



An Australian Government Initiative



Regional
Development
Australia



ORANA

23 | 24

Annual Report

Local people developing local solutions rdaorana.org.au



Acknowledgement of Country

Regional Development Australia Orana acknowledges the First Nations peoples as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of Australia. We respect and celebrate the inherent strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and their commitment to the land, waters and their communities. We pay our respects to all Aboriginal people in the Orana region and also acknowledge the Tubbagah people of the Wiradjuri Nation where our Dubbo office is located and the Barkindji Nation where our Wilcannia office is located.

Disclaimer:

Disclaimer: The information contained in this publication is based on knowledge and understanding at the time of writing (June 2024) and may not be accurate, current or complete. Regional Development Australia Orana, the author and the publisher take no responsibility, and will accept no liability, for the accuracy, currency, reliability or correctness of any information included in the document (including material provided by third parties). Readers should make their own inquiries and rely on their own advice when making decisions related to material contained in this publication.

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Strategic context





Chair's report

The 2023/24 reporting period has been a strong year of consolidation for RDA Orana. We welcomed a new CEO to the helm with Justine Campbell who has brought new energy and growth to the organisation.

We also welcomed new board members: David Kirby from Brewarrina and Lisa Crothers from Bourke in May 2024, each bringing knowledge and skills from varying industries and a passion for our wonderful region.

RDA Orana's key focus areas in support of the region's growth and future sustainability throughout the 2023/24 financial year were:

- Workforce: businesses in the region have access to the workforce required to support growth
- Information: businesses and governments have access to economic information, credible research and insights
- Leadership: influence all levels of government as a respected, apolitical and reliable advocate for the Orana region
- Sustainable region: Orana region recognised as a net-zero emissions region

These key focus areas are supported by several significant infrastructure projects currently underway and planned including the Central West Orana Renewable Energy Zone, critical mineral mining, numerous large-scale projects in various stages of development, a thriving business community, expanding education facilities/offerings, and a number of other opportunities.

The region has an annual economic output of nearly \$27 billion, with a pipeline of large investment projects occurring, creating thousands of employment opportunities in construction and ongoing jobs. While the expansion and significant number of infrastructure projects and opportunities is positive, it has not been without its challenges. The region has had difficulty managing the pressure on services, housing, labour, business capacity and skills.

One of our region's successes through our organisation is the Orana Designated Area Migration Agreement (DAMA), which provides skilled migrant visas to enable our region to employ workers to help fill skill gaps.

We were successful in gaining an extension and geographical expansion to the Orana DAMA, which RDA Orana has held since 2019, to now include a further four RDA regions covering a total of 53 local government areas and 65% of NSW. The Orana DAMA provides an opportunity to allow regional NSW to employ skilled labour where there is no other available opportunity. The Orana DAMA is crucial for regional inland NSW to attract and retain migrant workers to the Orana region.

The growth in population and economic activity has prompted a continuing rise in housing demand. Home expenses increased and there was a shortage of available, affordable housing due to the demand outweighing supply. The need to identify appropriate housing infrastructure to support the expanding resident and itinerant population has become a priority. The solution will require innovative and progressive thinking as the vast majority of regional Australia also grapples with this issue.

The region's growing population has put pressure on existing public services such as healthcare, childcare, utilities, and other social services. The current limited capacity of these services has resulted in a struggle to cope with increased demands. The flow on effect unfortunately will place pressure on the long-term liveability and marketability of the region.

In an effort to address these challenges, RDA Orana continues to work closely with regional stakeholders, and the three tiers of government, business, educational institutions, and business and industry organisations to identify the gaps and opportunities.

Looking forward, RDA Orana will continue to be a key program partner and enabler for the region for and on behalf of the people who live, work and visit it.

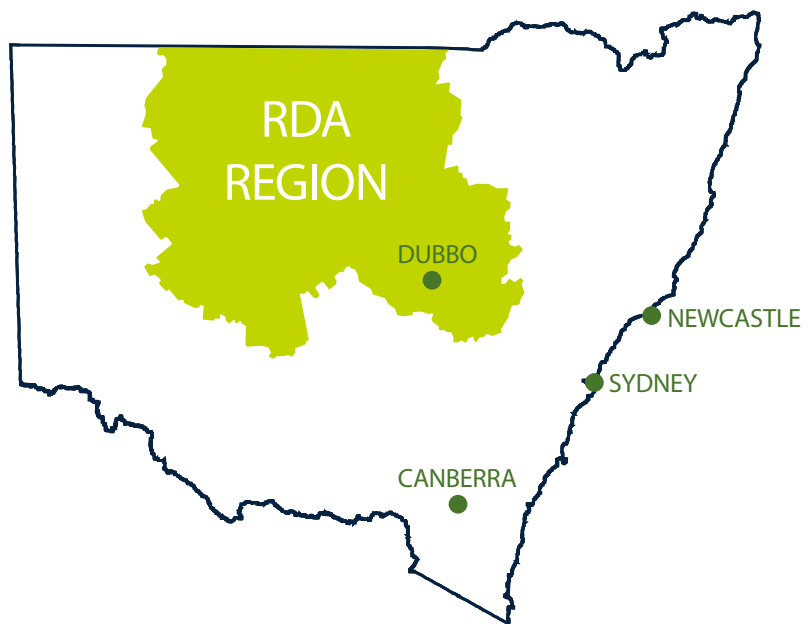
**RDA Orana Chair
Brad Cam**

Who we are

RDA Orana is an incorporated, not-for-profit association and registered charity, led by a regional board of industry and government representatives. We support economic development across the Orana region by building partnerships and working with all governments and agencies to respond to local priorities and needs.

