

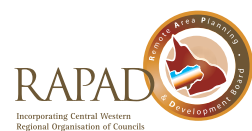
Photo courtesy of Winton Shire Council.



# RAPAD Consultation Report

## “Realising the RAPAD Big Vision”

Prepared by Women at the Well, June 2019



# Acknowledgements

Without exception, the people of central west Queensland were welcoming, and once aware of the purpose of this consultation, displayed a high level of interest, and support. In particular, venturing into townships of less frequently visited areas often resulted in our strongest community participation. There was a high level of appreciation that the consultation was taken deep into the communities.

First, we would like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands that we met on over the four shires throughout the consultation period and pay our respects to Elders past and present. We recognise that the strategy we have proposed throughout this consultation piece, while focused on the modern circular economy, critically relies on, and values Indigenous knowledge which has exercised circular economy principles for over 40,000 years. We thank the Aboriginal organisations and various groups of First Nations people who were kind enough to provide information, context and cultural connection. While not every outcome or finding shared has been captured in this report, the information is held in trust, and will only be used with the continued support of those who shared it. We are honoured by your trust.

We would like to personally thank all the people of Barcaldine, Longreach, Winton, Alpha, Jericho, Blackall, Tambo, Aramac, Muttaborra who attended our forums and discussions, and the businesses who made time for one-to-one interviews with us, often opening on public holidays, and who personally undertook the further promotion of the regional consultation. We'd also like to thank the families who welcomed us into their homes and provided unique insights and context on their experience of living in central west Queensland – and shared their aspirations for a brighter future throughout central west Queensland.

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# Executive Summary

The Central West Queensland Remote Area Planning and Development Board (RAPAD) is a united regional organisation of the seven central west Queensland council shires – Barcoo, Boulia, Barcaldine, Blackall-Tambo, Diamantina, Longreach and Winton. The purpose of this organisation is to proactively shape and create a prosperous future for the RAPAD region of Outback Queensland.

In July 2018, the Realising the RAPAD Big Vision strategy document was prepared for RAPAD by Global Futuremakers, with support by the Department of Environment and Science (DES). This strategy was particularly brought about by RAPAD's recognition that cumulative loss of population throughout the region over the last decade is not sustainable—and that a transformation around the region's liveability and economic outlook needed to occur.

The concepts of the strategy were tested within four shires of the central west Queensland community over an 11 day period – in Barcaldine, Blackall-Tambo, Longreach and Winton shires, representing 90% of the population of the RAPAD region. Travelling under the partnership “Women at the Well”, Global Futuremakers (GFM), Regional Economic Solutions (RES) and The Circular Experiment (TCE, now trading as Correo) conducted this consultation. Further targeted consultation will be required in the remaining three shires in the future, recognising that most stakeholders are highly remote.

Community consultation occurred in various forms, including community and targeted workshops, an open survey, and multiple one-to-one discussions with businesses and community members. Over 30 meeting interactions were undertaken from 5-15 November 2018.

The purpose of this report is to summarise the findings during consultation with the broader Central West Queensland community, also referred to as the RAPAD community. As such, it is structured to reflect the consultation findings directly under Realising the RAPAD Big Vision key thematic areas.

## Community Profile and Attitudes

The community has indicated that it is ready to take on significant economic transformation within the region, and that RAPAD should be the body to lead. However, there are significant challenges that will need to be addressed first. These include:

- Perception of community boundary, and ensuring there is alignment across the community
- Effective communication, that enables broad community participation and ownership of the transformation; and
- Capacity building and capability enhancement of RAPAD.

## Valuing Knowledge

The community holds the concept of valuing knowledge in high regard – and is readily willing to participate in the identifying of opportunities and lessons learned. This is an opportunity for RAPAD to forge stronger, transparent relationships with the community, to generate buy in for the strategy.

## Energy (electricity)

The consultation has highlighted that the cost of electricity is viewed by the community as:

- The biggest threat to the region's economic development;
- The underlying deterrent to region liveability;
- and is unsustainable.



Way Out West Festival. Photo courtesy of Winton Shire Council.

It is also clear that the community very strongly supports (>98%) energy self-sufficiency, in line with the strategy document, based on a new pricing model for delivered electricity – and does not believe the current retailer will deliver stronger or better outcomes for the community.

While there is work that RAPAD will likely undertake with the Queensland Government and other interested parties to realise energy opportunities, there is significant work that can and should be done within the region to facilitate alternative energy solutions.

## Digital Economy

The NBN is not delivering the level of operability or reliability expected in the community. The community believes it has a direct impact on the liveability and opportunity to grow the community. Businesses in particular, across the spectrum of industries, recognise the importance of digital platforms to their profitability. There is an opportunity to review the learnings from the installation of the private network in Winton, which could serve as a model for solutions across the region.

Based on community feedback there seems to be little recourse for the central west Queensland region to experience more reliable NBN. The Winton approach reflects a local response

to overcoming the limitations of insufficiently delivered services.

## Water

Water appears to be one of the areas in this strategy that has the most potential for gains, yet remains one of the most divisive issues, particularly between council shires. Pricing, metering, messaging and access around water use and efficiency has resulted in significantly different expectations across the community. Unlike energy, digital economy, food production or manufacturing, water is a natural resource that occurs disproportionately across the central west Queensland community – and consequently has the potential to emerge as a source of conflict, particularly between shires. This will fundamentally be driven by the perception of equitable water use.

While there are a range of technological solutions to water availability and reuse across the central west Queensland region, there is a fundamental lack of data capture and collation at this time, which is needed to underpin the further investment required to deliver on the strategy document. There are valuable measure that can be taken across the community to improve existing knowledge and community water use efficiency, and explore anecdotal evidence around water recycling and reuse in the past.

## Food Production

The community is highly supportive of increased local food production for self-sufficiency. Using technology to develop sophisticated food production is widely appealing.

## Advanced Manufacturing

The community needs to “see some wins”. However there is significant capacity and capability building required to ensure these pathways are able to be pursued.

## Services and International Markets

The role of services and international markets seemed to be implicitly woven through all of our discussions while consulting in the region. During the consultation, we engaged the community on the possibilities within this sector that, if we can build the self-sufficiency of the initial platforms – energy, digital economy, water and food production – then there is scope to reinvent service delivery throughout the region. The overwhelming response of the community was the desire for choice. More choice around education delivery, more choice around

engagement with health services, options for interacting with international markets in a modern framework.

## Next Steps – The Community View

The community clearly expressed throughout the consultation period that it wants to be included in the journey to realise the Big Vision strategy. We asked (through the survey) if respondents and their families would be more likely to stay in the region over the next five years if RAPAD pursued the Big RAPAD Vision. Over 88% stated that they would.

It must be acknowledged that there is a genuine anxiety about capacity and capability within the community to deliver this kind of vision. The communication issues raised earlier in this report are part of that challenge – finding new ways to engage and inform the community, and enable community ownership.

However, the unique strength of the community is its resilience. It has embraced the ideal of self-sufficiency promoted through Realising the RAPAD Big Vision, because it’s a concept it is well familiar with. This is a strategy that the community is eager to put forward.



*Australian Age of Dinosaurs Museum. Photo courtesy of Winton Shire Council.*

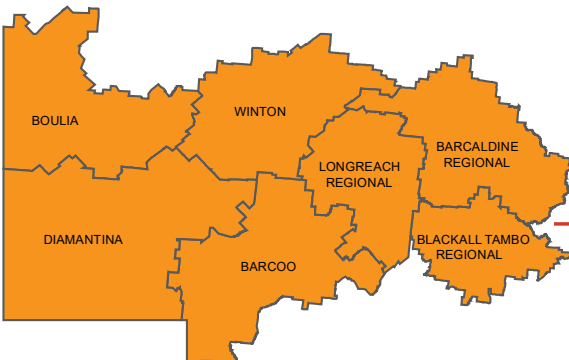
# Community consultation findings on realising the RAPAD Big Vision

The Central West Queensland Remote Area Planning and Development Board (RAPAD) is a united regional organisation of the seven central west Queensland council shires – Barcoo, Boulia, Barcaldine, Blackall-Tambo, Diamantina, Longreach and Winton (Figure 1). The purpose of this organisation is to proactively shape and create a prosperous future for the RAPAD region of Outback Queensland.

RAPAD recognises that cumulative loss of population throughout the region over the last decade is not sustainable—and that a transformation around the region’s livability and economic outlook needs to occur, through continued commitment to enhancing energy supply, security and reliability within the region. The range of initiatives undertaken to date include the RAPAD Pathfinder report, funded by Queensland’s Department of State Development, identifying renewable energy as an economic development initiative; RAPAD’s 2018-2020 Strategic Plan with a focus on energy, with the first step including a RAPAD Renewable Energy Forum held in February 2018; and in July 2018, the Realising the RAPAD Big Vision Strategy Document, prepared for RAPAD by Global Futuremakers, with support by the Department of Environment and Science (DES). RAPAD supported testing the key concept of this strategy with the community.

Over an 11 day period, Global Futuremakers (GFM), Regional Economic Solutions (RES) and The Circular Experiment (TCE) conducted community consultation across four shires of the central west Queensland community –

### Map of Queensland and the seven shires that make up the Central West RAPAD region.



Barcaldine, Blackall-Tambo, Longreach and Winton, representing potential coverage of 90% of the population of the RAPAD region.

