

PART 2 REGIONAL PROFILE -REGION

The Limestone Coast lies midway between the capital cities of Adelaide and Melbourne, covering an area of approximately 21,310 square kilometres or 2% of South Australia's landmass. The Limestone Coast is referred to as the "South East" because it occupies the south eastern most part of the State and extends from the Victorian border and the south coast north to Bordertown and west to Kingston and Robe. The region is divided into two sub-regions, Lower South East and Upper South East.

The Limestone Coast region encompasses seven Local Government Areas (LGAs): the City of Mt Gambier; Wattle Range Council, Naracoorte Lucindale Council, District Council of Grant, District Council of Tatiara, Kingston District Council, and the District Council of Robe. The *South Australia Works in the Regions* program encompasses the Limestone Coast region and is successfully managed by the Limestone Coast Regional Development Board (LCRDB) and the Limestone Coast Employment and Skills Formation Network (LCESFN). This network is central to the delivery of the program in the Limestone Coast region, as its membership consists of key local people from industry and employer groups, employment and training organisations, Government, Non-Government agencies and community service organisations. These key people contribute to identifying local solutions to employment and skill formation issues across the regions communities.

The LCESFN is responsible for:

- Building strategic alliances
- Providing a coordinated response to the regions employment and training needs
- Contribute to the development and endorsement of the *South Australia Works in the Regions* Strategic Plan and Implementation Plan
- Developing, monitoring and evaluating project responses for local employment and training challenges.

Population Characteristics

There is an estimated residential population of 64,832 (ABS, 2006) which is 4.1% of the State's population. The most populated LGA is the City of Mt Gambier with 38 percent of the region's population followed by Wattle Range Council with 19 percent, Naracoorte-Lucindale (13%), Grant (12.8%) Tatiara (11%), Kingston (3%) and Robe (2%). The region experienced a 0.9% increase in population from 2003 to 2006, however projections estimate a lower future growth rate than the State average.

According to 2006 Census data the Limestone Coast region (LCESFR) has higher proportions of children (0 to 14 years) and younger adults (25 to 44 years) than the State average; this is consistent with the region's higher proportion of couples with children in households (31.4% LCESFR, 29.7% SA). The region has a lower proportion of people aged 65 and older

but the proportion of people aged 45-64 years (26.1%) is consistent with the State average.

At the time of the 2006 census, Aboriginal people accounted for 1.2% (776) of the regions population, which is significantly below the state average of 1.7%. The Aboriginal population in the region has a much younger age profile compared to the non-Aboriginal population, with 36.1% of Aboriginal people being under 15 years of age. Almost half the Aboriginal population reside in Mt Gambier.

Industry

The rich volcanic soils, traditionally reliable access to water and productive coastline have allowed the Limestone Coast to develop into one of the most productive agricultural regions in Australia. Agriculture, forestry and fishing are the major employment industries in the region, employing 18.8% of the region's workforce.

The region provides 30% of South Australia's agricultural production and employs people in greater proportions (15.2%) compared to the state average (4%). Major agricultural products range from livestock such as sheep, wool and prime beef to such horticultural commodities as grain, seed and potatoes. The South East produces approximately 302 million litres of milk, which represents 50% of the State's production each year.

Farming communities across the region continue to be impacted on by drought conditions. The Upper South East has had an extension of its Exceptional Circumstances Funding Package allowing farmers to seek government financial assistance. The Lower South East has

not qualified even though rainfall levels continue to remain lower than neighbouring regions that have been declared. Climate change will continue to impact on the agriculture and forestry sectors. Innovative water sustainability and waste management practices will need to become the region's priority if primary industries in the region are to continue growing and processing commodities at the same rate.