Our region is the largest and most diverse region in the State, with 123,000 people living in an area covering 25% of NSW. Extending from Mudgee in the east to Bourke in the west, our region includes the local government areas of:

- Bogan
- Bourke
- Brewarrina
- Cobar
- Coonamble
- Dubbo Region
- Gilgandra
- Mid-Western Region
- Narromine
- Walgett
- Warren
- Warrumbungle



Our vision

To be the region's primary source of information for regional economic development: inspiring innovation, collaboration and sustainability.

Our mission

To support the positive change in the Orana region by:

- Leading change
- Providing regional intelligence and advocacy
- Facilitating collaborations
- Inspiring innovation
- Supporting relocations and investment

Our motto

Building the region together

The RDA Orana Board

RDA Orana is a non-profit, community-based organisations. The RDA Orana Board is comprised of six directors from across the region who represent local communities, businesses and local government.

The RDA Orana Board has a broad and diverse skills base and demonstrated networks and alliances. The Chair is appointed by the Commonwealth Minister for Regional Development. Vacant positions are advertised and applicants must submit an application form and approved by the Board.



Chair
Brad Cam



Deputy Chairman
Jeffery Caldbeck



Board Member
Kerrieanne Nichols (10/23)



Board member
Steve Hinks (10/23)



Board member
Ross Earl



Board member
Megan Callinan



Board member
David Kirby (5/24)



Board member
Lisa Crothers (5/24)

Our initiatives





Our team

The RDA Orana team is made up of a powerhouse of energetic like-minded individuals who all have a vested interest in the development of the Orana region. It is a mix of full-time and contract professionals who are specialists in their respective fields, led by the Chief Executive Officer, Justine Campbell. Our staff for 2023/24 included:

Operations Manager, Zannat Shrestha

Project Officer, Penny Banks

Project Officer, Gail Russell

Digital Marketing Specialist, Kullunee Savant

Communications Specialist, Emma Knight

Marketing Manager, Sophie Plasto

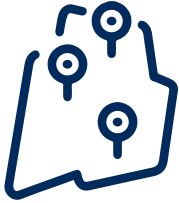
Event Manager, Kate Wade

Web Specialist, Peta Simpson

The Exchange Orana Manager,
Kate O'Shaughnessy

The Exchange Orana Customer Services Officer,
Georgie Kennedy

Regional snapshot



12
local government
areas



\$6.2 B
project and
investment
pipeline



124,696
people call the
Orana home



54,887
jobs



2.0%
unemployment



40 years
medium age



\$14.228 B
gross regional
product



\$26.934 B
annual economic
output



\$473 M
building approvals

*Source Remplan



CEO's report

It's been a busy year for RDA Orana and the team. I've hit the road running literally and covered more than 60,000 km in the reporting period, touching base with government, a cross range of businesses and the 12 local government areas in the region since I began the role in November.

We've built new relationships and partnerships with industry, business and all three tiers of government and helped to advocate for our region and the RDA Orana business.

As my first year as CEO for RDA Orana I'm so pleased with what we have achieved. With the guidance of the RDA Orana Board, we have set new goals and developed new initiatives that will further strengthen the organisation and the region.

I'm proud to present the 2023/24 annual report and the following document will outline our achievements and where we plan to grow in the future to help build our region.

Our highlights include:

- The approved extension and geographical expansion of the Orana DAMA to cover four new RDA regions now totalling 53 LGAs and 65% of NSW, 129 occupations and numerous concessions.
- The acquisition and relocation to The Exchange Dubbo (now known as The Exchange Orana)
- New RDA Orana website
- Baaka Cultural Centre project
- RDA Orana events
 - Orana Outlook Forum
 - Inland Growth Summit
- Finalisation of the Orana Hunter Connections and Beyond Golden Highway Transport Study Business Cases.
- Finalisation of the Inland NSW Growth Alliance Zero Hub Business Case.
- Establishment of The Vault Talent Bank
- Relaunch of the Orana Grants Hub.

In the coming year we will focus heavily on our workforce strategy which will include the launch an Orana specific jobs board.

Another component of the strategy involves key connectors that will help engage key employment sectors to come and live and enjoy the life we offer in the Orana region.

My many regional visits has provided insight into the exciting projects in planning and development stages across the region and, we will be working closely to understand where and how we can provide business and fundraising support.

We will continue to build on our regional events including the Orana Outlook Forum; Inland Growth Summit; Resources, Energy, Innovation and Industry Forum; and our inaugural Orana Youth Forum.

Looking forward the organisation will also reflect and build on our strategic plan through workshops with the RDA Orana Board to look at what our priorities are to help shape the future of the region and the state as a whole.

Embracing our motto 'building the region together' I will ensure that RDA Orana will continue to work with business, industry and government to build the region together.