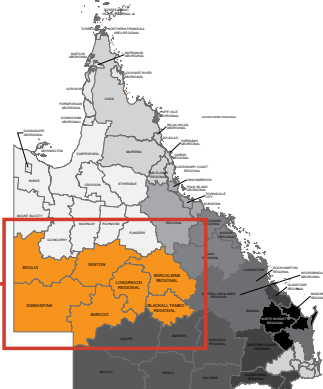
Travelling under the partnership of “Women At The Well”, the purpose of this visit was to:

- Socialise the concepts behind the strategy document, Realising the RAPAD Big Vision
- Test community appetite for progressing the strategy
- Engage the community in opportunity and barrier identification, that is to understand where the community envisioned potential barriers/opportunities, and/or identify potential barriers/opportunities arising from community discussions; and
- Scope high level potential regional capability and constraint.

While ‘RAPAD region’ has been used to group the seven councils in Realising the RAPAD Big Vision, it became clear during this consultation exercise that the community is more familiar with the term central west Queensland. Hence the two terms can be used interchangeably, but for community understanding, central west Queensland is generally used throughout the remaining document to describe the region proscribed by the seven councils.

### Purpose

The purpose of this report is to summarise the findings during consultation with the broader Central West Queensland community, also referred to as the RAPAD community. As such, it is structured to reflect the consultation findings directly under Realising the RAPAD Big Vision key thematic areas.



# Approach

Community consultation occurred in various forms, including community and targeted workshops, an open survey, and multiple one-to-one discussions with businesses and community members. Irrespective of consultation type, a consistent approach to messaging and information gathering was maintained, to ensure information gathered through these conversations could be reviewed and compared within a framework. Central to these discussions was the use of a 'yarning document' – a brochure prepared by Women At The Well, outlining the six key steps to transformative change

for a thriving, self-sufficient and sustainable outback community, and further supported by a website, [www.ourregionourfuture.com](http://www.ourregionourfuture.com). Over 30 meeting interactions were undertaken from 5-15 November 2018.

Three shires within the RAPAD region were not included in the community consultation forums—Diamantina, Barcoo and Boulia. Given the cost of extending the consultation, it was agreed that the consultation findings of this initial exercise would be used to inform targeted consultation in these three shires by RAPAD at a later time.

Six steps to transforming the RAPAD economy.



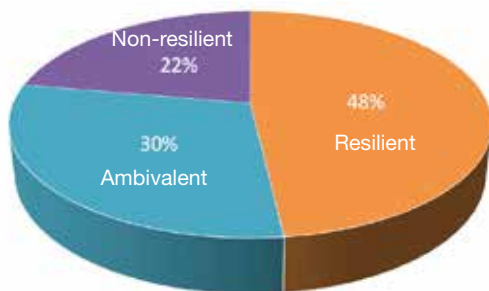


# Acknowledgement of the challenge – community profile and attitudes

## Key findings of community attitudes

The community has indicated that it is ready to take on significant economic transformation within the region, and that RAPAD should be the body to lead. However, there are significant challenges that will need to be addressed first. These include:

- Perception of community boundary, and ensuring there is alignment across the community;
- Effective communication, that enables broad community participation and ownership of the transformation; and
- Capacity building and capability enhancement of RAPAD.



Participant responses to 'how resilient do you think your community is?'

As identified in Realising the RAPAD Big Vision, there are significant challenges facing the RAPAD community. These include the grinding impacts of an extended drought, declining population, individual, family and community wellbeing, health and life satisfaction, and ultimately regional liveability. All of these factors have a distinct impact on a community's resilience. While national wellbeing studies suggest that the RAPAD region continues to demonstrate some of the strongest community resilience throughout regional Australia (73.4% compared with 70.8%) community optimism is low (54.1% compared with 72.0%).

Responses to the survey, and commentary throughout the consultation forums, suggests the community's optimism is linked to self-

perception of community resilience. When we further analysed the range of interviews undertaken and written responses in the survey, key words and phrases continued to occur throughout the dialogue, as the community articulated their views of the challenges:



While there are generalised statements (no future, depressing), the strongest responses are around specific issues—jobs, electricity, water, food, education, health—cost of living issues. This language contrasts with key word responses, when we asked the community to determine what they needed their community to become to encourage people to stay:



In effect, the community is not prescriptive about the methods or pathway for the future, but rather more interested in futuring hope and opportunity. This finding suggests the community is open to a range of alternative mechanisms and pathways, if it means that liveability is enhanced. This is one of the most important findings of the community engagement exercise.

<sup>1</sup> Comparing Central West Queensland resilience and optimism against national regional average, *Wellbeing*, resilience and Liveability in rural and Regional Australian: The 2015 Regional Wellbeing Survey.



## Where is my community?

One of the challenges ahead for RAPAD however, is the perception by individuals about the size of their community – who's included, and who isn't. The RAPAD Big Vision is predicated on cooperation, coordination and collaboration between all seven RAPAD councils. Hence its important to understand how the community views this relationship. Through our survey, we asked the respondents to identify how big they consider their community to be.

The problem was that we saw significant shift between various forums around how big participants considered their community to be, that just didn't match up with our survey results. Further investigation of the data indicated there is a gender bias – and a council shire bias.

Women are more likely to view their community as closer to home, with over 71% viewing their community between smaller than a township (i.e. other) and the local council shire. In contrast, 84% of men surveyed viewed their community size as somewhere between their council shire and central west Queensland.

However, the really interesting findings in the desegregated data is separating out council shire responses. When Longreach survey responses were separated from other shires, it became evident that Longreach's view on community is substantially different from other shires. Where survey respondents from the remaining six shires were more likely to consider their community boundary to be their council shire (46%), Longreach residents were more likely to consider central west Queensland (62%) to be the boundary of their community. Given the extent of centralised services operating from Longreach, and a number of sophisticated businesses (i.e. operating across the region), it is logical that Longreach residents are more likely to recognise the larger region as their community.

This was a much more consistent match against the feedback during provided during community consultation. Where business owners and service providers were actively engaging their businesses across or beyond the region, they were more likely to consider central west Queensland as their community.

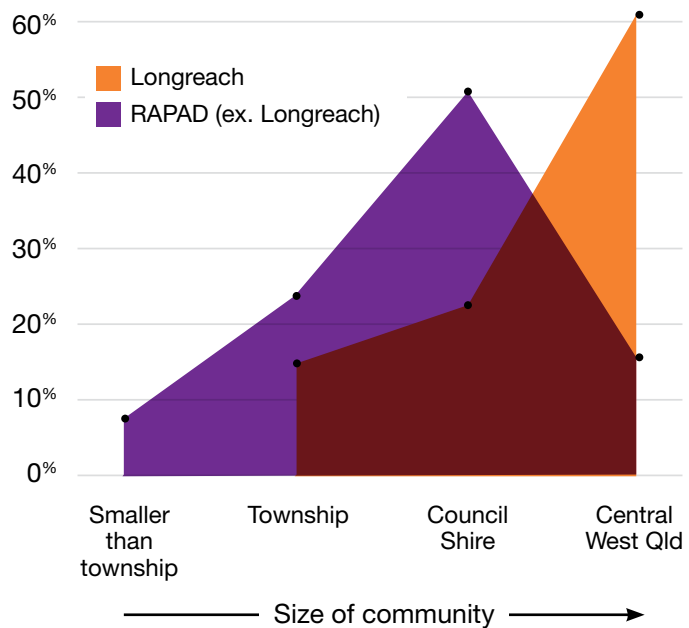
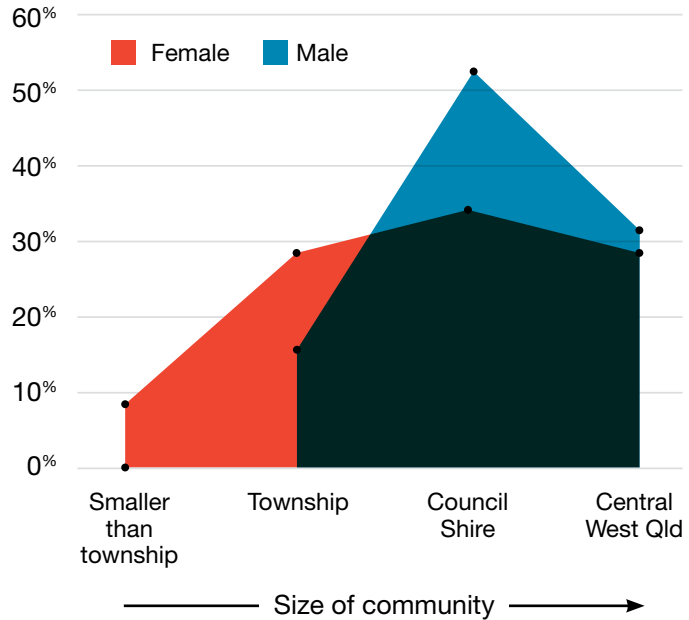
However, community members whose focal points of interaction were more typically limited to their township, or their property, were more likely to consider the shire or township as the extent of their community. There are notable differences between the shires on critical issues (e.g. communication, and water charging) that were raised to emphasise how individuals characterised their view of who was 'in' or 'out' of their community. The concern of a central west Queensland community being Longreach centric was raised often during consultation within the other shires.

The significance of how people identify within their community is critical to support for the RAPAD strategy going forward, as it is intended to deliver an enhanced region, rather than 'cookie-cutter' infrastructure solutions in every township or shire. As will become evident from the evaluations under the key themes, building trust across the community is likely to be an urgent and critical activity to ensure community ownership for an economic transition. Both of these findings have significant implications going forward as:

- Women are more likely to trigger the decision for a family to leave the region; and
- The risk of community disengagement because the remaining shires view the strategy as Longreach centric.



