGIONAL LEADERSHIP AND ADVOCACY

The Northern Rivers JO has developed advocacy briefs for the five strategic priorities but there is limited evidence of action being taken to deliver against these.

MAJOR PROJECTS

From Roots to Routes – the JO co-sponsored the development of a strategy, undertaken by Southern Cross University, to outline suitable regional development to improve access to Brisbane, southern Queensland and northern NSW.

Regional Priorities Advocacy briefs – The Northern Rivers JO advocates for the region regarding a variety of issues including social housing, native forestation, water management, infrastructure, waste management, renewable energy and economic development.

Regional Covid response – the JO had a very active role in developing and managing a regional response to Covid restrictions including border closures and negotiating a regional “bubble” that allowed some degree of mobility across the NSW Queensland border for people whose work, education and other needs required access across the state border.

KEY CHALLENGES

- Northern Rivers JO stakeholders considered financial sustainability to be a key challenge for the JO. While the Northern Rivers JO has the strategies and planning in place to pursue regional projects, they have not been able to leverage funding support from state agencies to transition policies into deliverables. There is concern amongst stakeholders that without the capacity to implement projects, members will begin to disengage with the JO.
- Member councils perceive themselves as having limited capacity to contribute more funds to support the JO.

- In developing its strategies and priorities, the Northern Rivers JO has not clearly differentiated between issues where there are distinct benefits to be realised through regional collaboration as compared with interests which are well served by individual local governments. As such, some Northern Rivers JO stakeholders perceive the JO as competing against its member councils for funding.

SURVEY RESPONSES

Two out of six general managers from the Northern Rivers JO completed the survey (33% response rate). The data demonstrates a few areas of unanimous sentiment among the GM survey respondents. The responding GMs disagreed that the JO is an innovative way of addressing regional needs or solving problems but agreed that the JO provides leadership for regional communities. The respondents disagreed that there are sufficient resources available for the JO to be viable or that the information materials on the initiative developed by the state government provide useful information.

12. PROFILE OF ORANA JOINT ORGANISATION

BACKGROUND

The Orana JO has six council members covering a large and mostly sparsely populated rural area. The Mid-Western Regional Council is the only council in this region to be experiencing population growth (0.4%), and the only LGA where mining is a major industry. The socio-economic rankings for member councils indicate that the region is in the lowest 40% of the state with rankings between 14 (Gilgandra) and 51 (Warren). While member councils have a long history of collaboration under the Orana ROC, the ROC included six additional LGAs, three of which now make up the Far North West JO, and three which have no current JO membership, including Dubbo which was previously an important and driving contributor to the Orana ROC. For the last 12 months, there has been no paid executive officer, with a general manager of a member council taking on the role in addition to his usual role. While there has been work undertaken to establish the strategic direction of the JO, the Orana JO members have recently (13/05/2021) voted to dissolve the JO and are awaiting ministerial acceptance of their decision.

The operational funding for the Orana JO is sourced from member council contributions.¹⁸

¹⁸ The Statement of Revenue Policy is available here

<https://www.oranajointorganisation.nsw.gov.au/assets/uploads/139/files/Board%20Meetings/Policy%20Documents%20for%20Website/POLICIES/2019%202020%20JO%20Statement%20of%20Revenue%20Policy%20FINAL.pdf>

TABLE 14: MEMBER COUNCIL PROFILES, ORANA JOINT ORGANISATION

Orana JO members	Classified as	Main employer	Sum of Population	Median age (2016 census-quick stats)	Council Area (km2)	Population Density per capita/km2	Total Rate Revenue (\$'000)	Socio-Economic Index Rating 2016	Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islanders Population (%)
Bogan	Rural	Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	2,621.0	40	14,599.9	0.2	2,914.0	42.0	16.5
Gilgandra	Rural	Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	4,226.0	45	4,831.5	0.9	4,856.0	14.0	14.0
Mid-Western Regional	Regional Town/City	Mining	25,086.0	42	8,752.3	2.9	18,425.0	44.0	5.4
Narromine	Large Rural	Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	6,567.0	42	5,261.5	1.2	5,747.0	31.0	19.9
Warren	Rural	Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	2,745.0	43	10,753.8	0.3	4,716.0	51.0	14.5
Warrumbungle	Large Rural	Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	9,399.0	49	12,372.1	0.8	7,933.0	21.0	9.8
Overall	Rural	Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	50,644.0	43.5	56,571.1	1.0	44,591.0	33.8	13.4