**RDA Orana CEO
Justine Campbell**

Stakeholders and third party arrangements

Regional Development Australia Orana would like to acknowledge the support of our key stakeholders:



Contracts

The following outlines the various contracts and funding agreements that RDA Orana had for core and position funding for the 2023/24 financial year:

Commonwealth Government

Core funding for administrative positions and operational purposes.

NSW Department of Regional NSW – Business Case and Strategy Development Fund

Orana Hunter Connections and Beyond - Transport Study.

Inland NSW Growth Alliance (INGA)

The INGA Innovation Hub Business Case.

Resources, Energy, Innovation and Industry Forum.

Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal

Future Drought Fund's Helping Regional Communities Prepare for Drought Community Impact Program.

NSW Department of Regional NSW and Central Darling Shire Council

Fundraising, operations and implementation of the Baaka Cultural and Arts Centre, Wilcannia.

Commonwealth Government

Orana Designated Area Migration Agreement.

Strategic priorities in 2023/24





Workforce

Orana Designated Area Migration Agreement (DAMA)

DAMA extension and geographical expansion

RDA Orana has held the Orana DAMA since 2019 and is the only DAMA in NSW. The aim of the DAMA is to help regional inland businesses in filling critical employment gaps through skilled migrant workers. In December 2023 RDA Orana submitted a DAMA variation submission to the Department of Home Affairs to extend the agreement to cover other regional areas in the state that were facing a shortage of skilled employees.

In April 2024 the organisation was notified by the Minister for Immigration, Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs, the Hon Andrew Giles MP, of the approved variation request for the Orana DAMA to include four surrounding RDA regions of Riverina, Murray, Southern Inland and Central West, more occupations and numerous concessions.

The new agreement has resulted in the Orana DAMA covering more than 60% of regional NSW to include a further 41 local governments across the state. The variation is a win for the regions, with projects like the Central West Orana Renewable Energy Zone, Snowy 2.0, Humelink, Energy Connect, mining, agriculture, manufacturing and infrastructure projects being able to employ skilled employees.

- In 23/24 We helped 59 businesses through the Orana DAMA and endorsed 183 positions.

Orana DAMA business model developed

DAMA training with the four RDA's was completed on 20 and 27 May, with all CEO's and migration officers participating.

We're also collaborating with all LGAs that are covered under the Orana DAMA to host information sessions for businesses and local councils.

- Three LGA meetings held to outline the Orana DAMA.

Australia-wide DAMA network establishment

RDA Orana established a national DAMA network with the other 12 Designated Area Representatives, which meet monthly and is led by RDA Orana.

- Two national DAMA meetings held with 12 Designated Area Representatives.



Launch of The Vault Talent Bank

In early March 2024, RDA Orana launched The Vault Talent Bank at the Annual Long Lunch Coonamble, to a crowd of more than 300 women who attended the fifth rendition of the luncheon.

The Vault Talent Bank has been developed to establish connections between organisations and skilled people in the region who excel in what they do to support growth and development.

The platform aims to showcase regional talent while building partnerships to ensure collaboration is maximised and outcomes are achieved.

Through the online directory, we connect businesses and organisations with independent contractors, freelancers, specialists and advisors to fill skill gaps on a flexible, short term or contract basis. TVTB helps provide the right person, who shares the same passion and values as those searching for them.

- 32 registered members.



Information

Relaunch of the Orana Grants Hub

The Orana Grants Hub was relaunched in early 2024, and is comprehensive online platform designed to simplify the grant search and application process.

During the reporting period the platform undertook a refresh to become the Orana Grants Hub supported financially by all 12 local government areas in the Orana region as well as the Central Darling Shire in Wilcannia

It is a free service that allows for local business, not-for-profit organisations, or individuals, to connect with funding opportunities. The Orana Grants Hub has more than 750 registered users on the site. During the reporting period:

- Promoted \$78.7 B work of grants available.
- 52,391 email alerts sent about 225,352 grants available.
- 2,656 search queries and 3,192 grant views.