### How large do you consider your community to be?



Implementing transitional change across the region needs to reflect cross regional support. Given the population of Longreach, and therefore, the increased number of absolute responses to surveys and other forms of community engagement, it is critical that going forward, RAPAD ensures careful disaggregation and interrogation of data to manage this bias.

## Regional capability

There appears to be general consensus across the community, based on our discussions, that RAPAD is the appropriate body to lead an economic transformation across the central west Queensland community. Transformation needs to be led by the region, and this is the one unifying body, purpose established to do that.

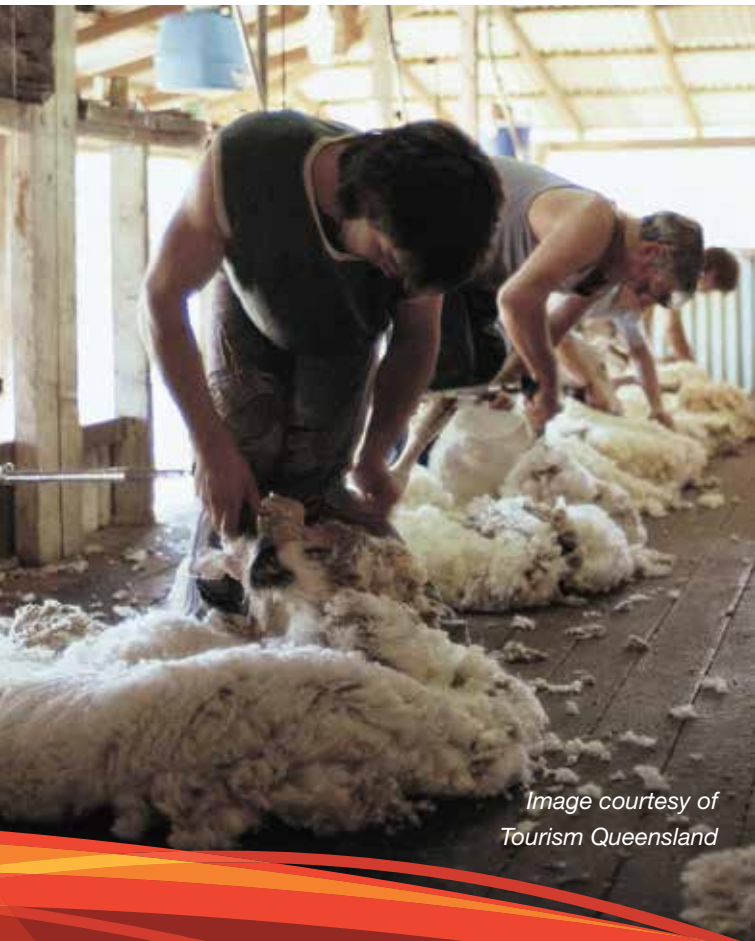
At the heart of the Realising the RAPAD Big Vision Strategy is enhancing the community's self-sufficiency. As we moved through the region during consultation, we heard very clearly from the community that its appetite for significant change is high. We asked the community the question – through survey and forums – if it supported a change to the current model of government service delivery. Over 90%, in both formats, said 'yes'.

To be able to effect an economic transformation across the region, a vision of this scale requires a coordinating body. This is the central platform under which RAPAD exists. Hence it was important to test the community's understanding of RAPAD. We asked the community about their knowledge of RAPAD. From our survey results, approximately 85% of the community were aware of RAPAD's existence and purpose.

When we asked the same question during consultation forums and discussion, this number was closer to 50-60%. Business owners were more likely to have an understanding of the role of RAPAD within the region, particularly those with interests beyond their township or council shire. For a number of residents, their responses suggested that while they were aware of RAPAD as an organisation, they didn't really understand their role. Given that RAPAD had promoted our survey, it is logical to expect the survey would reflect a higher correlation with RAPAD awareness.

Attitudes towards RAPAD effectiveness and capability are mixed. There is genuine recognition across the community that at a functional level RAPAD has good capability to attract funds, and deliver targeted, specific smaller projects. However, there is significant concern, particularly across the business community, about the capacity of RAPAD to manage and deliver a transformational initiative of the scale in the strategy document, and the capacity of councils to align and support RAPAD.

The community also revealed that it didn't want external help based on a fly in/fly out approach. The concept of bringing in external mentors to help build the capability within the region was frequently raised as an option during discussions. There was also recognition that external mentors and influencers might stimulate value for existing knowledge.



*Image courtesy of  
Tourism Queensland*

*“I got an email about this forum from the council – but I ignored it because we just get so many, I didn’t think it was important – until my friend contacted me and said you MUST go to this. So of course I did!”*

## Communication

One of the biggest challenges facing RAPAD is communicating effectively across central west Queensland. We asked the community, through the survey, how they keep in touch within their community. Over 88% rely on email and internet to maintain contact within their community, followed by 67% using mobiles (including texting).



However, as we moved throughout the region we regularly heard from the community that they found email to be a “noisy” communication channel. In addition to the usual spam that hits the inbox of every email user, there is a higher reliance on broadcast communications, which once were solely distributed by word, newspaper and radio, now channelling through email. Councils, schools, community groups, state and federal communications – the email noise was considered to be ‘deafening’ – with the result that people are increasingly ignoring email communication.

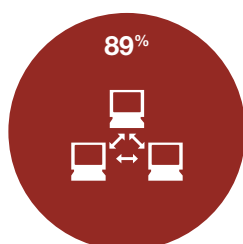
and the community. Strategic and targeted information will be critical to community support throughout the region.

This is a serious challenge for RAPAD – and for the broader community. The major transition proposed through this consultation relies on effective communication between RAPAD

However, an underutilised resource throughout the community are the various community advocates, whom Women at the Well had the remarkable privilege to meet throughout each of the four shires. Crossing a range of ages and interest groups, each of these people were well networked with the community, active in their community, and passionate about their region.

During consultation, these members of the community ensured that consultation forums were attended, tapping into members of the community that we ourselves did not know how to reach.

**89%** of respondents preferred communication method within their community was email/internet”



Email/internet



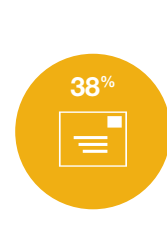
Mobile/text



Newspaper



Phone (landline)



Australia Post

# The key platforms of realising the RAPAD Big Vision

The remainder of this report focuses on the community responses to the key platforms identified in the strategy – valuing knowledge, energy, digital economy, water, food production, advanced manufacturing, services and international markets.



*Ayrshire Hills. Image courtesy of Winton Shire Council*

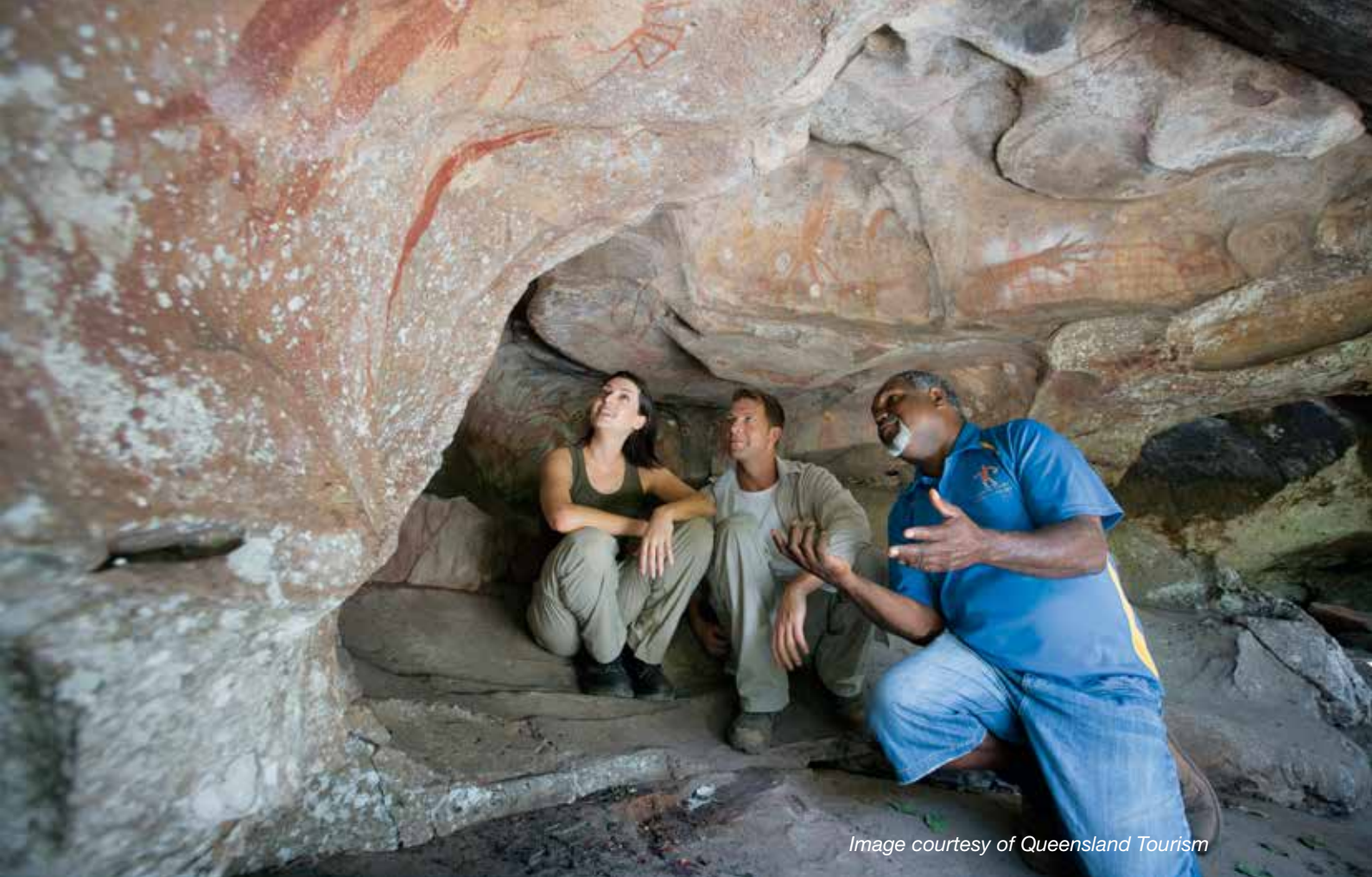


Image courtesy of Queensland Tourism

## Valuing Knowledge

**Key findings:** *The community holds the concept of valuing knowledge in high regard – and is readily willing to participate in the identifying of opportunities and lessons learned. This is an opportunity for RAPAD to forge stronger, transparent relationships with the community, to generate buy in for the strategy.*