The forestry industry is well established and a major economic contributor for the region. The plantations are located across the Green Triangle region, which encompasses South East South Australia and South West Victoria. The South East has softwood plantations (*Pinus radiata*) concentrated in the Wattle Range and Grant LGAs. The hardwood plantations (blue gums) are more widely distributed across the Naracoorte-Lucindale, Wattle Range and Grant LGAs, and are primarily destined for export wood chips. The bulk of the timber milling and processing plants are located in Tarpeena, Nangwarry and Mt Gambier, with a large tissue and paper products manufacturing plant operated by Kimberly Clark Australia at Snuggery, near Millicent.

The Green Triangle region is responsible for approximately 20% of the Nation's forest industry production including forest plantation, export woodchips, timber processing, wood preservation, panel products, pulp and tissue products.

The Green Triangle region harvests approximately 4.6 million tonne of wood per year. It has been estimated that an extra

3.7 million tonnes will become available annually between 2009 and 2014 because of the harvesting of the blue gum plantations. Decreased demand short-term for woodchips has resulted in harvest timelines being delayed. However, when harvesting occurs, it will have direct (increasing employment and population) and indirect (infrastructure and services) impact on the Limestone Coast economy. In particular, employment opportunities will exist for harvesting and haulage contractors to transport raw commodities and processed timber. Uncertainties have surfaced around the long-term opportunities to replant the existing estates after harvesting. Such decisions will have a direct impact on the previous predicted expansion of the forest industry.

Alternative timber processing employment opportunities may exist for the region with the proposed development of a Pulp Mill near Penola. This development has achieved legislative approval and is now seeking design completion, resource agreements and financial close. Upon commencement, it will generate future long-term employment and construction jobs within the Wattle Range LGA. Grant LGA is in the preliminary planning stages for a Wood Pellet Mill located north of Mt Gambier. These projects and the exploration of wave energy will generate future employment opportunities.

The region is also renowned for fishing and exportation of southern rock lobster from October to May. The Limestone Coast's crayfish are harvested directly from the Southern Ocean and is one of South Australia's most valuable seafood commodities along with other commercial species such as; shark, abalone, octopus, periwinkles

and king crab. Land and sea based-aquaculture is expanding with barramundi, abalone, rainbow trout and fresh yabbies being farmed.

The manufacturing sector employs 16.8% of the workforce and encompasses some of the regions large food and beverage processing businesses and wood and paper production businesses. Manufacturing employed the largest number of apprentices and trainees in 2007, accounting for 27% of all new apprenticeships and traineeships in the region. The region's manufacturing industries that are dependent on local agricultural production may be susceptible to seasonal factors and world commodity prices, which may limit their ability to sustain growth levels.

The third largest employing industry is the retail sector employing approximately 14.5% of the workforce. This encompasses the accommodation, café and restaurant sector workforce (4.7%) and reflects the region's potential to attract tourists. The retail and service industries offer opportunities for people seeking part-time and casual work.

Of the estimated 8000 businesses in the region, approximately 95% are small or family owned. The LCRDB and the LCESFN acknowledge the need to support the Limestone Coast's new and existing businesses to grow their workforce and to create entry level positions for *South Australia Works in the Regions* target groups.

Labour Force Characteristics

The unemployment rate for the region has generally been lower than the State average, although it has risen over recent years. The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) found there were 1,397 unemployed persons in the region (June quarter, 2008). Local employment service providers believe labour market figures to be higher and are not accounting for 'hidden youth' unemployment, that is, young people that are not registered with Centrelink or employment agencies.

The Limestone Coast region's youth (15-24) unemployment rate is 11.2%. A growing concern for the region is the increasing level of homelessness and youth offenders going through the court system. Centrelink data (Dec 2008) has revealed an increase in youth allowance and the number of young people requesting financial assistance for circumstances such as 'unreasonable to live at home'.