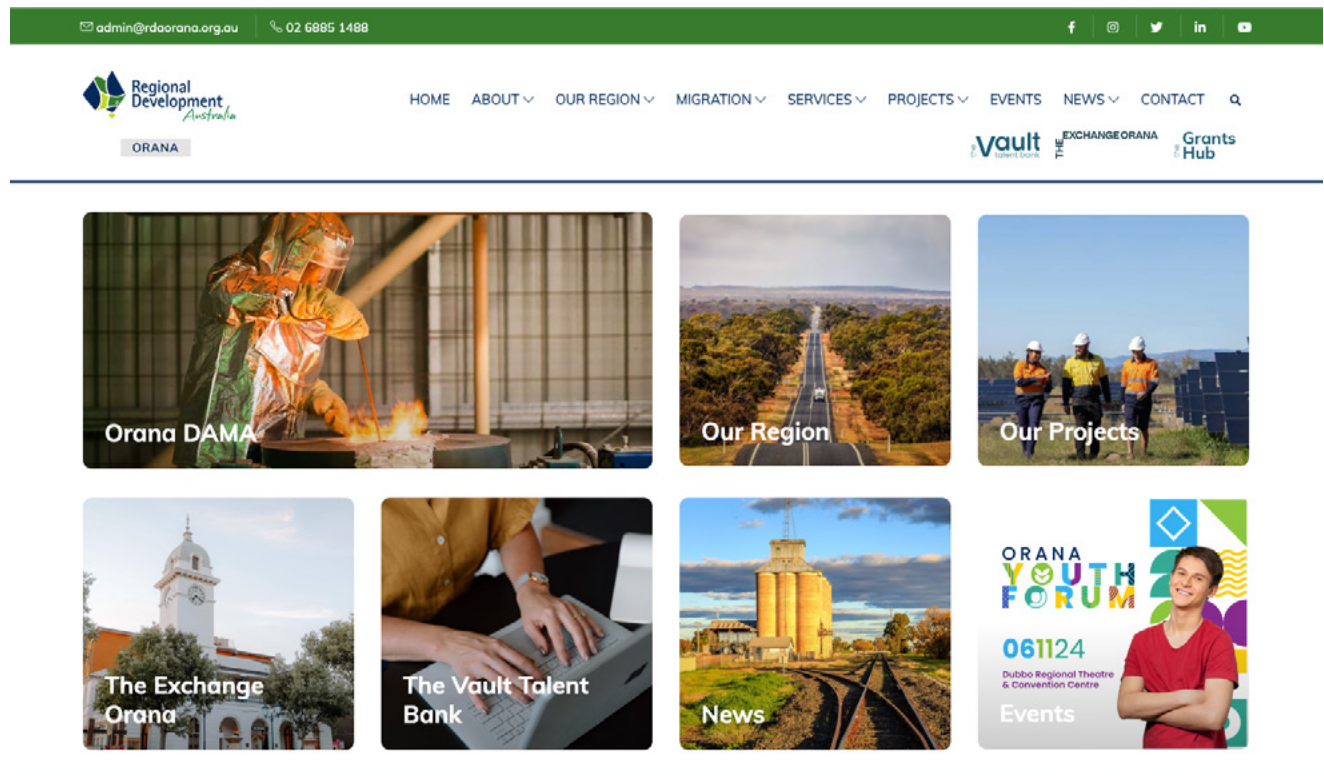
Launched new RDA Orana website

In June 2024, RDA Orana launched a new website www.rdaorana.org.au. The new look site features a clean, modern design and improved site navigation to help users find what they are looking for and better represent what the organisation does. The new website boasts intuitive and consistent side-wide navigation to help you easily find your way around. It is also fully responsive to mobile devices, making it easy to navigate on many web browsers and devices.

Weekly regional newsletter

RDA Orana issues a weekly newsletter to more than 16,305 subscribers. The newsletter provides information on grants, conferences, regional news and events taking place across the region.

During the reporting period 51 newsletters were sent. A total of 1967 new contacts signed up to receive the newsletter.



The Exchange Orana

A major coup for the organisation was the acquisition of The Exchange Dubbo, now known as The Exchange Orana in May 2024. The Exchange Dubbo was the brainchild of entrepreneur Jillian Kirby who redeveloped the building to become a co-working space for small business, sole traders and entrepreneurs and a hub for start-ups in the area.

Under the management of RDA Orana, the business, now a regional base, offers all LGAs in the region a central space for meetings, office space and events.

The Exchange Orana has become a central meeting space for collaborating with other committees, across geographical clusters, to share knowledge, skills and resources.

Participation in regional consultations

Since joining the Organisation in November 2023, the CEO has participated in more than 250 regional consultations.

Clocking up over 60,000 km. She has toured the region building relationships and fostering connections with government, business and community groups, industry leaders and landholders to hear first-hand what the issues are in each LGA, and how RDA Orana can assist.

- RDA Orana opened an office in Wilcannia with planned offices opening in Walgett and Bourke in 24/25.
- Participation in regional conferences.
- Regional networking opportunities.





Leadership

Appointment of RDA Orana CEO, Justine Campbell

In November 2023, the RDA Orana Board welcomed a new Chief Executive Officer to the organisation. Justine Campbell was officially appointed to the position and was recognised for her leadership skills, strategic insights and deep industry knowledge.

Ms Campbell is an accomplished and recognised leader who brings a wealth of knowledge to RDA Orana with more than 20 years of experience as a chairperson, board member and non-executive director across varied sectors. She is a strategic, creative thinker and problem solver, who specialises in creating opportunities and delivering projects from a place-based, people-centred approach.

Ms Campbell grew up on the family's mixed farming property in the small town of Baradine in NSW, where she developed her passion for regional Australia and her work across regional NSW and WA.

New board members

The organisation bid farewell to two outgoing board members Taronga Western Plains Zoo Director, Steve Hinks and Dubbo entrepreneur, Kerrieanne Nichols and welcomed the appointment of two new members to the Orana region board, David Kirby from Brewarrina and Lisa Crothers from Bourke, who both have strong ties within the communities they live in and advocates for social and economic development in the region.

David is the General Manager of Brewarrina Shire Council. He is a proud First Nation Ngemba and Maraurra traditional owner and grazier. Born and raised in Brewarrina, David's life has revolved around water with a deep spiritual connection as a custodian of the oldest man-made structure on earth, Baiame Ngunghu (Brewarrina Fish Traps).