In the strategy, we identified that valuing knowledge within the community is one of its critical strengths. This ‘well’ of knowledge holds the learnings of past failures and successes— and this approach appeared to strike one of the deepest chords for the community, as we met across forums and a range of discussions.

We asked the community, through the survey, how well they felt their community was partnering to value key relationships within

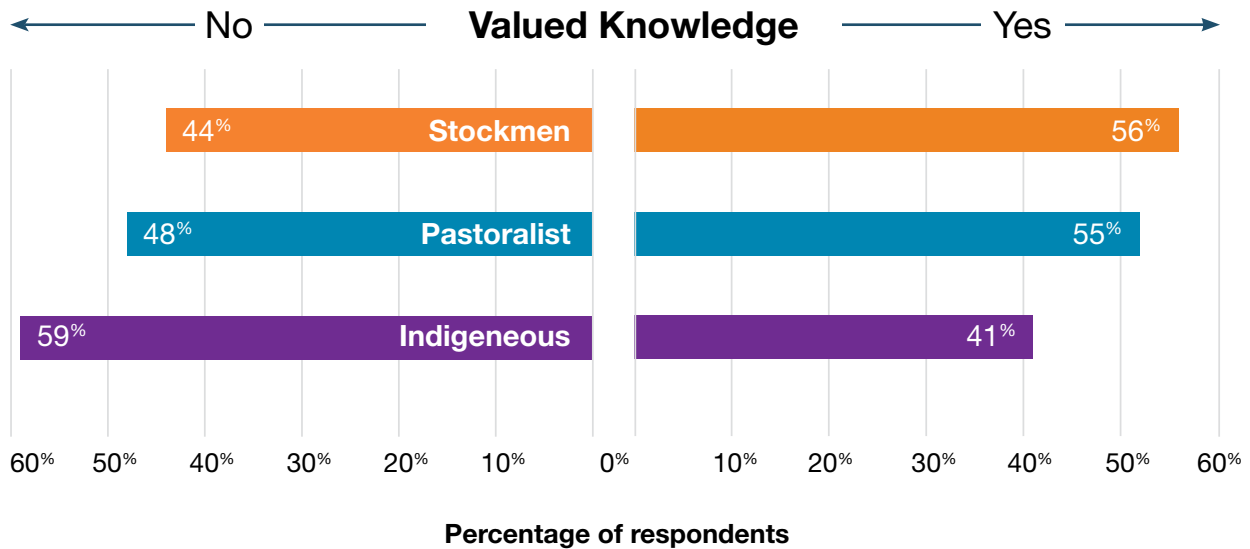
the community – Indigenous knowledge, Stockmen/Stockwomen and Pastoralists. Of the community surveyed, 59% believe that partnerships to value Indigenous knowledge are not occurring, 44% believe the same of stockmen and women’s knowledge, and 45% believe the same of pastoralists.

We also asked the community if more should be done to value the knowledge in the region. Over 86% of respondents agreed. When we asked this question throughout the forums and discussions, we were overwhelmed by the responses.

The response from Indigenous councils and groups was extremely positive. Entering into partnerships that showcase and value knowledge, gathered and passed down between 40,000-70,000 years appeared to be a highly welcome concept.



Do you think there is partnering to value key relationships within the community?



This particular interaction was based on viewing these Indigenous partnerships through a lens of strength and respect. It was clear from each of these groups that a significant number of opportunities were believed to exist that would contribute to the enhanced liveability of central west Queensland.

*“Of course, we would want to be involved in this form of partnership. The circular economy is more of what we’ve always done within our own culture. We have so much to offer.” (Barcaldine)*

Similarly, when we met with pastoralists, local businesses, councils, families and within the various forums, numerous anecdotes were recounted regarding opportunities and lessons that could and should be learnt from previous

projects and challenges. Of concern, when asked if these learnings were captured at the time, or after, at no point did anyone indicate that this had occurred. One of the real challenges in introducing potential change is that communities will resist because of the failures of projects perceived to be similar in the past – and it is clear from the community that it desperately needs some wins. However, one of the simplest ways of mitigating the risks is at least ensuring to learn the history of success and failure of projects in the region, including geographical, climatic, geopolitical and cultural.

It is evident that significant knowledge sits within the community. There is a high risk this knowledge will be lost as the community continues to age – or move away. Managing this risk presents significant opportunity to engage the community with the RAPAD strategy.



## Case Study: Growth in predator numbers

During one of our discussions, the issue of escalating numbers of wild dogs preying on sheep arose. A former shearer quickly highlighted that predator numbers had escalated further with the downturn in the kangaroo meat industry, which declined in the wake of the collapsing export market. This view was continuously endorsed across the community as we tested it in a range of other groups – and we researched further following discussions in central west Queensland – and believe the story unfolds something like this:

In 2013, a scientific review by the Invasive Animals Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) reported that unless there was a coordinated effort between government, landholders, industry and research, to actively control wild dogs, rangeland sheep production would cease within 40 years. This risk was particularly high in Queensland. Previous population control had included a range of netting fences, a higher availability of labour on a station, where every station hand facilitated control of wild dogs. However the changing dynamics of station management, wild dog control and commodity prices meant that this was no longer the case.

However, there was a reduction in predation where roo culling occurred on properties. Roo shooters, when entering a farm property, typically entered agreements to shoot any wild dogs while culling kangaroos, and to leave a few carcasses behind to distract wild dogs that may return later.

When the export market collapsed, due in large part to being unable to export to Russia (the largest export market kangaroo meat), the local kangaroo shooting industry declined. Predator numbers rapidly escalated again, without continuous culling. By 2015, it had become clear that wild dogs were a major problem for all grazing industries in Australia.



*Image courtesy of Queensland Government*

To date the State and Federal Government combined have spent approximately \$32.74 on control of invasive plants and animals, including cluster fencing. Throughout regional Queensland and New South Wales, cluster fencing has successfully reduced predator attacks on sheep and cattle farms. However, the use of cluster fences has also come with unintended issues. Kangaroo shooters have claimed that kangaroos and emus are now cut off from waterholes by fences, while some believe farms have treated kangaroos trapped inside cluster fences inhumanely. Outside of the RAPAD (central west Queensland) region, a kangaroo processing meatworks claims that its supply has halved since the introduction of cluster fences, and Indigenous elders in south west Queensland were not consulted and provided the opportunity to perform a work area clearance before the clearing of land to build the cluster fences in that SW Qld region.

This case study demonstrates that projects or solutions within a community are rarely straight forward—there are usually multiple, mutually dependant relationships throughout the chain. RAPAD has the opportunity to draw on the learnings in adjacent communities throughout this process—and mitigate the unintended consequences.

## Energy (electricity)

### Key findings:

*The consultation has highlighted that the cost of electricity is viewed by the community as:*

- *The biggest threat to the region's economic development*
- *The underlying deterrent to region liveability; and*
- *Is unsustainable.*

*It is also clear that the community very strongly supports (>98%) energy self-sufficiency, in line with the strategy document, based on a new pricing model for delivered electricity – and does not believe the current retailer will deliver stronger or better outcomes for the community.*

*While there is work that RAPAD will likely undertake with the Queensland Government and other interested parties to realise energy opportunities, there is significant work that can and should be done within the region to facilitate alternative energy solutions. Some options, that are additional to the material previously discussed in the RAPAD Big Vision include:*

- *RAPAD review of Western Power approach to network reform. As a major retailer delivering energy across regional Western Australia, its approach to buttressing regional electricity delivery and quality of power is directly relevant to current facets of existing market.*
- *Review of network augmentation opportunities (ie investment in additional renewable generation)*
- *Regional energy audits – local government, businesses and residential.*

*The anecdotal evidence suggests a high penetration of outdated and highly inefficient technology. These audits may also benefit from metering in key properties (residential or business) to monitor power quality.*

- *Independent review of substation electricity data for the region. The issue of reliability is a fundamental driver for investment in network augmentation, particularly around larger renewable energy generation. This is also an opportunity to review impact of local generation investment to date on power quality and reliability within direct areas of influence.*
- *Development of a regional energy efficiency education campaign, with roll out in parallel to localised generation investment. This would effectively provide a progressive roll out across the region, with learnings paid forward.*
- *Identify potential supplier/s for energy efficiency appliances, willing to support appliances with local/regional service capability*
- *Provide more information for the community on their rights through the Energy and Water Ombudsman.*
- *There is an urgent need to understand the impact of telemarketed solar entering regional and remote communities, where access to quality assurance and legal mechanisms are limited.*

*It is not suggested that RAPAD undertake these actions in isolation. They are however important actions that do need to be initiated to enable further investor readiness. The need for energy transformation is highly apparent, but the evidentiary case needs substantiating with data, which typically resides the network distributor or retailer.*



*“We supported Winton Council installing the geothermal power station, we thought it was a good thing to do. But my bills seem to be going up when theirs are going down. That doesn’t seem fair.” (Winton discussions)*

The energy story in central west Queensland, while at times convoluted, demonstrates the most unified responses of the community. We asked the community six key questions around the cost, accessibility, self-sufficiency and growth opportunities associated with energy, through our survey and various forums. In particular, we wanted to understand the attitudes towards the current delivery of electricity within the community, that is: did community members feel the service was meeting their needs; was it affordable; was electricity availability was impacting economic growth; could more be done to reduce the cost of electricity; what might this look like; and does the community want energy self-sufficiency?