The Aboriginal unemployment rate for the region was 16.1% compared to 4.8% for non-Aboriginal people. The Aboriginal unemployment rate was 17.7% for Mt Gambier. Grant a comment/analysis here is missing

While the unemployment rate for the region has been lower than the State average, it is not reflecting the number of individuals who may be engaged in seasonal and casual work and those who are underemployed. Casual and short-term labour hire is extensively used across the region in industries that employ labour to pick fruit,

prune or plant trees. This type of labour leads to peaks and troughs in the region's labour market statistics.

At the time of the Census (2006), of those people with a disability aged 15-64 in the region, only 25.3% were in the labour force (i.e. either employed, unemployed or seeking work). The unemployment rate for people with disabilities was 11.3% compared to 5% of those that did not report a disability. Centrelink data (2008) reveals the total number of people on a disability support pensions (DSP) is 2,273 people and this figure has increased since 2007. The LCESFN has identified this target group to have higher needs than the regular long term jobseeker and believes they may benefit from training assistance to move into employment. Local data reveals that a larger percentage of individuals on DSP are mature-aged.

The Limestone Coast has lower unemployment levels and higher than average labour force participation rates than the rest of the State across the key population groups of youth aged 15-24 years, mature aged 45-64 years, Aboriginal people and people with a disability. In June 2007, the labour force participation rate for the region was estimated to be 65.5%, compared with the State average of 61.4%. The mature-age (45-64) group contributes the most to labour force participation rates of 73.5% compared to the State 67.7%.

Whilst the occupational breakdown for the region shows a higher concentration (15%) of residents employed as managers

and administrators, the majority were farmers or farm managers. Other high employing occupations in the region include; labourers and related workers at 14.7% , tradespersons and related at 13.4% and intermediate clerical, sales and service workers at 12.8%, professionals and associate professional account for 10% and 10.5% respectively. The higher portion of occupations in the low to medium level trade and labourer categories is consistent with the region's commercial, industrial and service sector profile particularly agriculture, forestry and fishing and may be associated with a lower portion of residents completing year 12 education.

The region has had strong increases in employment in the following industries; Health and Community Services (23.1%), Construction (28.1%) and Education (15.8%) between 2001 and 2006.

Education and Qualification levels

The region has a lower than average level of school achievement, with only 27.7% of the population aged 15 years and older having completed year 12 or equivalent compared with 38.8% of the State population. The Limestone Coast also has a lower than State average number of people with a Degree (6.7% LCESFR, 13% SA) and a below average proportion of people with a Diploma qualification. The region has an above average proportion of people with Certificate III and IV qualifications.

The region's ability to offer degree courses has developed with the presence of regional university campuses. Mt Gambier's Southern Cross University offers distance education degrees and diplomas in forestry and environmental science and University of South

Australia offers nursing, social work and business courses. The tertiary courses offered are limited and degree courses as teaching, engineering, and allied health are not available. This leaves the region vulnerable to losing its youth to the metropolitan campuses that offer a full course selection. Regional information suggests that more mature age students are undertaking tertiary studies. Flinders University Rural Clinical School supports new medical practitioners and medical student placements in the region. This is assisting with the attraction of medical practitioners to the region.

THE OBJECTIVES - FACILITATE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT APPROACHES BY

Objective 1: Increasing workforce participation:

The LCESFN has a vision to build the region's workforce by creating employment opportunities for *South Australia Works in the Regions* target groups (young people, people with a disability, mature-aged, aboriginal people). The Network believes individuals should be able to enter the labour market with the right base level education, attitude to learning/work, and are aware of and have access to support services. The Limestone Coast *South Australia Works in the Regions* target groups are experiencing personal and structural barriers that prevent them from making informed decisions about education, training and employment opportunities.

Strategy 1 Engaging the *South Australia Works* target groups

The Network (LCESFN) has identified disengaged youth as a serious concern. This particular cohort is at risk of becoming more marginalised and appears to be facing multiple barriers including ‘generational’ unemployment, limited work experience, self-esteem and personal issues, poor communication skills, lower literacy and numeracy skills, substance abuse, and mental health disorders. Life coaching, personal development, case management and mentoring projects are mechanisms to empower this cohort to be productive members within the labour market. The Network believe that peer support training initiatives can play a vital role in giving people the tools to overcome barriers and move into training and employment.