Lisa is the owner of Bourke Administrative Services, she is a fifth-generation Bourke resident. In 1996 Lisa established her own business providing financial/administrative and management support to a diverse group of local businesses, primary producers, trades and local government. During this time, Lisa has undertaken the management function of a residential aged care facility; a disability employment service and a number of indigenous NGOs – all based in western NSW.

2023 Orana Outlook Forum

Planning for the future of the Orana region and working together to ensure local communities could reach their full potential was the goal of the 2023 Orana Outlook Forum, which was held in Dubbo on 17 November 2023.

The one day event saw 10 speakers present to 105 attendees from across the region discussing the theme *'building the region together'*.

While only in its second year, the Orana Outlook Forum was well received by both presenters and attendees, providing an opportunity for information sharing and building important collaborative networks to ensure the region continues to thrive.

Speaker presentations focused on outlooks in tourism, agriculture, energy, roads and transport, housing, and circular economics with a spotlight on how the NSW Government was supporting the region and investing in the future.

A highlight of the day was keynote speaker, Circular Australia Managing Director and CEO, Lisa McLean who discussed sustainability through circular economics and the opportunities available to regional Australia in the circular transition by using the principles of designing waste and pollution out of the existing system, keeping products and materials in use and at their highest value, and regenerating natural ecosystems.

2024 Inland Growth Summit

An impressive line-up of speakers and panellists shared their thoughts and input on the future of regional NSW at the 2024 Inland Growth Summit.

More than 200 people travelled from across the state to attend the two-day event, which focused on the theme People and Place.

The seventh summit of its kind, covered topics including circular economics and sustainability, training and education, people and community, rural and remote health and tourism and hospitality.

The summit brought people together to share stories and insights from respected leaders in their field about topics that affect the everyday lives of people living and working in regional NSW.

The line-up of keynote speakers included Bega Group Chair, Barry Irvin, Regional Education Commissioner, The Hon Fiona Nash, award-winning sustainable architect Carol Marra, Spinal Cure Australia Executive Director, Duncan Wallace and Taronga Western Plains Zoo Director, Steve Hinks.





Finalisation of Orana Hunter and Beyond Transport Study Business Cases

RDA Orana achieved a significant milestone in finalising the Orana Hunter and Beyond Transport Study, Business Cases, which were funded through a \$665,000 grant from the Regional NSW – Business Case and Strategy Development Fund.

The study resulted in two business cases being developed, focusing on road and rail transport and providing valuable insights and recommendations to inform the region's transportation planning and help address the challenges facing the freight industry.

The Golden Highway serves as the backbone of the Orana region's economy supporting more than 2.5 million tonnes of freight in the corridor, travelling by road and rail. This volume is expected to reach an estimated 6.3 million tonnes over the next decade due to the expansion in renewable energy and mining sectors.

These changes require a plan of infrastructure improvements that will minimise impacts on local communities while keeping freight moving safely and efficiently between the Orana and Hunter regions and the Port of Newcastle.

The project is crucial to ensuring the Golden Highway remains a reliable and efficient transport link. The project is anticipated to provide broad benefits to the resources, energy, manufacturing, education and tourism industries, as well as the many companies in the Orana and Hunter regions that trade across NSW and globally.

A roundtable meeting with key stakeholders has been planned for late 2024.

Baaka Cultural and Art Centre, Wilcannia

RDA Orana is working with the Baaka Cultural Centre Wilcannia Aboriginal Corporation and Central Darling Shire Council to provide executive support and operations and implementation management for the nearly completed Cultural Centre.

Construction work is currently underway to transform a once derelict site into a state-of-the-art cultural centre and visitor experience. The development of the \$9.5 million Baaka Cultural and Art Centre at Wilcannia is a regionally significant project funded by the Australian and NSW governments.

The centre will recognise and celebrate the culture and traditions of Baakintji people of the middle and lower Darling River region and support cultural and economic initiatives in the wider community.

Employment of Indigenous project officer

Orana in Wiradjuri means welcome and RDA Orana welcomed its first Indigenous project officer Gail Russell to the team. Gail brings a wealth of experience to RDA Orana with a background in research and history.

A proud Malyngapa woman, Gail moved to Wilcannia (Barkintji Country) several years ago to be closer to her ancestral lands.

Gail is also working as Operations Manager for the Baaka Cultural Centre from the RDA Office in Wilcannia.

In her role as Project officer, she will collaborate with local government and organisations to further develop projects and partnerships linked with Aboriginal cultural heritage in the region.



Sustainable region

Drought Community Impact Program

RDA Orana is acting in the role of Community Partner Lead Organisation for this project. Our role is to provide ongoing support to the project organisations in the region who were successful in receiving funding through this program.

We are also working with the Australian Rural Leadership Foundation (ARLF) to coordinate complementary training as part of the Drought Preparedness program.

- Two-day Changemaker Workshop held in Cobar May 2023.

Inland NSW Growth Alliance

In 2023 the Inland NSW Growth Alliance (INGA) was established (previously known as O2N). INGA was created to support the development of businesses across the region to improve sustainability, increase investment, build connections and expose potential collaborations.

INGA supports business development across regions while focusing on growing capability to enable access to local opportunities and increasing investment in regional NSW.