### Why are our electricity bills so high?

Before questioning the community about a future energy outlook, as articulated in the strategy Realising the Big RAPAD Vision, we needed to ascertain community understanding about current electricity services. There is currently significant confusion around the narrative of how electricity is costed and delivered into the community.

Through the forums and various discussions conducted over the consultation period, it is clear that most of the community has little to no awareness of the disconnect between their electricity bill and the new solar power station that they might drive past on their way in and out of a township. As new infrastructure moves into the grid, in their region, community members anticipate bill relief through lower cost electricity. When this expectation is unrealised, a number of community members have indicated suspicion of these projects, particularly where they are local Government owned or facilitated. Equally, where these projects are supported by external investment, there is suspicion that investors are profiting at the cost of the community.

Most community members are unaware of the Community Service Obligations (CSOs) surrounding the delivery of electricity into regional Queensland; or the complexity of arrangements that may occur “behind the meter”, as utilised by the Winton Shire Council in the deployment of its geothermal power station. In particular, the community is broadly unaware of the impact of network costs to their electricity bills. The absence of this level of understanding is likely to hinder implementation of alternative energy delivery models into the future.

*“This is my country...I want to live here, but its just too expensive, and I’m thinking that I’ll have to move my family away...I just don’t think we have a choice.” (Winton discussions)*

*“Our quarterly power bill is between \$3000-\$4000. Two households – four adults and one toddler. Gas stoves.” (survey response)*

Electricity bill shock is front of mind for most of the community. Some members of the community were willing to share their electricity bills, indicating electricity costs of \$6000-\$16,000 a year (which is between 8% and 21% of the median family income and likely more for a significant proportion of the community who have low income and highly inefficient appliances). It also worth noting that customers with lower electricity bill costs typically had installed solar. High energy demand is inescapable when living in an environment where extreme temperatures necessitate air conditioning and a range of other energy driven responses 24 hours a day, for 3-6 months a year, just to maintain liveability. Consequently, there is a breaking point emerging for the central west Queensland community, as the region becomes increasingly unaffordable to live in.

During forums delivered over the consultation period, and in one to one discussions, Women at the Well provided an overview of the fundamental structure of electricity pricing and delivery of energy into the region. This

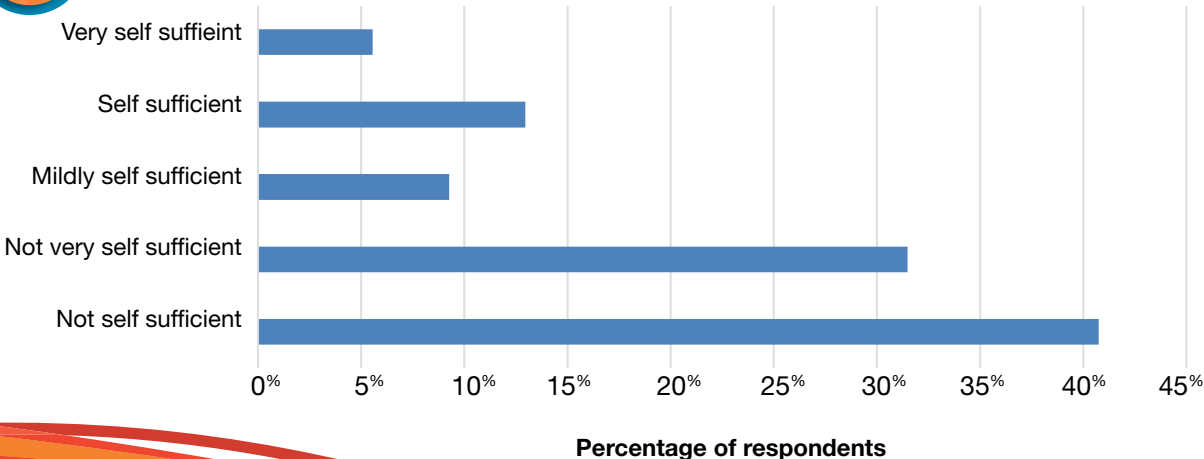
information was welcomed, and appeared to be readily understood. However, it did also appear to reinforce the community’s own understanding of their electricity bills. That is, under the current structure of electricity pricing they were unlikely to experience a reprieve from bill shock.

**Can we do better on the cost of electricity?**

We asked the community if they felt there were better ways to deliver electricity into their community at a lower cost. 100 % of survey and forum participants agreed there was. When we questioned further how this might be achieved, over 90% of survey and forum participants indicated locally generated renewable energy as the means of delivering lower cost electricity into the community. Suggestions heavily favoured solar and geothermal, with a strong push towards individual solar and battery systems, further supported by networked solar power stations, battery and geothermal. Critically, the written comments through the survey, and direct feedback during the forums indicated a strong desire for localised ownership.



**How self sufficient do you believe your community is for energy?**



# 98% of respondents answered “yes” when asked “Would you support your community becoming energy self-sufficient”

*“I remember when communities had their own power stations...at least if lights went out we knew it was a local issue. I would like to think that any changes had a long and sustainable vision.” (survey response).*

*“We want this vision – but how do we get government to agree to it” (every forum, every discussion)*

*“How do we get government to pay for energy self sufficiency” (every forum, every discussion)*

## Energy self sufficiency

Over 72% of the survey participants believe the community is not energy self-sufficient. However, this response was stronger on a major township basis, where over 92% of Longreach participants suggested their community was not energy self-sufficient, and 87% of Winton participants. Consultation forums gave similar responses, with over 90% of the attendees suggesting their community is not self-sufficient.

When we asked if the community would support central west Queensland becoming energy self sufficient, over 98% of survey respondents and 100% of forum attendees supported the concept.

It is clear that the community are already attempting to remediate electricity bill shock. During the forums, one-to-one discussions, and our own observations while driving through the region, people continued to highlight their individual installation of solar panels on homes and businesses, all aimed at reducing electricity costs. Solar panels appeared on homes across the full breath of the social strata.

In addition to fulfilling needs of enhanced self-sufficiency, these installations also demonstrate a comfort and awareness of the concept of ‘behind the meter’ solutions. Hence the issues around behind the meter solutions by councils (as raised above), would suggest the community is open to these types of solutions, but require greater communication to ensure transparency.

As we moved throughout our forums and discussions, the level of defeat around current energy services emerged as a recurring theme throughout the community. The population is largely indoctrinated to acceptance of the status quo. There is also a general disbelief that a Queensland Government would see benefit in a more independent region. The community mindset is strongly of the view that any and all change to the region is limited by the willingness of government interest and investment. We regularly challenged the community during forums and discussions – “Why does it have to be government? What about attracting external investors?” There was generally surprise to this suggestion – and concerns expressed by many on what this approach might look like – but an openness to external investment.

*“Why would anyone want to invest out here, in us?” (Blackall-Tambo forum)*

*“If we start to bring in bigger investors from outside, it would open doors for local community investment too” (Longreach Business Forum)*

This entrenched community acceptance of government control seems largely attributable to the progressive removal of government support of services from the region (energy, water, roads, agriculture, health, education) – where the community indicates it is reduced to accepting what the government is willing to give.

*“Every time government takes away another office out here, more families leave, and our quality of service for whatever that was diminishes too. No one listens when we complain. There’s just not enough of us here to make government pay attention.” (Barcaldine discussions)*

## Relationship between electricity availability and economic growth

Through the survey we asked the community if it felt that electricity availability was affecting economic growth of the community, and if yes, why. In retrospect, this question was poorly phrased, and likely created some confusion, as became evident during discussion in forums. Our intent was to investigate availability and reliability of power. However, many responses focused on the cost of electricity and relationship with economic growth. Of the survey responses, 63% believe that electricity availability is affecting economic growth in the region. While this figure was substantially higher in the forums (around 90%), forum interpretation of this question typically led to cost and liveability. This interpretation was matched by many of our survey respondents too. Feedback in the forums, discussions and the survey overwhelmingly indicate that the community links economic growth of the region with affordability (or lack of) electricity.