South Australia Works in the Region planning survey respondents identified the top barrier to workforce participation in Limestone Coast as “don’t want to work” followed by “lack of jobs or apprenticeships” and mental health. Moskos 2007 conducted qualitative research of 106 respondents not participating or under participating in paid employment and found respondents believed the biggest barrier they experienced was lack of education and appropriate qualifications, followed by disability or ill health and caring responsibilities.

In the region, 25.3% of working age people with a disability are in the labour market. The Network has identified that clearer career pathways into employment and training need to exist to allow this cohort to increase its contribution to the labour market. Employers also need to be educated and assisted when taking on someone

with a disability. Agencies and government departments have identified peer support training as a valuable way of allowing a person with a disability (physical or intellectual) to contribute to community and /or health programs run across the region and a way of preparing them for future employment or further training.

Carers of people with a disability are often restricted in working fulltime. ABS data (2006) found that of those people employed with carer responsibilities, 37.6% were working in a part-time capacity. This group are underemployed and often isolated. Initiatives that empower this cohort and reintroduce them to paid employment are required.

Strategy 2 Removing Structural Barriers and Providing Work Structure

The Network identified structural barriers preventing *South Australia Works in the Regions* target groups accessing training and employment, including a lack of public transport, housing and access to health services and childcare facilities.

The lack of public transport across the region tends to isolate people from accessing education and training opportunities. The Network has identified that assistance is needed for disadvantaged groups to obtain or regain drivers’ licences.

Access to a range of health services across the region is a priority for some individuals who need to resolve health issues prior to accessing training or employment opportunities.

Limited availability of childcare services, especially for smaller towns across the region is also a barrier to accessing training or employment.

Other structural barriers include the financial costs associated with accessing birth certificates, appropriate tickets or licences, first aid certificates, and police clearances and training or education that lead to a qualification and/or employment.

Low levels of literacy and numeracy skills reduce peoples employment prospects. Training and education providers in the region are frustrated by the poor mathematical skills of some young people embarking on apprenticeships, especially engineering and electrical trades.

The region has seen increasing numbers of overseas residents. The Australian Government launched a pilot project in 2007 to settle refugees in Mt Gambier. These humanitarian entrants have been successfully supported through the Migrant Resource Centre. The cohort is usually from a low skill and educational background and requires a number of services and training in order to secure employment. Identifying employment pathways into entry-level positions that allow this group to practice their English is a priority for the region.

The LCESFN recognises that people are more vulnerable at times of personal change. These changes can be more difficult if compounded by poor health, mental health issues, caring responsibilities, limited education and geographic or social

isolation. The LCESFN in partnership with the Department of Education and Children's Services and Families SA, has identified the region's 'at risk' youth (15-24) population as most vulnerable. The regions youth accounts for 12% of the population and has an unemployment rate of 11.2% (Census 2006). Regional intelligence suggests that disengaged school students require early intervention to maintain a smooth transition from learning to earning.

Initiatives that support work place learning can provide the key to assisting the most disadvantaged achieve sustainable employment. The LCESFN is committed to supporting projects that support a smooth life transition for those most vulnerable and projects that educate employers to support disadvantaged individuals gain meaningful structured and supported work experience, that leads to employment.

Many individuals from the *South Australia Works in the Regions* target groups are disadvantaged because they lack a work history, including current references and up to date skills. There is a need in the region to provide opportunities for entry-level jobs to engage marginalised groups in ongoing sustainable employment. Strategies that encourage transition through consecutive seasonal employment opportunities may help to promote a more structured, multi-skilled training and employment environment.