The alliance aims to foster greater cooperation between small and medium-sized enterprises (SME), and promote growth in employment, investment, and exports through:

- greater cooperation and collaboration between participating SMEs and others
- growth of participating SMEs through activities such as developing collective brands and leveraging infrastructure to support the participation of their region in global supply chains
- improved local capability to increase exports, encourage growth, and create jobs.

INGA is a coordinating organisation that facilitates a strong and prosperous future by building on existing economic and community strengths in collaboration with industry, business and community leaders.

Finalisation of the INGA Innovation Hub Business Case

The INGA Innovation Hub is a core initiative of INGA and is designed to support critical industry and business development in the Orana and Central West regions of NSW aligned to priority industries.

INGA received funding support from the Regional NSW Business Case and Strategy Development Fund (BCSDF) to develop the INGA Innovation Hub Business Case, which was finalised in June 2024.

The business case provided a detailed overview of the Innovation Hub, a project that will become a state significant project for the region, and is designed to deliver a unique hub-and-spoke model of industry activation.

Head-quartered in Dubbo, with spokes operating throughout the region, this flagship project will partner with strategic stakeholders that represent industry, research, education, and the community to foster connection and collaboration.

Over time, it is envisaged that the INGA Hub will continuously evolve its core offerings to be known as an agile, place-based innovation precinct model that enables and unlocks resources and energy innovation.

The INGA Innovation Hub aligns to the 20-Year Economic Vision for Regional NSW, the NSW Government's Net Zero Plan Stage 1: 2020-2030 and the vision outlined in the NSW Critical Minerals and High-Tech Metals Strategy.

The focus of the INGA Innovation Hub will be to complement the significant activity and opportunity in the region and state for renewable energy, critical minerals, copper, circular economy and infrastructure. This includes critical minerals production and processing, clean energy industries, resources technology, advanced manufacturing, circular economy industries and new energy solutions.

Our commitment to communicate

Build the brand

Support and promote RDA Orana activities in a way that results in brand awareness, stakeholder enquiry and increased revenue.

- 1700 Facebook interactions
- 248 Instagram interactions
- 1046 LinkedIn interactions
- 26 X interactions

Extended reach

Become a recognised regional voice that creates awareness of the region's capabilities and needs.

- 19 media releases distributed
- 3 research projects finalised
- 252 engagements with stakeholders and policy makers

Attract talent and investment

Support and promote the region to support the attraction of workforce and public and private investment.

- 741 registered on Orana Grants Hub
- 2959 grants posted on Orana Grants Hub

Engage and collaborate

Create genuine opportunities for RDA Orana to collaborate and partner in projects with stakeholders

Orana Outlook Forum

- 105 attendees
- 10 speakers

Inland Growth Summit

- 207 attendees
- 25 speakers

Sponsorships

- The Long Lunch - Coonamble
- Western Division Councils of NSW Annual Conference - Cobar
- Dubbo Business Chamber of Commerce Rhino Awards
- Business NSW Regional Leaders Program
- 'A Seat at the Table' International Women's Day evening by One More Event

Key activity statistics

Local government meetings and workshops attended	42
State government meetings attended	27
Australian government meetings attended	34
Business / industry meetings attended	149
Social media posts	670

Case Study **Workforce**

Orana Designated Area Migration Agreement (DAMA) extension and geographical expansion

More than 65% of regional NSW is now covered under the Orana Designated Area Migration Agreement, which aims to alleviate workforce shortages in business and industry in regional inland NSW.

The Orana DAMA is an agreement between RDA Orana and the Australian Government to enable employers to sponsor skilled overseas workers, for positions that they are unable to fill with local workers.

The Orana DAMA variation was approved with an expansion of a further 41 local government areas throughout NSW and an increase to 129 occupations within the agreement.

After months of lobbying, the Minister for Immigration, Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs, the Hon Andrew Giles MP, signed off on an approved variation request for the Orana DAMA to include four new RDA regions, more occupations and numerous concessions.

The Orana DAMA exists to provide businesses in the regions covered, with an avenue to address current workforce shortages and to support future workforce planning.

It is a priority for RDA Orana and the Australian Government to always promote jobs for Australians first, however a DAMA allows employers who are unable to find suitably qualified Australians to supplement their workforce with overseas workers.

The Orana DAMA variation includes a geographical boundary extension to include the RDA regions of Central West, Murray, Riverina and Southern Inland.

The approval marked a significant milestone in the ongoing development and growth of regional NSW to access a broader range of skilled workers.

As part of the Orana DAMA Variation, we have also received concessions that are eligible for some occupations including English, qualifications, age and Temporary Skilled Migration Income Threshold (TSMIT).

RDA Orana will remain the Designated Area Representative (DAR) with dedicated DAMA officers in each of the four RDA regions.

RDA Orana holds the only DAMA agreement in NSW, which was approved in 2019. It is now in the fifth year of operation and has been granted a 12-month extension until 3 April 2025.





Case Study **Information**

Orana-Hunter Connections and Beyond Golden Highway Transport Study

The Golden Highway could become the road of opportunity for the Orana-Hunter regions through the outcomes of the recently completed Orana-Hunter Connections and Beyond Golden Highway Transport Study.

RDA Orana received funding from the Regional NSW – Business Case Strategy Development Fund to complete an independent study, shedding light on the drivers of freight demand to develop a business case for road and rail transport solutions between Narromine and Newcastle.