*“Liveability also means being comfortable. With temperatures exceeding 40 degrees most months you have no choice but to consume more energy for fans or air conditioning. The electricity bills are massive here and as a small family, I struggle to keep up with the cost of living out here with no competitive pricing for essential services.” (survey response)*

*“Electricity has increased by 40%. People can’t afford their power bills, yet can’t afford to be without electricity either. What you might spend in a community business you’re now stashing to afford your electricity bill.” (survey response)*

A significant number of survey responses highlighted the impact of power reliability/availability on current economic activity, for existing businesses – and homes.

*“Limited power source through diesel powered generators limits the electricity grid to allow businesses such as manufacturing and pre-fabrication to open as there is not the consistent power availability, especially in summer to accommodate new business.” (survey response)*

*“The shop closes when the power goes out.” (survey response)*

*“Brown outs and the lack of supply limits the businesses ability to expand. Also the huge cost of power is crippling.” (survey response)*

*“Cost, lack of consistent voltage (damaged electrical pumps & white goods)” (survey response)*

The community clearly recognises that reliability of power is more readily influenced by localised generation, and that it is logically more cost effective to deliver. Increasing the presence of localised generation, that feeds into the grid, will enhance perception issues if the community is failing to benefit. The message is clear – investment in localised electricity generation needs to lead to lower electricity prices.



However, as the current pricing arrangement does not lead to lower prices, and is unlikely to in the near future, (remembering that up to 20% of people in the region are considering leaving in the next 12 months), the absence of price relief is likely to drive more members from the community. Off-grid responses are also increasingly more likely, with multiple community members indicating they have been considering moving off-grid for some time.

## Energy efficiency

While energy efficiency wasn't directly raised as an issue with the community through the survey or forums, it became clear during our visit that there is a pressing need for energy efficiency education and reform throughout the region.

Energy efficiency is typically one of the least exciting aspects of energy management but often yields the simplest, biggest and most cost-effective energy solutions. From our observations throughout the consultation period, it was evident that appliances are very outdated, from homes to hotels, shops to major businesses. Similarly, building efficiency envelopes are generally poor – that is, many without insulation, or passive cooling/heating measures, and a lack of air tightness about the homes, reflecting the age of building stock.

The greater concern is the number of outdated appliances that are run continuously, such as air conditioning, water pumps and refrigeration, in combination with a lack of energy efficiency awareness. From the stock observed throughout communities, many of these appliances are 15 years (and generally more) old. Within households, numerous appliances are likely to payback very quickly through energy savings on quarterly bills – and present a genuine opportunity to improve liveability. However it is also evident that many of these appliances are kept because of their inherent resilience in poor power conditions.

Modern, energy efficient appliances rely on quality power. Feedback from the community suggests power quality is inconsistent across the region, as a result of electrical harmonics, poor power factor and voltage instability. Therefore, newer, more efficient appliances can present to the community as high risk purchases in the absence of guaranteed power quality. This mistrust is compounded by the capacity or willingness of manufacturers honouring warranties in regional Queensland – through distance and available expertise (i.e. recognised by the manufacturer). Consequently, community members are more likely to endure high (operating) cost appliances (often unknowingly) than expose themselves to the cost of replacement, particularly where a new appliance is likely to be less resilient.

Solar installation on a rooftop at Jericho



There is currently no method of monitoring the quality of power at a household level with existing infrastructure.

This is one of the most fundamental areas of change required for the community to benefit from lower cost energy. Increasingly, there is global recognition that renewable energy and energy efficiency policy must be developed simultaneously to avoid inefficient investment.

## Relationship with Electricity Retailer

Without exception, the relationship between the individual and electricity retailer arose during every discussion, in every format of consultation. The takeaway message from the community was one of disillusion and dis-empowerment, particularly prevalent in the more vulnerable sectors of the community.

There is a real challenge with the existing messaging around delivering power into this regional area. Government, and government

owned corporations have typically reflected to the community that the cost of delivering power to the region is substantially subsidised through community service obligations (CSOs). However this narrative fails to reflect that centralised electricity delivery has been the decision of successive governments, over many decades. That is, to deliver power less efficiently into regional Queensland, on the basis of being more cost efficient across the State. [Note that increasingly this cost effectiveness argument is diminishing for government].

The overall effect of this messaging is that the community are left with the impression that they should 'feel guilty' about their 'subsidised' electricity – and 'grateful' for the electricity service they have, irrespective of the quality. The community, however, is well aware, that it was once self-reliant, with electricity generated locally – and a substantially smaller component of their income. A number of highly impacted community members reflected that they feel dismissed when raising issues with their retailer. The relationship between retailer and customer is particularly corrosive for First Nations people and low socio- economic.



*“I’ve tried talking to (my retailer) about issues with my power connection, they tell me I’ll have to pay the cost of bringing someone out here, pay for their accommodation – and if the fault is found to be on my property, I’ll have to pay for that too. I can’t afford the thousands of dollars they’re talking about – so I live with having only half of a service.” (Winton Discussion)*

*“I’m sick of being told that I’m lucky the government subsidises the cost of my power when I call up (the retailer). I don’t see anyone lining up to pay for my appliances that have blown up because of the power surges again.” (Barcaldine discussion)*

*“I’m so frustrated talking with (the retailer) and getting nowhere. I just don’t bother anymore. I’m sure if there were competition, (the retailer) would suddenly be a whole lot more interested in doing a better job!” (Blackall-Tambo forum)*

There are significant challenges associated with delivering electricity into the central west Queensland region, when based around a single interconnector from the east coast of Australia. It is also reasonable for the community to expect a consistent and reliable electricity service – with a responsive and supportive retailer. The relationship between retailer and community is one of deep distrust and for the community and low expectation.

### Does solar panel installation automatically mean electricity savings?

A significant number of community members have already installed solar panels on their homes, driven by the desire to reduce electricity costs. Anecdotal discussion suggests that many investors do not know how to maximise the benefits of their solar investment through modified energy use behaviour, and are unlikely to be realising the full value of their investment, or potentially installing larger systems than they would otherwise need.

Tele marketed solar appears to be the main mechanism of solar penetration within the region, especially to the community’s more vulnerable members. It is a particular concern when these members may experience incomplete or inappropriate installation, and lack the financial means to pursue legal recourse against the installers.





## Digital Economy

**Key findings:** *The NBN is not delivering the level of operability or reliability expected in the community. The community believes it has a direct impact on the liveability and opportunity to grow the community. Businesses in particular, across the spectrum of industries, recognise the importance of digital platforms to their profitability. There is an opportunity to review the learnings from the installation of the private network in Winton, which could serve as a model for solutions across the region.*

*Based on community feedback there seems to be little recourse for the central west Queensland region to experience more reliable NBN. The Winton approach reflects a local response to overcoming the limitations of insufficiently delivered services.*

The state of the digital economy in central west Queensland is less difficult to understand than energy – but continues to reflect a theme of community disillusionment. Given that the

strategy document critically links energy and digital economy to economic transformation, we wanted to understand the community's view towards current digital services, and their view of the role of the digital economy going into the future.

We asked the community if they felt the digital economy was important to the liveability of central west Queensland. The survey identified 98% of responses as digital economy being important, with over 70% stressing it was very important. During forums and discussions, all attendees (i.e. 100%) identified digital economy as important not only to the liveability of the region, but growth and retention in the future.

However, the lived experience for many of the community we met with throughout consultation, was less than ideal. After five or more years of promotion of the national broadband network (NBN), and in particular, the potential opportunities for regional communities advocated via federal and state governments, many within the community are extremely disappointed. Many report that they continue to experience data speeds similar to pre NBN – or slower.

## Case Study: Tambo Teddies

Tambo Teddies is an Australian made product that combines traditional crafts with modern platforms. While a number of the bears are moved through shop visits in Tambo, a significant portion of the market is met through online sales. As the gift of choice from the Australian Government to new born royals, this business experiences surges in international and domestic interest, and orders, that critically rely on a functioning website. Learning to operate in the digital ether is an ongoing process of self-education, and identifying virtual support partners.

Tambo Teddies uses 100% Australian sheepskins, that are tanned in China, and returned to Australia. An older workforce are involved in the hand production of teddies, relying on traditional sewing skills. Supply of teddies, particularly through the portal of Tambo, is a critical limitation, with transport over mainland Australia (skins and components from port to Tambo, bears from Tambo to port) cost prohibitive, while finding an appropriate labour force in a declining population is also a key challenge. Hence the management of sales, logistics and new supply opportunities are largely reliant on effective digital platforms – which take up a significant component of the business management.

Tammy and Alison, joint owners of Tambo Teddies, have undergone (and are continuing) an extensive journey into the digital marketing of their product. However, with minimal digital expertise and a lack of continuity of support within the community, the process has largely been driven by both women continually researching, and gaining knowledge as they “go along”. Dividing the tasks between them, Tammy and Alison have had to evolve their website to reflect the limitations of local dataspeeds – recognising that a complex website that takes too long



to load will not sell merchandise. They both acknowledge that knowledge and capacity to build a business, particularly around digital platforms, is limiting throughout the region. Learning how to use social media, and the interaction between these platforms has also been a challenge – from the basics of self promotion, to the careful management of communications around brand protection when visiting countries like China. Critically their information technology support is delivered virtually – where finding the right service supplier to partner with has been a trial of elimination. Without the active and proactive follow up from both women throughout every level of the business, but in particular digital, Tambo Teddies would not be operating today.

*“People have to have the right mindset. We’re constantly promoting our business or people wouldn’t know about us.” (Alison, Tambo Teddies)*

Tambo Teddies are in the process of expanding their business, on the basis of creating regional sewing hubs, particularly in regional communities where refugees are resettled. Expanding the business into multiple regional supply hubs will require effective digital platforms in all relevant regions to ensure business continuity and efficiency.

