

Western NSW Regional Advisory Council

AGM Minutes

Thursday 30 September 2021

Via Zoom

1 Welcome & Attendance

Rob Drage welcomed all those in attendance.

In attendance: Rob Drage (Rob Drage Consulting), Matt Irvine (Bathurst Business Chamber), Ellie Brown (Business NSW Board Director), Angela Myles (Business Mudgee), Daniel Sutton (Business Orange), Cath Woolfrey (Central West Lift Trucks) & Justin Enright (Oberon Business & Tourism Association)

Staff: Vicki Seccombe (Regional Manager – Western NSW)

2 Previous Minutes

The minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 17 July 2019 were confirmed.

3 Regional President's Report

Rob Drage delivered his report as following;

This has been a very disruptive year for the Western NSW region on so many fronts.

As you know, our membership covers all facets of business. Manufacturing, Retail, Energy, Agriculture, Hospitality, Business Services – just to mention a few.

Balancing the needs of members – and their views, has been a challenge. What we have achieved is having the voice of Western NSW business to be heard where it counts.

Key outcomes:

- **Drought assistance** – seems a long time ago. And despite the expectations of current grain, livestock and fleece prices, the advocacy for assistance at the time kept the key operations and systems intact to re-start when the rains came.
- **Covid Assistance** - At the outset, we need to acknowledge the work of Service NSW in delivering grants and advice to businesses across NSW. Their support and advice has assisted many businesses to modify their business model. Sadly we will see many smaller businesses not make it past December.

BUSINESS NSW

- **Border issues** – We were spared the brunt in the interstate decisions. Our members in Albury and Tweed heads for example were in a constant state of apprehension regarding snap lockdowns. As a united NSW Chamber, we kept pressing for sensible and operationally sustainable ‘bubbles’.
- **International export issues** – The International team really came to the party in helping a number of industries find new markets when doors to current markets were shut for many and various reasons.
- **Transport and infrastructure** – Western NSW has always said that the “sandstone Curtain” requires multiple crossings to support current and future transport needs. While not pushing any particular solution, we have sought to encourage discussion, cost-benefit analysis and sensible strategies to make the flow of people, products and profit more equitable in Western NSW
- The increased reliance on **telecommunication** over the last year has revealed “holes” in our networks. Where “black-spots” were seen to be a problem for the bush, larger regional towns frequently felt the “choke” of increased traffic. We are continually advocating and pressing the major Telcos to invest in the growth of our regions.
- **Workforce resources.** The most recent issue to emerge as a result of domestic and international border closures has been the severe shortfall in seasonal labour. Business NSW is actively engaged in voicing the needs of our members in defining Pacific Nations as well as longer term European and Asian worker visa conditions.

The past few months has seen an uplift in direct discussion and forums with State and Federal authorities – seeking clarification and direction, hearing the needs of regional business – and taking account of those needs in crafting decisions.

The RAC is the eyes and ears of our business community. We are being heard as part of a united NSW business community.

Thank you for listening to your communities and being vocal and forthright in pushing those views forward. The growth in local chamber membership, visibility and direct support of their respective communities over the last 12 months has been fantastic.

Thanks Vicki, for fronting the media, consolidating the various viewpoints and putting Western NSW front and centre.

4 **Regional Manager’s Report**

Vicki Seccombe reported as following;

Since our previous Annual General Meeting in 2019, the NSW Business Chamber (aka Business NSW) and the Western NSW region has continued to grow & evolve.

BUSINESS NSW

At the previous AGM, our then Chief Executive Officer, Stephen Cartwright, presented on the Chamber's new direction and the evolution to Business NSW/Business Australia and a new membership model which included a "free membership" level.

In late February 2020, the NSW Business Chamber rebranded into two new trading names:

- Business NSW focused on the policy and advocacy matters that affect your business.
- Business Australia, which is the national brand to lead the organisation's member-focused products and services

We were still in drought in the later half of 2019, then bushfires through the Christmas break. Business NSW launched in late February 2020, followed closely by COVID-19 in mid-March and easing of drought conditions throughout 2020. And if you add in a mice plague, it's been one huge ride over the past two years.

Katie Kidd, our Business Solutions Executive left us after 5 years to commence working with the Master Builders Association, and whilst it leaves a gap for us, it has opened up new opportunities to be working with that industry association. Unfortunately, all the BSE positions were removed from regions, so it is unlikely there will be a replacement for this position.

Membership

At the 2019 AGM our numbers were sitting at 1469 members and as of 29 September 2021, our member numbers total 2,570.

The current member numbers are split up as following (as at 29 September 2021);

65 voting members (16 local chamber alliance partners)

796 Business Australia members

1709 Local Chamber members

Total member numbers: 2570

It was positive to see growth in members since 2019, particularly via our local chambers and the new free membership segment. Voting members have decreased, but we will be launching a new membership level shortly which will provide more access for businesses in Western NSW to get involved.