STRATEGIC PLANNING AND PRIORITY SETTING

The Orana JO has developed a statement of Strategic Regional Priorities¹⁹. Strategies and actions are directed at achieving the following priorities:

- A connected region
- A vibrant region
- An environmentally sustainable region
- A capable and collaborative joint organisation.

The document identified a range of strategies and related actions to achieve each of these. The plan does not, however, clearly identify responsible parties for actions nor timelines for their delivery.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL COLLABORATION

JO stakeholders noted that state government agencies have largely ignored the Orana JO as an entity and have instead continued to engage directly with local councils. JO stakeholders felt that this was in part due to the absence of the largest regional service centre (Dubbo) from the JO.

Stakeholders also reported disappointment with regards to projects where they had had in principle agreement, but no action towards implementation was taken, for example for a water pipeline project to supply drinking water to Nyngun.

REGIONAL LEADERSHIP AND ADVOCACY

Nil

MAJOR PROJECTS

Nil

KEY CHALLENGES

- The JO members identified that their very small population base and lack of industry has meant they have been unable to support the administrative load of the JO structure.
- The JO has felt that the absence of the “key player” (Dubbo) has meant that the JO has been largely ignored by state agencies.

¹⁹ Available on-line at

https://www.oranajointorganisation.nsw.gov.au/assets/uploads/139/files/Board%20Meetings/Policy%20Documents%20for%20Website/STATEMENT%20OF%20STRATEGIC%20REGIONAL%20PRIORITIES/OJO_StrategicRegionalPriorities 2019 FINAL.pdf

SURVEY RESPONSES

Three out of six general managers from the Orana JO completed the survey (50% response rate). All responding GMs indicated that the JO is not addressing important needs in the region and is duplicating existing council processes. The GMs all disagreed that together, the member councils can achieve more than they could on their own. They did not agree that the benefits of the JO outweigh the effort required to maintain it or that there are sufficient resources available for the JO to be viable. They did not agree that the right business model is in place to sustain the JO or that JO members have the necessary capacity to contribute to joint regional activities. They also unanimously disagreed that the support provided by the state government for joint organisations has been helpful.

13. PROFILE OF RIVERINA PROFILE

BACKGROUND

The Riverina JO was a JO pilot site. The council members maintained a regional organisation, the Riverina Eastern Organisation of Councils (REROC) alongside the pilot and now choose to operate both models of local government collaboration (a JO and a ROC) in the region, though Wagga Wagga is not a member of REROC. There are eight council members in the Riverina JO. Wagga Wagga has the largest population (60% of the total regional population) and Bland council covers the largest area. The Riverina JO has diverse communities from a large regional centre and smaller centres to rural and remote townships. **Error! Reference source not found.** below shows substantial socio-economic variation across the JO with ranking as low as 27 in Cootamundra-Gundagai Regional to moderately high in Wagga Wagga (88).

There is substantial attachment amongst councils to the REROC as this has been the basis of regional collaboration for many years and has been seen to be a highly effective mechanism for achieving very similar functions as the JO.

The operational funding for the Riverina JO is sourced from member council contributions, grants, other income and interest and investment revenue.²⁰

²⁰ The Annual Performance Statement 2020 for the Riverina JO is available here <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5c09f91e266c075f5717dc2a/t/5fe27145d6737c201f5776ca/1608675661905/Riverina+JO+Annual+Performance+2020.pdf>.