## Impacts of low functioning digital economy

The impact of low functioning digital capability in townships that are financially isolated is particularly significant. The township of Jericho, 90km from Barcaldine has minimal to no employment prospects, no shops, no fresh food and high unemployment – and experiences some of the worse NBN speeds recorded around Australia. In effect, the township is financially and socially isolated. Digital capability becomes essential for enabling the most basic tenants of liveability – job searching, online ordering of food and groceries, accessing services – health, education, government, and basic safety information relating to travelling in the region, particularly after flood events and during drought.

In the absence of the most basic social infrastructure that shops provide as a connection across the community, for the exchange of information, functioning digital networks are critical. Anecdotal discussions with a number of people within the community connected with mental health services also identified the vitally important role of digital economy in facilitating just-in-time 24 hour counselling across vast distances through an online presence. In a region affected by drought and ongoing hardship, this fundamental access to services is critical.

## Local champions

Some parts of the community have placed such a high value on digital economy for local economic transformation, that they are looking beyond the NBN for appropriate digital services.

Winton Shire Council is a leader in the region, promoting high speed digital network partnerships outside of government. During consultation, it became clear there is already a strong understanding within the council of the importance of digital economy for attracting an entrepreneurial economy. Events such as Vision Splendid (Winton Film Festival) and Way Out West Musical Festival provide unique opportunities to further leverage the capability of the high-speed network. These acts of direct participation and immersion in digital economy are backed by a strong council focus on developing a range of alternative industries/ opportunities based on digital capability.

## Support in transitioning to the digital economy

Discussions with various business owners during the consultation period reflected the general lack of support for digital platform users.

Businesses throughout the region have built their websites and other digital platforms to work around the limitations of the varying degrees of digital network capability across the region. However, with the increased digitisation of agriculture (the predominant industrial sector and traditionally low engagement with the digital economy), including virtual saleyards and animal health tracking, the community is also struggling to find sufficient support services to grow and enhance the use of digital platforms. This limitation is problematic in any business, but is especially evident in businesses interfacing with international markets.



## Water

### Key findings:

*Water appears to be one of the areas in this strategy that has the most potential for gains, yet remains one of the most divisive issues, particularly between council shires. Pricing, metering, messaging and access around water use and efficiency has resulted in significantly different expectations across the community.*

*Unlike energy, digital economy, food production or manufacturing, water is a natural resource that occurs disproportionately across the central west Queensland community – and consequently has the potential to emerge as a source of conflict, particularly between shires. This will fundamentally be driven by the perception of equitable water use.*

*While there are a range of technological solutions to water availability and reuse across the central west Queensland region, there is a fundamental lack of data capture and collation at this time, which is needed to underpin the further investment required to deliver on the strategy document.*

*There are valuable measures that can be taken across the community to improve existing knowledge and community water use efficiency, and explore anecdotal evidence around water recycling and reuse in the past. Some options raised during consultation included:*

- *Each council reviewing and collating previous water reuse, recycling and treatment schemes – and identify learnings and opportunities.*
- *Cross community water auditing, to better understand water use across the community sectors and different shires.*
- *A unified and consistent protocol around the region's water resources and their limitations, water use, and water efficiency.*
- *A community water efficiency campaign, potentially part of a broader energy, water and waste efficiency campaign.*

*These steps would help the community to improve its understanding of the water relationship across the region, behaviour modification, and water opportunity – and signal a level of investor-readiness.*

Without exception, water was the most conflicted, and therefore contentious, issue raised during consultation. As a critical platform in the Realising the Big RAPAD Vision strategy document, the community views, while not discordant with the aspirations of the strategy, indicated there is a significant gap between the community’s views on water use efficiency—and the strategy’s. We asked the community to rate its water self-sufficiency—and received responses, both through the survey and forums, that ranged from not self-sufficient, to highly self-sufficient, but overall, 78% of survey respondents indicated that the community was self-sufficient for water. When we asked the community if it had enough water for its needs, only 63% of survey respondents agreed. The questions were not as nuanced during forum consultation and discussions, but there was a sufficiently mixed range of views again.

These findings were particularly confusing, as we were well aware of the extended drought experienced across central west Queensland when we entered the region during consultation. During forums, the discussions around the different water charging practices associated with the various councils appeared as a potential cause of disparate results. However, the survey results indicated a wide spread of views within the same council shires. The perception of what constituted “their” community was also likely to

affect the perception of water self-sufficiency. Eventually, we reached the conclusion that these highly varied responses were more likely a reflection of how each individual accessed water – which could include a range of bores that are unregulated and not metered. Clearly, there is further follow up required around how water is accessed, used and charged across the region.

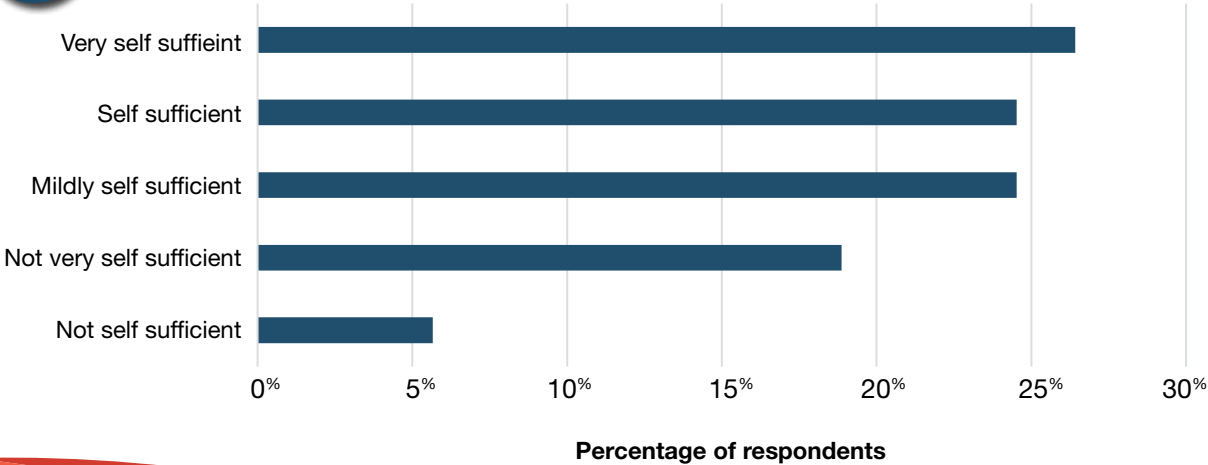
It became evident during forum discussions, that many within the community believed that water availability is a necessary factor for growth in the region.

**Community attitudes towards water**

One of our observations, while travelling throughout the four shires, was the very different attitudes towards the use of water at a recreational park/residential level – and rural. In some townships, such as Blackall and Tambo, verdant gardens with sprinklers operating during 40o C days appeared in direct contrast to the extreme drought conditions evident on fringes of townships. When raised during forums and discussions, a number of the community members described the use of water for greening as “an entitlement”. However, these members were more likely to have access to unmetered water.



**How self sufficient do you believe your community is for water?**



Community consultation meeting at Blackall



*“A green garden is an entitlement. It’s a recognition for living in the harsh conditions out here.” (Blackall forum)*

As we commenced discussion around water resources during community forums, it became clear that most of the community did not view the Great Artesian Basin as a contextually finite resource. [The Great Artesian Basin recharges at a substantially slower rate than water exiting, with groundwater recharging occurring at different rates across the basin. In 2012, CSIRO reported an overall finding of diminishing pressure and water inflow compared to outflow over the last century, with some recovery of ground water levels following bore capping in 2000-2010 .].

However, it was also evident during consultation that First Nations people take a different view to the use of water throughout council shires.

Given the links between indigenous culture and circular economy, First Nations people expressed genuine concern regarding not only the over extraction of ground water, but where water is visibly wasted or used inefficiently throughout the community. Indigenous communities have a very strong cultural connection to water conservation values, through both water quality and quantity.

### Water reuse and recycling

Over 74% of survey respondents, and around 80% of forum participants indicated that water reuse in the community was poorly managed. Significant work would be required to quantify the opportunity in this area, but forum discussion indicated the community supported the concept of water reuse – and regularly identified where water had previously been re-used in the community.



Image courtesy of Tourism Queensland

## Food production

### Key findings

*The community is highly supportive of increased local food production for self-sufficiency. Using technology to develop sophisticated food production is widely appealing.*

Local food production is a concept highly supported by the community. When we asked the community to rate its self-sufficiency for food, we broke our analysis into 2 categories: fruit and vegetables; and protein (meat/fish/poultry). Of our survey respondents, 89% indicated their community was not self-sufficient for fruit and vegetables, 68% for protein.

During community forums, close to 100% of participants indicated the region was not self-sufficient for food. The protein result was higher than expected, given the primary industries of the region, but when investigated further

reflected the movement of abattoirs closer to the coast. While there is some private butchering made publicly available, accessibility seems to be limited by geography and time.

When we asked the community if it would support increased local food production, there was a 100% response of yes from the survey, community forums and discussions. The community recognises the value in local food production, particularly after it has been lost.

At various forums (and discussions) community members raised examples of where local food production had occurred in the past – until it didn't. Typically, most people didn't know the local food production disappeared, and there has been no capture to date about experiments in food production that succeeded (until they failed), but as best we could determine, all the knowledge associated with these efforts died with the projects.