As part of the study two business cases have been developed focusing on Rail and Road transport:

- The Golden Highway Road Corridor Improvements Business Case
- Construction of Maryvale – Gulgong Rail Line and Upgrade of Gulgong – Ulan Rail Line Business Case

The Golden Highway serves as the backbone of the region's economy supporting more than 2.5 million tonnes of freight in the corridor, travelling by road and rail.

This volume is expected to reach an estimated 6.3 million tonnes over the next decade due to the expansion in renewable energy and mining sectors.

These changes require a plan of infrastructure improvements that will minimise impacts on local communities while keeping freight moving safely and efficiently between the Orana and Hunter regions and the Port of Newcastle.

The Orana region, the largest in NSW, is poised to experience a transformative shift in its economic landscape. Characterised by booming agricultural and mining sectors, the region is well-resourced to contribute materially to the shift towards renewable energy, critical minerals production and increased agricultural production.

However, these drivers will place significant demands on transport networks, notably in road and rail freight in the corridor between the Orana and Hunter regions.

The Orana Hunter Connections and Beyond - Golden Highway Transport Study is crucial to ensuring the Golden Highway remains a reliable and efficient road and rail transport link.

The recommendations from the two business cases are anticipated to provide broad benefits to the resources, energy, manufacturing, education and tourism industries, as well as the many companies in the Orana and Hunter regions that trade across NSW and globally.

The Golden Highway Road Corridor Improvements Business Case was developed through an extensive process of stakeholder engagement, measurement and cost-benefit analysis.

It outlines opportunities driving change in Western NSW including the development of the Central West Orana Renewable Energy Zone, the growth in mining industry and the importance of agriculture underpinning the rural economy.

These changes require a plan of infrastructure improvements that will keep freight moving safely and efficiently from the Central West region to the Hunter Region and Port of Newcastle.

Upgrades include bridge replacement, bridge widening, new overtaking lanes, upgrades to railway crossings and intersections. The economic, social and environmental impacts present a strong case for improvement.

The Dubbo Newcastle Rail Business Case proposes the construction of the incomplete Maryvale-Gulgong line and upgrade of the Gulgong-Ulan line to a 25 Tonne Axle Load (TAL) to ensure a reliable and resilient freight rail network. Reliability is achieved by providing capacity that allows consistently acceptable performance levels.

The proposal aligns with State Government strategies for critical minerals and freight transport, ensuring efficient and reliable service.

The improvements are expected to boost freight transit efficiency, competitiveness, and overall capacity through travel time savings, reduced gross tonne kilometres, and diversion from overcrowded rail networks.

Additionally, environmental and safety benefits, including lower carbon emissions and fewer road accidents and deaths, are anticipated by transitioning freight from road to rail.

The project is particularly important given increases in future freight demand (Golden Highway Corridor total freight volumes are anticipated to grow from 2.5Mtpa in 2023 to 6.3Mtpa in 2033) and population growth in NSW.

Between 2021 and 2061 NSW's freight task is only expected to grow by 34%, highlighting the need to focus effort on the Orana – Hunter Region.

The Dubbo Newcastle Rail Business Case not only addresses the current inefficiencies but also anticipates for future growth, ensuring the state's infrastructure can support the increasing demand for freight transport while reducing environmental, safety, and economic costs associated with road transport reliance.

By investing in this rail corridor, the project promises to enhance the competitiveness of Australian exports, reduce environmental impacts through decreased road freight, and improve safety by reducing traffic accidents and fatalities.

The Dubbo Newcastle Rail Corridor Improvement represents a strategic step towards sustainable economic growth, environmental stewardship, and a more efficient, reliable freight network for NSW.





Case Study Leadership

The Exchange Orana

The Exchange Orana is a new chapter in the growth and development of RDA Orana, as the organisation has taken over the management and operations of the community and co-working space – now known as The Exchange Orana.

The Exchange Orana supports a diverse and at times, geographically isolated, community of founders.

It provides co-working desks, private offices, meeting rooms and event space, as well as a vast community network that provides people in regional Australia the best chance at commercial success in their own business.

Led by RDA Orana CEO Justine Campbell, she has a vision to see the business thrive even further by expanding into the region. Her passion lies in the regions with people-based approaches. She is driven to make a difference by leading and developing innovative, strategically directed projects that bring people together to create new opportunities.

The Exchange Orana will remain a community and co-working space that first and foremost aims to build confidence, capacity and capability to increase the chance of commercial success of startups, those scaling businesses, and even those still sitting on the fence.

The Exchange Orana will be a meeting place to build connections for the 12 local government areas RDA Orana represents and allow the organisation to expand its operations and events, provide a home for The Vault Talent Bank, Grants Hub, Jobs Board and support local government regions within the RDA region with working and meeting spaces.

The Exchange Orana will become a central meeting space for collaborating with other committees, across geographical clusters or specific tasks to share knowledge, skills and resources.

“I’m very excited about this announcement and for RDA Orana to work across the region, enhancing regional development by facilitating and brokering economic growth, and collaborating across the different spheres of government, improving social capital and local capacity.

“We will continue the aspirations of The Exchange Dubbo and founder Jillian Kirby’s dream of *‘where the bold meet the brave, where ideas meet their maker and where coworking meets the community’*.