TABLE 15: MEMBER COUNCIL PROFILES, RIVERINA JOINT ORGANISATION

Riverina JO members	Classified as	Main employer	Sum of Population	Media n age (2016 census -quick stats)	Sum of Council Area (km2)	Sum of Population Density per capita/km2	Sum of Total Rate Revenue (\$'000)	Average of Socio-Economic Index Rating 2016	Average of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islanders Population (%)
Bland	Large Rural	Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	5,985.0	43	8,557.7	0.7	7,955.0	62.0	4.4
Coolamon	Rural	Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	4,368.0	44	2,430.9	1.8	2,380.0	71.0	3.2
Cootamundra -Gundagai Regional	Large Rural	Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	11,260.0	47	3,981.4	2.8	7,254.0	27.0	30.1*
Greater Hume	Large Rural	Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	10,686.0	44	5,939.0	1.8	8,316.0	79.0	3.3
Junee	Large Rural	Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	6,631.0	40	2,030.0	3.3	3,914.0	29.0	7.8
Lockhart	Rural	Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	3,295.0	46	2,895.8	1.1	2,415.0	81.0	3.4
Temora	Large Rural	Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	6,274.0	46	2,802.0	2.2	3,852.0	47.0	2.4

Riverina JO members	Classified as	Main employer	Sum of Population	Media n age (2016 census -quick stats)	Sum of Council Area (km2)	Sum of Population Density per capita/km2	Sum of Total Rate Revenue (\$'000)	Average of Socio-Economic Index Rating 2016	Average of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islanders Population (%)
Wagga Wagga	Regional Town/City	Health Care & Social Assistance	64,820.0	35	4,824.5	13.4	43,378.0	88.0	5.6
Overall	Large Rural	Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	113,319.0	43.13	33,461.3	3.4	79,464.0	60.5	7.5

STRATEGIC PLANNING AND PRIORITY SETTING

The Riverina JO worked with member councils and the State to workshop the six Riverina strategic regional priorities. The priorities are:

- transport and connectivity
- energy water and environment
- Workforce development
- Leadership and collaboration
- Economic and community development
- Healthy and vibrant communities.

Waste and resource recovery is a priority strategy of the REROC and the Riverina JO extends and complements that work.

The means for advancing the strategic priorities is planning (for example, Freight Transport Plan), doing (such as participation in the Southern Lights Project, skills shortage audit and identifying and promoting pathways to professions such as through ‘come and try’ events), applying for funding (and assisting member Councils to apply), working with State agencies (attending the Regional Leadership Executive) and advocacy including liaison (meeting and corresponding) with State Government Ministers and making submissions to advance the Riverina JO priorities.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL COLLABORATION

The Riverina JO is focussed on liaison with State Government Ministers as a key collaboration (with the State) and advocacy strategy. It is also a member of the State’s Regional Leadership Executive in the region. The relationship between the smaller Councils is generally collaborative though, Wagga Wagga left the REROC and is an associate member of the Canberra Region JO. The City of Wagga Wagga is a member of the Regional Capitals NSW network and believes that provides them with the access to the State Government they need to be effective at the local scale.

REGIONAL LEADERSHIP AND ADVOCACY

As well as liaison with State Ministers, the Riverina JO reviews State Plans and programs across a range of areas (such as transport, COVID support and others) to ensure they align with local government and regional priorities. The Riverina JO leadership is clear about the roles and relationship between the REROC and the Riverina JO, though the dual models causes confusion for some other stakeholders.

MAJOR PROJECTS

Workforce Development – based on a ‘grow your own’ principle, facilitates ‘come and try’ activities for local school students focused on the professional gaps in member councils such as engineering, town planning and others.

Freight Transport Plan – to provide guidance on transport and freight management planning for the eastern Riverina region of NSW.