Strategies that allow people to experience different work environments during their formative developmental stage,

help to build up to date employment skills. This is particularly pertinent to individuals that may be serving community court orders, where the tasks they are required to undertake have no ongoing employment prospects or prevocational development opportunities.

The LCESFN has acknowledged that accessing further education and training for the region's local youth (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) can cause significant financial and social pressure on families. Local Government has identified a need to encourage our youth to train and study locally to provide Limestone Coast industries with qualified people. The LCESFN is supporting strategies that assist disadvantaged people on a case-by-case basis; to identify and obtain the skills training they need to secure local employment.

Strategy 3 Engaging individuals in Work Plans

Network intelligence suggests that individuals are more likely to benefit from training and to gain work if they are confident, can plan and manage their own career development and understand how to create, secure and maintain work. The LCESFN has identified a need to assist people to access local labour market information; write current, tailored job applications, cover letters and resumes; identify individual's existing skills and suggest areas of further learning to improve their employment prospects. The Network has determined that career development services will meet this need.

Objective 2: Increasing industry engagement

The LCESFN is aware that other States are conducting forums intended to bring employers, industry and unions together with education and training organisations to develop workforce planning for their regions. The Network believes that similar initiatives will work in the Limestone Coast to ensure that education and training programs are consistent with emerging and growth employment opportunities. It has been recognised, that sustainable employment outcomes, can only be achieved by matching individuals from specific target groups with skills that meet the needs of employers.

Strategy 1 Promoting and Planning for Industries

The LCESFN believes the region can grow its skilled trade workforce through several avenues. Forums that celebrate individual achievements and promote industries and occupations can highlight employment options to the community and jobseekers . The Network will collaborate with the TAFE sector, Registered Training Organisations, Group Training Companies, Industry Skills Councils, Trade Unions and employers and industry to support events that recognise outstanding employees and promote apprenticeship/traineeships and cadetships across the region.

A significant number of apprenticeships also go unfilled each year because employers are expecting more from the regions youth. Employers are reporting young people are “just not work ready, lacking work ethic and have poor attitudes”. The

LCESFN has identified a need for pre-apprenticeship training to prepare young people for employers' expectations and standards.

Strategy 2 Shifting and Targeting Local Skills Demands

The LCESFN has identified the importance of supporting individuals facing retrenchment. The Limestone Coast has seen a slowing of production and manufacturing due to decreased export demands. Labour hire companies report employers opting for casual labour because they do not know if ongoing contracts or future contracts are secure. Initiatives that address the effects of the net cost of retrenchment ranging from mental health programs, career development techniques to retraining to fill gaps in other industries are needed.

Building and construction work is predicted to increase due to the incentives provided by the Federal Government's stimulus measures. This implies that there will be an ongoing requirement for workers such as skilled tradesmen and labourers in the near future. A range of initiatives will be required to meet this industry's growing needs.

The meat processing industries, such as abattoirs, find it difficult to attract and retain local residents and have been filling their workforce gaps with overseas workers on short-term visas. This impacts on their business expansion plans and the region's overall economy. Strategies to improve attraction and retention of staff are required to support industry development, especially in towns such as Bordertown and Naracoorte.

Network intelligence has identified that a number of industries including the region's major industries agriculture, forestry and fishing have mature aged workforces and will be looking to introduce younger people to mitigate attrition from retirement of these ageing workers over the next 9 years. Initiatives that make these industries attractive to younger workers will need to be developed.

The health and community service sector has experienced difficulties attracting specialist clinicians, allied health professionals, specialist nurses, mental health workers and senior management staff to the region. The aged care sector also has difficulties recruiting registered nurses.

Strategy 3 Training Support for Business and Industry Leaders

The LCESFN recognises that employers of smaller businesses cannot provide their staff with training opportunities but could provide individuals with higher duties and longer hours if training is tailored to meet the needs of the business. The LCESFN recognises upskilling of individuals as an important contribution to the region's economic growth and especially supports training opportunities for people that may be at risk of losing their employment.