Case Study Sustainable regions

Inland NSW Growth Alliance (INGA) Innovation Hub Business Case

The INGA Innovation Hub is set to become a state significant project for the region, and is designed to deliver a unique hub-and-spoke model of industry activation.

The INGA Innovation Hub is a core initiative of INGA and is designed to support critical industry and business development in the Orana and Central West regions of NSW aligned to priority industries.

The Innovation Hub aims to be a catalyst for resources and clean energy innovation across regional NSW with a unique hub-and-spoke approach.

INGA received funding support from the Regional NSW Business Case and Strategy Development Fund to develop the INGA Innovation Hub Business Case, which was finalised in June 2024.

The business case outlines the significant opportunity to create impact in, and for, NSW by supporting the development and adoption of resources and energy technologies through a model of partnership and shared value.

It provides the background, justification, guiding principles and objectives of the Innovation Hub and outlines a delivery plan over three stages to progress development.

- Stage 1 Hub: Plan and deliver the INGA Innovation Hub
- Stage 2 Hub: Plan and deliver and connect 'spoke' or satellite facilities across and beyond the region.
- Stage 3 Hub: Develop and sustain the innovation ecosystem.

The Innovation Hub will bring together a range of stakeholders such as project proponents, infrastructure providers, governments, researchers, educators, small to medium enterprises (SMEs), startups, and the community to collaborate and achieve a shared vision: to become a world-class region for responsible critical minerals and high-tech metal production, as well as for clean energy development, innovation, and participation.



Over time, it is envisaged that the INGA Hub will continuously evolve its core offerings to be known as an agile, place-based innovation precinct model that enables and unlocks resources and energy innovation.

The INGA Innovation Hub aligns to the 20-Year Economic Vision for Regional NSW, the NSW Government's Net Zero Plan Stage 1: 2020-2030 and the vision outlined in the NSW Critical Minerals and High-Tech Metals Strategy.

Physical infrastructure will be strategically located in Dubbo as a central hub and spokes throughout the region, and a model of partnership will deliver a range of enabling programs aligned to support climate smart decarbonisation innovation, solutions and technologies that will contribute to lower-emission outcomes, transparency and assurance to industrial processes and downstream supply chains.

The focus of the INGA Innovation Hub will be to complement the significant activity and opportunity in the region and state for renewable energy, critical minerals, copper, circular economy and infrastructure. This includes critical minerals production and processing, clean energy industries, resources technology, advanced manufacturing, circular economy industries and new energy solutions.

The business case explored the opportunity to connect to an experienced Hub operator, with networks in the resources, METS and energy sectors and significant expertise in innovation development and investment attraction.

The INGA Innovation Hub will create new regional jobs and increase the capability and participation of the local workforce. The model will stimulate the growth of companies and compatible businesses, research partnership and support the skills needed for the future related to priority industry segments in the region through the delivery of:

- A physical facility (Hub) located in Dubbo to accommodate the shared use of common office space and equipment, direct business assistance and guidance, mentoring, concierge access to capital and markets, events, and support access to education, research and collaborative partnerships.

- A suite of hybrid facilities (Spoke) to connect geographic regions to incubator programs, education and events. The use of hybrid facilities recognises the geographical challenges of the region and will encourage participation from the Orana, Central West, Far West and beyond.
- Connection to a network of targeted industrial pilot and testing sites (Spoke) that will comprise physical space and links to the most appropriate structured research partnerships.
- A model where partners and collaborators can meet with anchor tenants to accelerate efficiencies across the innovation ecosystem and optimise infrastructure.
- A place to help innovators with a regional focus to connect, find research partnerships and/or expand and scale their business.
- A place to strengthen First Nations participation in resources and new energy supply chains.
- A place to address future skills and education needs and strengthen research and development outcomes across resources and energy supply chains.
- A model to strengthen the network of resources and stakeholders in the community.

To achieve these ambitious targets, considerable investment and advances in technology are required.

The INGA Innovation Hub will bring together researchers, industry and government stakeholders to collaborate and catalyse the uptake of new technologies and will be a showcase for the region to demonstrate research partnership, education and future skills development related to resources and clean energy value chains and will contribute to job creation, export growth and economic prosperity for the Orana and Central West regions of NSW.

Future plans

In 2024/25 RDA Orana will be focusing on six key areas of Leadership, Workforce development, Supporting Indigenous business development, Building future resilience, Education, learning and jobs and Infrastructure and development.

Leadership

Influence all levels of government as a respected, apolitical and reliable supporter for the Orana region, while advocating for regional success.

Workforce development

Support businesses in the region to access the qualified workforce required to promote growth and development through local and migrant employees.

Indigenous business development

Assist and enhance the economic development opportunities for Indigenous business progression across the region while promoting opportunities and establishing pathways for Indigenous leaders.

Building future resilience

Establish and secure regional business and social practices and behaviours that lead to enduring resilience and growth.

Education, learning and jobs

Collaborate between industry, education, research and government to help deliver a strong economy for the Orana region built on investment, jobs for the future and growth.

Infrastructure and development

Enable and advocate for infrastructure improvements and development in the region to improve connectivity and unlock investment opportunities.