Water and Wastewater, Waste and Resource Recovery – working closely with the REROC committees to identify solutions with part funding from EPA (waste).

Start Your Career Here – this project encourages young people, those attending Secondary School, TAFE, and University, to consider a career in local government, in order to address skills shortages in local government.

KEY CHALLENGES

- The Riverina JO continues to operate both a JO and a ROC. While this may make sense for the member councils within the JO, it causes confusion for those in the region who are outside of the local government network, including some state agencies seeking to invest in regional projects.

SURVEY RESPONSES

Six out of eight general managers from the Riverina JO completed the survey (75% response rate). While the responding GMs agreed that JO members actively work together to ensure the partnership achieves its goals, they unanimously disagreed that there are sufficient resources available for the JO to be viable or that the benefits of the JO outweigh the effort required to maintain it. They also either disagreed or tended to disagree that the right JO business model is in place to sustain the JO.

14. PROFILE OF RIVERINA AND MURRAY JOINT ORGANISATION

BACKGROUND

The Riverina and Murray JO is in southern central NSW, and it has the largest council membership of any JO with 11 members. The member councils are Albury, Berrigan, Carrathool, Edward River, Federation, Griffith, Hay, Leeton, Murray River, Murrumbidgee and Narrandera. The Riverina and Murray JO region covers an area of 72,724 square kilometres and has an estimated resident population of 148,500 (2018). Albury council has the largest population and Carrathool council covers the largest area. **Error! Reference source not found.** below shows that the SEIFA rankings vary from low (23 in Narrandera) to moderately high (78 in Murray River). The JO includes urban, rural and remote locations.

The Riverina and Murray JO has not provided a breakdown of its funding sources for 2019-20²¹, however interview data indicate that operating revenue is sourced primarily through member contributions.

²¹ The Riverina and Murray JO Annual Performance Statement 2019-20 is available here <https://ramjo.nsw.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Presentation-of-Financial-Statements.pdf>.

TABLE 16: MEMBER COUNCIL PROFILES, RIVERINA AND MURRAY JOINT ORGANISATION

Riverina and Murray JO members	Classified as	Main employer	Sum of Population	Median age	Sum of Council Area (km ²)	Average of Population Density per capita/km ²	Sum of Total Rate Revenue (\$'000)	Socio-Economic Index Ranking 2016	Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islanders Population (%)
Albury	Regional Town/City	Health Care & Social Assistance	53,767.0	39	305.9	175.8	41,309.0	64.0	2.8
Berrigan	Large Rural	Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	8,707.0	49	2,065.8	4.2	5,157.0	36.0	2.3
Carrathool	Rural	Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	2,802.0	40	18,934.5	0.1	3,358.0	73.0	8.0
Edward River	Large Rural	Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	8,995.0	45	8,883.4	1.0	7,240.0	43.0	4.0
Federation	Large Rural	Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	12,462.0	49	5,685.0	2.2	7,626.0	37.0	1.7
Griffith	Regional Town/City	Manufacturing	26,882.0	37	1,639.2	16.4	16,498.0	48.0	4.8
Hay	Rural	Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	2,979.0	46	11,325.9	0.3	2,304.0	26.0	6.0

Riverina and Murray JO members	Classified as	Main employer	Sum of Population	Median age	Sum of Council Area (km2)	Average of Population Density per capita/km2	Sum of Total Rate Revenue (\$'000)	Socio-Economic Index Ranking 2016	Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islanders Population (%)
Leeton	Large Rural	Manufacturing	11,438.0	40	1,167.2	9.8	7,107.0	35.0	5.7
Murray River	Large Rural	Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	12,118.0	49	11,863.5	1.0	10,150.0	78.0	3.2
Murrumbidgee	Rural	Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	3,961.0	41	6,880.8	0.6	4,137.0	54.0	7.5
Narrandera	Large Rural	Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	5,931.0	44	4,116.3	1.4	4,851.0	23.0	9.7
Overall	Large Rural	Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	150,042.0	43.55	72,867.5	19.3	109,737.0	47.0	5.1