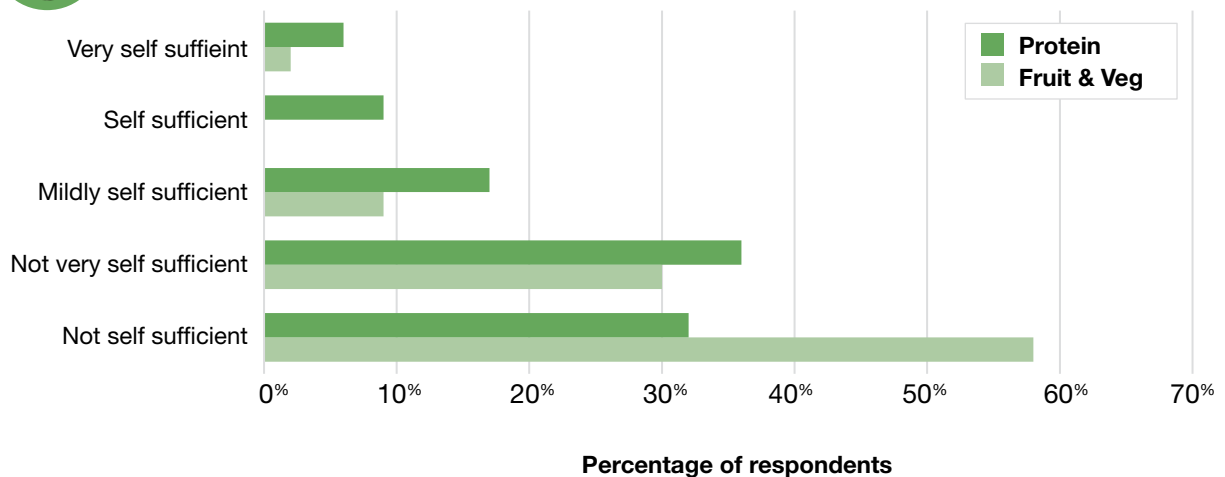
*“We travel nearly 100km to Barcaldine for “fresh food” – but if I’m working, and we don’t get there until the weekend, just before the shop closes, I’m lucky if that fresh food lasts longer than a day!” (Jericho Discussions)*



*“You know, its tough finding good fresh food out here, and keeping it fresh with the surges in power...but we’re still better off than those poor devils in Boulia....I’ve seen green meat land over there.” (Winton Discussions)*



**How self sufficient do you believe your community is for food?**



For example, a fruit orchard in Barcaldine was poisoned via reused waste water, while the very long-term Chinese markets just progressively disappeared, potentially because no family was left to take over. The Chinese markets were widely considered an example of successful cropping in the region.

The concept of sophisticated food production (biodomes), to neutralise the challenges of extreme conditions with technology appeared to be widely appealing to the community.

Realistically, biodome food production is something that could occur readily in every township throughout the region. While ideally situated or networked with local, stabilised electricity generation, a biodome can be free standing with inbuilt solar and battery storage. However, if assessing potential trial sites on need, Jericho is a logical choice, providing food, employment and potential downstream service industries (produce for grocers, café and hotel – neither grocer or café exist at this time).



## Advanced manufacturing

**Key findings:** *The community needs to “see some wins”. However there is significant capacity and capability building required to ensure these pathways are able to be pursued.*

We asked the community what it thought about advanced manufacturing, and it is clear that the community are open to a wide range of possibilities, in the interest of remaining viable. While there is less vision about what those industries might be, there are some clear views within the community about pathways. Repurposing existing infrastructure and providing free renewable energy to attract manufacturing industries are two frequent suggestions that arose during consultation.

*“Please use the existing infrastructure – its paid for...and a damn eyesore sitting there doing nothing” (Barcaldine discussions)*

The community was also asked its view, through the survey, if provided training/working opportunities, which of the following manufacturing industries it might be interested in working in (no restriction on choices): renewable energy, water, food production, digital economy, food manufacturing (processing to produce a new food product) and rare earth metals. There was over 50% support for working in renewable energy, water, food production and the digital economy, followed by over 40% for food manufacturing. Only 15% supported processing rare earth metals – and each of these respondents had supported every industry within the question. A further 10% of respondents supported all industries except earth metals.

Indigenous tourism and Indigenous food production were two key industry opportunities that were raised in indigenous and broad community discussions. This was widely viewed as a very strong opportunity, particularly if wrapped in intellectual property agreements to respect and honour cultural knowledge.

However, there is considerable work to be done to enable the community to identify these broader opportunities, which comes from understanding the scope of the platforms (energy, digital economy and water). There is a genuine anxiety present in every forum about “getting it wrong”, where multiple projects have been raised that either failed instantly, were successful for a time and then failed. Yet there seems to be no gathering and reflection on the learnings behind why these projects may have failed – an exercise that requires the anecdotal context as well as the facts of the project – which is the most vital part of ensuring new projects have a reduced risk of failure. The movement into what these industries could be requires considerable work.

*“Maybe I’m a bit of dinosaur, but even I can recognise we might not be farming sheep in the region in 10 years time – I have no idea what we will be doing, but I think a big part of it will be digital.” (Winton Discussions)*



## Services and International markets

The role of services and international markets seemed to be implicitly woven through all of our discussions while consulting in the region.

During the consultation, we engaged the community on the possibilities within this sector that, if we can build the self-sufficiency of the initial platforms – energy, digital economy, water and food production – then there is scope to reinvent service delivery throughout the region. The overwhelming response of the community was the desire for choice.

More choice around education delivery, more choice around engagement with health services, options for interacting with international markets in a modern framework.

### Health and Education services

We asked, through the survey, if the community felt the current model of health and education services delivered affected their decision to stay or go. Approximately 70% stated that it did affect their decision, with 33.3% that it very strongly affected their decision. A gender bias appears in the very strongly affected decision, with 37% of women surveyed taking this position, compared with 26% of men surveyed. This group of women were aged between 30-55 years of age, while the men were typically 50-65 years of age.

There is a high level awareness of e-health potential, with many in the community already engaging in health teleservices. However, the lived experience for many is far from ideal – and can result in community members failing to access the full health support that they need.

### Case study: Managing injury from Blackall to Rockhampton

A Blackall resident describes the challenges of seeking the nearest specialist orthopaedic services in Rockhampton. Using a bus service the resident:

- **Day 1: catch a bus from Blackall to Barcaldine.** However the bus from Barcaldine to Rockhampton leaves an hour before the Blackall bus arrives – requiring an overnight stay.
- **Day 2: Catch a bus from Barcaldine to Rockhampton.** Although the bus trip is around six hours, the time of arrival into Rockhampton will require an additional day of travel. Stay overnight in Rockhampton.
- **Day 3:** Medical appointment. Appointment and tests incompatible with a return trip to Barcaldine on that day. Stay overnight in Rockhampton.
- **Day 4: Catch a bus from Rockhampton to Barcaldine.** If bus on time, catch a bus from Barcaldine to Blackall, otherwise stay another night. This does not include extra days for when the bus service is not available.

There is a high cost for the regional individual to visit centralised specialist health services, due to a lack of connectivity in transport services. There are many in the community, particularly men and economically vulnerable, who will not take this time away from work simply because they cannot afford to.



## Fostering International markets

We also asked the community (through the survey) whether they felt it was important for Longreach airport to develop international capability for services and tourism. 85% of the community suggested that they believe it is important. Of interest, the remaining 15% of respondents, who did not support this question, all hailed from Barcaldine. Given that Barcaldine airport is not consistently used by the main airline, it is possible these responses were based on a shire centric view.

Central West Queensland is well connected with the Darling Downs community, and clearly abreast of the developments occurring in Toowoomba. Community members talked with considerable eagerness about the implications of a successful international airport in Toowoomba for the repeating the outcome in Longreach.

## Case study: Blackall specialising in aged care

Blackall has established a multi-aged care facility that enables residents to progress from relative independence through to the various stages of a live-in care facility. Competition for access to the facility is high, with a significant number of residents drawing from the eastern coast of Queensland. The accretion of elderly residents is driving the increased presence of specialist aged care medical staff, and in turn creates demand for particular medical services that were previously unavailable. During the consultation forum in Blackall, several community members highlighted the opportunity to develop aged care health services as a growth industry in the region.

## Next steps – community view

The community clearly expressed throughout the consultation period that it wants to be included in the journey to realise the Big Vision strategy. We asked (through the survey) if respondents and their families would be more likely to stay in the region over the next five years if RAPAD pursued the Big RAPAD Vision. Over 88% stated that they would.

*“We actually want our kids to go out and leave the community for a while – we want them to explore the world. But we want to make sure that when they’ve had their fill they’ll come back home – because the liveability of home is something they’re really looking forward to.” (Barcaldine discussions)*

In addition to returning these findings to the community, there are three remaining council shires who have yet to have direct consultation on the Realising the RAPAD Big Vision. That

is, Diamantina, Barcoo and Boulia. Given the higher dispersion of the community in this region, and the learnings from this process, community forums are unlikely to appropriately reach the audience. This is something for RAPAD to consider further, as we anticipate that the enhanced distance will result in some significantly different results.

It must be acknowledged that there is a genuine anxiety about capacity and capability within the community to deliver this kind of vision. The communication issues raised earlier in this report are part of that challenge – finding new ways to engage and inform the community, and enable community ownership.

However, the unique strength of the community is its resilience. It has embraced the ideal of self-sufficiency promoted through Realising the RAPAD Big Vision, because it’s a concept it is well familiar with. This is a strategy that the community is eager to put forward.



