



Guidelines for analysing regional Australia impacts and developing a Regional Australia Impact Statement

The Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development (the Department) is available to assist in the analysis of the possible impacts of a policy proposal on regional communities. The Department can also assist with the development of a Regional Australia Impact Statement (RAIS) as part of the Cabinet Submission process. Consultation should occur as early as possible in the policy development process. If agencies have general queries they should contact the Department on 02 6274 7778 or at RAIS@infrastructure.gov.au. All Protected: Sensitive: Cabinet material should be directed to the RAIS contact officer via CABNET.

Analysing regional Australia impacts

Significance and diversity of regional Australia

Australia's regions are characterised by significant economic, social and environmental diversity and policy proposals may have differential impacts across regions.

Policy proposals are often developed with a view to enhancing outcomes for the majority of a target population. In many instances this means that they are primarily developed with reference to people living in our major cities. While regional Australia accounts for just under a third of the total population it makes a key contribution to our national economy. For example products from regional Australia account for almost two thirds of our national export income. Ensuring the continued wellbeing of our regional communities and economies is therefore central to maintaining national living standards.

While regional Australia makes a significant contribution to the national economy, outcomes in health, employment and education are generally poorer than in metropolitan areas, and people living in regional Australia also report greater difficulty in accessing services. Geographic distance, small markets and economies of scale all contribute to these poorer outcomes for regional Australia.

Policy design for national initiatives can therefore contribute substantially to positive and negative outcomes in regional Australia. The Government must work in partnership with communities and regions to identify local approaches to social and economic development in our regions, supported by the right policies at the national level.

What is Regional Australia?

When looking at the needs of a region, it is important to understand the links and interactions between that region and nearby towns and regional cities. This interconnectedness can have implications for regional development policies and programmes (for example, a service provision centre may be based in a major town centre, but its service footprint may encompass a large area, including isolated communities).

There is no standard Australian Government classification of regional Australia – the term generally refers to regions outside metropolitan areas. Agencies are encouraged to identify the definition of regional Australia that is best suited to their policy and programme requirements, including those definitions developed by the Australian Bureau of Statistics: [Australian Bureau of Statistics](#).

Analysing Regional Impacts

The economic, social and environmental diversity of regions is likely to lead to policy proposals having different impacts in the various regions of Australia.

The table below is designed to assist you determine if your policy will have any particular implications for regional communities and stakeholders. The table also includes possible ways to mitigate negative implications of your proposed policy on regional communities. This table is intended as a guide to prompt innovative solutions.



Implications Checklist and Mitigation Measures

Economic Drivers

Developing policies which will have positive impacts in regional locations is not necessarily about ensuring every region has the same facilities and services. Rather, it can be about building an understanding of the factors that drive a region's wider economic performance, and helping regional communities identify and capture opportunities.

Checklist

- What are the key economic drivers of the regions which your policy will impact?
- Will your policy affect communities with similar economic drivers (for example, primarily agricultural or mining communities) or communities or regions with different economic drivers?

Mitigation measures

- Consider structural adjustment as part of your implementation plan.
- Consider whether your policy may represent an opportunity for a region to diversify its economic base.
- Assess region for competitive advantages that may be built upon.

Connection Infrastructure

People living in regional locations may not have mobile phone coverage, a reliable internet connection or access to public transport.

Checklist

- Will your policy affect the availability, quality or cost of accessing infrastructure in regional areas?
- Will your policy have a disproportionate affect on small regional communities?
- Will the infrastructure be more difficult or expensive to provide in regional areas?
- Have you identified how your policy will impact on different sectors of the regional population, for example the elderly in regional areas?
- Does your communication plan ensure you have given regional communities the opportunity to engage with the policy process?

Mitigation measures

- Hold consultation meetings in regional areas and at appropriate times recognising the distances and time regional people have to travel.
- Consider appropriate service and supply standards in regional areas, recognising provision costs may be higher in regional areas.
- Use regional media outlets to communicate with regional communities.



Access to Services

People living in regional and remote locations can be located over an hour by road from the nearest police station, fire service, medical centre, school, hospital and/or service town.

Checklist

- Will your policy affect the availability, quality or cost of accessing services in regional areas?
- Are there significant travel distances or times involved in providing or accessing the service in regional areas?
- Will the delivery of services be more expensive or more difficult to achieve in regional areas?
- Are there any particular implications for the safety and security of regional communities or businesses given their isolation from services?

Mitigation measures

- Consider flexible and innovative service delivery (for example, mobile delivery of Centrelink services, offering flexible operating hours or using information technology in new ways).
- Modify funding formulas to take into account higher per capita costs of delivery in regional areas (for example, regional loadings and incentive payments).
- Target funding to assist or encourage provision in regional areas or improve access for regional communities.
- Sharing premises or staff with other agencies where appropriate.

Ease and Cost of Compliance

A lack of competitive options in regional areas and isolation from services can increase the cost of complying with regulatory requirements.

Checklist

- Are there significant differences between the costs and benefits of compliance in regional areas compared to metropolitan areas?
- Will regional people or businesses find it more difficult or expensive to comply?
- Are the same compliance standards appropriate for both regional and metropolitan areas?

Mitigation measures

- Enable alternative delivery methods to improve accessibility.
- Provide exemptions or concessions in particular situations.

Steps in preparing a Regional Australia Impact Statement

1. **Contact the Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development** and confirm if a RAIS is required.
2. **Define “regional”**: Does your policy proposal require a definition of regional Australia? Will your policy impact broadly across regional communities or in specific geographic locations?
3. **Assess the implications of your policy**: are the implications significantly different for regional communities than for those in metropolitan centres?
4. **Identify and assess the positive and negative implications** of your policy for regional communities (the implications checklist may assist here).
5. **Seek advice** (where appropriate) from organisations that operate within the affected regional communities or that represent relevant regional stakeholder groups.
6. **Identify options for achieving your policy objectives** and maximising the positive implications for regional communities (the mitigation measures list may assist here).
7. **Identify unresolved implications** and develop a communication strategy as appropriate.

November 2017