STRATEGIC PLANNING AND PRIORITY SETTING

Despite being one of the larger JOs with 11 member councils, there is evidence of effective regional strategic planning and prioritisation. The Riverina and Murray JO has identified six priorities in its Statement of Strategic Regional Priorities. Actions are directed at achieving the following priorities:

- Improve water security
- Improve energy security and affordability
- Improve transport connectivity for freight and people
- Improve digital connectivity
- Better match health services to our changing needs
- Boost industry, workforce and jobs.

The Riverina and Murray JO states a key role as working with community, business, government, and service providers to facilitate the development of key infrastructure to improve performance and attract economic growth in the RAM region. The Riverina and Murray JO Water Security Sub-Committee published a water security position paper. That paper sets out several recommendations to investigate and ensure water security in the region and the basin. The position paper is seen by the NSW Government as a model for evidence-based and regional advocacy for water security. The Riverina and Murray JO has also developed a Regional Freight Transport Plan detailing a long list of road constraints and necessary freight infrastructure projects. A lack of digital connectivity is a major problem for the Riverina and Murray JO area. The Riverina and Murray JO is focussed on improving connectivity across the region.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL COLLABORATION

There is evidence of effective intergovernmental collaboration both across local governments and with other spheres of government (particularly the NSW Government) to align state and regional priorities and advocate for priority regional infrastructure and programs. As with several other projects, Riverina and Murray JO (then RAMROC) partnered with REROC (Riverina Eastern Regional Organisation of Councils) to engage a Regional Biodiversity Officer to assist councils with the changes which were occurring in biodiversity at the state level. To ensure regional responsiveness to the biodiversity goal of the State Government, the Biodiversity Reform Capacity Building Project ran for several years. The project focused on providing training, tools, and a helpdesk for councils to navigate the state changes and manage risks.

The Southern Lights Street Lighting project involves 42 Councils across the Canberra Region Joint Organisation, Central NSW Joint Organisation, Riverina and Murray JO Joint Organisation, REROC and including Broken Hill, Balranald and Wentworth Councils. The purpose of this project is to transition up to 80,000 streetlights across southern NSW to the latest technology LED lighting and to incorporate smart control devices which have capacity to manage and monitor the lights themselves, as well as undertaking a range of other Smart City type data gathering and analysis.

REGIONAL LEADERSHIP AND ADVOCACY

The largest council (Albury) accommodates the JO secretariat executive officer and Project Officers. Each of the eleven member councils has mapped their individual infrastructure priorities within a common software program allowing a series of reports that cut the data by council and infrastructure type (roads, bridges, wastewater, town water, tourism projects, community facilities). This supports regional prioritisation while giving transparency to each member council's priorities.

To drive its water security agenda for collaboration on agricultural investment and research, Riverina and Murray JO joined the One Basin CRC as a Tier 3/non-financial partner, linking ONE Basin CRC to researchers, farmers and community groups through the local councils.

MAJOR PROJECTS

Water Security – Position Paper and actions including partnering with the ONE Basin CRC and DPI Water.

Energy Efficiency and Digital Connectivity – Advocacy for better connectivity, identifying blackspots and other connectivity gaps.

Contaminated Land – The Riverina and Murray Joint Organisation and Riverina Eastern Regional Organisation of Councils (REROC) deliver the NSW EPA Regional Capacity Building Program on Contaminated Land Management.

Riverina and Murray JO Waste Management and Resource Recovery – The Riverina and Murray Joint Organisation has two regional waste groups and several projects underway primarily funded by the NSW EPA through initiatives such as the Waste Less, Recycle More and Community Recycling Centres.