A burgeoning environmental consciousness means that industry and local government are now embracing alternative waste management systems and striving to achieve

environmentally sustainable development practises. There has been expansive development in the area of renewable energy sources in the region. An opportunity exists for *South Australia Works in the Regions* to collaborate with industry to identify and support training and employment development for local people, in this area.

The LCESFN has identified that farmers in agri-food businesses are in need of innovative and entrepreneurial skills to combat local and global market fluctuations. Seminars and workshops on innovative business practices and export marketing for small and family run businesses operating across the region would help facilitate market expansion and create new local employment opportunities.

Retail is the third largest employer in the region; this and the additional employment created by accommodation, cafes and restaurants reflect the region's significant tourism industry. The tourism and food industries need suitably skilled staff to remain competitive in an increasingly uncertain economic future.

Local governments across the region are investing in the development of community facilities and the expansion of existing services such as libraries. These developments along with the anticipated growth of regional tertiary education institutions, upgrading of rural medical services and retirement facilities are expected to generate increased infrastructure and increased employment in the region.

OBJECTIVE 3 - Supporting State-Wide Economic Directions by Building Regional Capacity

The LCESFN believes building regional capacity is about supporting community programs that lead to the involvement of disadvantaged groups in the labour market. The LCESFN supports the South Australian Council of Social Service (SACOSS) in asking South Australians to embrace others in their community with equal opportunity for participation and belonging. The LCESFN would like to promote the inclusion of people in community-based projects that seek to develop skills to assist with confidence and self-esteem building, as these will, along with other developmental programs, help facilitate inclusion into further education or employment.

Initiatives that support community programs and projects need to be embraced, to bring individuals together to learn and share cultural knowledge.

Strategy 1 Supporting Community Projects and Programs that lead to Work Experience and Employment

The region's Centrelink agencies, employment service providers, the training and education sectors, aboriginal employment staff and local government community youth officers have all identified mental health disorders as a major concern affecting long-term unemployed people. The LCESFN believes that peer support training initiatives can play

a vital role in giving people the tools to overcome illness and disabilities and move into employment.

Skilled migrants have been settling in the region, with their families, to fill highly skilled professional positions (Medical practitioners, psychologists, dentists, engineers, agricultural managers etc) since mid 2003. The region needs to retain and attract a skilled and professional workforce if it is to sustain economic growth.

Research and projects conducted in other States have identified volunteering as a gateway to education and employment for people from diverse and disadvantaged communities. Bailey, Savage & O'Connell (2003) found that public participation, including volunteer activity can result in improved health and wellbeing. The LCESFN recognises that volunteering is a legitimate pathway for people to employment.

The Network sees an opportunity to collaborate with government, non-government and community organisations to support volunteer training needs so that *South Australia Works* target groups can be supported to obtain meaningful work experiences with appropriate supervision and mentoring. The benefits of social interaction with others could significantly benefit, disengaged youth if the volunteer work is matched to their interests and increase employment opportunities.

Regional intelligence suggests that childcare services are

under-represented and limiting certain individuals, such as single parents and working couples, from obtaining and keeping employment especially in smaller rural communities. The LCESFN believes that there are opportunities for members of families from diverse cultural backgrounds in regional communities to obtain qualifications and gain employment in childcare, which will also address the lack of childcare services in smaller agricultural communities.

Strategy 2 Promoting Learning, Education and Training Pathways

The LCESFN seeks to increase post school education levels through community education, which will result in local people having increased opportunity for higher paid jobs and improved career pathways. By collaborating with Federal, State and Local Government and education and training associations the LCESFN can lobby support for the expansion of the region's tertiary education sector. Currently UniSA, Southern Cross University, Flinders University Rural Clinical School all allow direct links with key industries in the region - health and community services, forestry and business services. By supporting initiatives that raise the region's education profile the Limestone Coast can attract international, interstate and South Australians to study in the region.