We were pleased to welcome Condobolin Chamber of Commerce and Coolah Chamber of Commerce on board. Whilst we were disappointed that Broken Hill Chamber of Commerce had folded 2 years ago, we are pleased to advise that we are working closing with them now to get the chamber back up and running.

Whilst COVID brought a number of negatives, it had a positive side effect that our engagement with local chambers as a group has increased with regular zoom meetings with President's, and their Secretariat.

BUSINESS NSW

Since our previous AGM, some of the highlights have included;

Policy & Advocacy

- COVID-19 and our eventual recovery continues to be a major focus for Business NSW. We continue meet with the NSW Government daily or weekly, advocating for support, sorting our issues and keeping members up to date with what is required.
- Range of zoom meetings for RAC, RPs and LCC Presidents – John Barilaro, Josh Frydenberg, Dominic Perrottet,
- Launched in July 2020, Back on Track was prepared to provide a forward policy agenda spanning both the immediate needs of businesses as well as longer term reform agenda needed to sustain economic growth beyond the crisis. It includes ten business recovery drivers and a further forty initiatives to support business recovery.
- Late 2020, Business NSW launched its report Running on Empty, which backed a pipeline of infrastructure upgrades to expand capacity and endorse a gas road map to bolster the domestic market.
- In December, we released our Telecommunications Survey, highlight the unanticipated strains on businesses' telecommunications services resulting in speed and reliability concerns. We've seen a blurring of the historical distinction between residential and business specifications as an increasing proportion of residents work from home.
- Workforce and Housing affordability/availability across the regions continues to be a major concern and working through solutions for.
- The NSW Government called for responses to Buying in NSW, Building a Future which focused on Property Tax. Our submission highlighted some concerns including risk to investors for both residential properties, but more obviously commercial properties with the proposed rate significantly higher than the present arrangement. Our full submission can be found on our website.
- In addition to these components, we continued our 'business as usual' submissions towards State and Federal Budgets, Annual Wage Reviews, Productive Commissioner Reviews, Local Government Planning, WHS and risks relating to mental health.
- We continue working with Government in regard to the Roadmap, and vaccinations requirements (i.e. monitor, check, enforce) and clarification relating to rapid antigen testing.

Western NSW Business Awards

As would be expected, the Western NSW Business Awards were cancelled in 2020, but we persevered for 2021 and have recently announced our finalists for 2021. Although we had only Business Orange aligning for this year's event, we saw a large increase from direct entrants. In 2019, we had 45 finalists and in 2021 we have 70.

The awards event will be held online on Friday 15 October.

BUSINESS NSW

Building awareness of Business NSW

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

Media coverage

Media is monitored via our Corporate Affairs team and I'm pleased to advise that our coverage across all mediums in Western NSW has increased substantially since 2017. In 2017 we recorded 345 points, and over the past two years, we recorded 728 points in 2019/20 and 881 in 2020/21.

Topics included Covid-19, Regional Business Awards, Infrastructure, Reducing Red Tape, , Workforce Skills, Skilled Migration, Budget announcements, Business Confidence Survey, Christmas retail spending, local NSWBC events and attendance at local chamber events.

Social Media

Regular posting on social media channels has seen the increase of followers in 2019 to 2021 as following;

Facebook from 855 to 1244

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

Rob Drage, as our current Regional President for his support and representation of our regional members

Ellie Brown, as our very knowledgeable and enthusiastic Board Representative, and

Your support has been invaluable!

And finally, I would like to thank all of you for your contributions as councillors. Your support is greatly appreciated by all of our members and I am looking forwarding to working with you!

5 Election of Regional Councillors

Vicki Seccombe declared that a total of 6 nominations have been received for the Election of Regional Councillors. All nominations are financial members, have been endorsed by 2 financial members and the number of candidates is not greater than 20. All nominations (as listed below) were duly elected as Regional Councillors.

Rob Drage, Rob Drage Consulting, Orange
Matthew Irvine, Bathurst Business Chamber
Daniel Sutton, Business Orange
Cath Woolfrey, Central West Lift Trucks, Bathurst

BUSINESS NSW

Justin Enright, Oberon Business & Tourism Association
Angela Myles, Business Mudgee

6 Election of President & Appointment of Regional Nominated Councillor to State Council

Rob Drage advised that the RAC Charter only allows a person to stand for 2 terms as Regional President and as such his term would be concluding at this AGM. He advised that you are able to apply for an extension of the term if there were no nominations from the WNSW RAC for the role of President and he would be happy to continue in this role if necessary.

Vicki Seccombe declared the Chair's position vacant and called for nominations for the position of President.

There were no nominations at this stage as all current members were new Councillors or could not commit to the time.

It was agreed to apply for an extension until the time that another Committee member wishes to nominate for the role.

7 Other Business

There was no other business.