Health – Riverina and Murray JO has a role in working with health service providers (and training organisations) to ensure the needs of the communities are met (and are affordable) with consideration given to the broader underlying supports/enablers required and to identify the potential role of councils. Health prevention programs such as the Community Change Program is available to communities within the Riverina and Murray Joint Organisation footprint. Developed by Team Resilience and funded by a Murrumbidgee Primary Health Network Empowering Communities grant, the program is a free community coaching program that is self-paced and online with access to six coaching calls with Team Resilience.

Community Change Program – Developed by Team Resilience and funded by a Murrumbidgee Primary Health Network Empowering Communities grant, the program is a free, self-paced and online community coaching program, with access to six coaching calls with Team Resilience. It is designed to provide mental and emotional health support.

Regional Capacity Building Program on Contaminated Land Management – Funded by the NSW Government's \$4.2 million Council Regional Capacity Building Program, Riverina and Murray JO and

REROC are working with their councils to ensure integrated management and regulatory oversight of fuel handling and storage systems. Working closely with Councils to strengthen capacity and capabilities on managing contaminated land in their services and business processes.

ONE Basin CRC Partnership – Riverina and Murray JO is a non-research partner to the ONE Basin Cooperative Research Centre bid, which brings together communities, industry and researchers to manage climate, water and environmental risks in the Murray-Darling Basin. Working with the agricultural industry, community and other relevant stakeholders on issues like water trading and better farm water management practices and supporting them to manage and adapt with changing global drivers.

Biodiversity Offset Scheme – Applies to development and activity that will impact threatened species, endangered ecological communities, or their habitats. An accredited assessor is engaged to assess the biodiversity impacts and prepare a Biodiversity Development Assessment Report, which is submitted with the development application.

Biodiversity Reform Capacity Building Project – Riverina and Murray JO partnered with REROC to engage a Regional Biodiversity Officer to assist Councils with the changes which were occurring in the biodiversity space. This project ran from 2018 to 2020 and focussed on providing training, tools and a helpdesk for Councils to navigate the changes and manage risks.

Southern Lights Street Lighting Project – Project across several JOs to transition up to 80,000 streetlights across southern NSW to the latest technology LED lighting and to incorporate smart control devices which have capacity to manage and monitor the lights themselves.

Regional Waste Strategy 2017- 2021 – Identifies the priorities for the region and determines the current and future services, infrastructure and educational requirements to develop a sustainable waste management system.

Riverina Waste Group and Murray Waste Group – Each waste group has a number of current projects underway primarily funded by the NSW EPA through initiatives such as the Waste Less, Recycle More and Community Recycling Centres.

Water Position Paper – The Position Paper seeks a sustainable, apolitical, ethical, evidence-based suite of solutions to ensure the optimal use of water across the Murray Darling Basin.

Infrastructure developments – Infrastructure reports including projects relating to water and drainage management, road repair, waste management, building restoration, sports ground reconstructions, and public amenities repair.

KEY CHALLENGES

- During the current review, the Riverina and Murray JO executive officer resigned. She was a highly regarded EO in the Riverina and Murray JO and across the network was viewed as having advanced strategic capacity. She cited the lack of financial security for the position as the main reason for her resignation. Her resignation is a setback for the Riverina and Murray JO and the network.
- Other challenges for the Riverina and Murray JO relate to its size and the diversity of the 11 member Councils.
- The Riverina and Murray JO leadership describe their JO as ‘solution focused’ and they identify State Government commitment (through funding and seniority of State Government liaison) as an ongoing issue.

SURVEY RESPONSES

Seven out of eleven general managers in the Riverina and Murray JO completed the survey (64% response rate). GMs responded positively with regard to the value of the JO and agreed that the JO is addressing important needs in the region and that member councils can achieve more together than they could on their own. They were also generally positive about the governance arrangements for JOs agreeing that the scope or terms of reference for the Board are clearly defined. However, the responding GMs were unanimous in disagreeing that there are sufficient resources available for the JO to be viable or that the right business model is in place to sustain the JO.