



# Regional Development *Australia*

B R I S B A N E

**ANNUAL REPORT HIGHLIGHTS**

**2019-20**

- RDAB quickly rose to the challenge of the **COVID crisis** through adaptation, communication, and crisis response. We ramped up communication to the community on government initiatives and online events to assist businesses, and set up a **COVID-19 Update and Resource** page on our website which is regularly updated and referenced in our communications. We developed a new program with the assistance of ASBAS Business Advisors who identified a critical need for businesses to be more closely supported in order to survive, recover and thrive the COVID period and looming economic downturn. The **Roadmap to Revitalisation (R2R)** Program has been scoped, costed and presented to the 3 levels of government, with the result that the Brisbane City Council named the initiative in its June Budget and Annual Plan. We are actively sourcing government funding in order to deliver a pilot project in Queensland.
  
- RDA Brisbane continued with year 2 of a 3 year third party contract to deliver the **Australian Small Business Advisory Services (ASBAS) Digital Solutions** program across Queensland. Partnerships with councils, chambers of commerce and RDAs to promote and host workshops enabled RDA Brisbane to successfully deliver the program and contribute most of the regional delivery outcomes for the program in Queensland when compared with our delivery partners (Business Station and Treeti) across the 3 jurisdictions (WA, NT and Queensland). At the outside of the COVID crisis in March, we had to convert all delivery to online which involved considerable consultation with stakeholders and promotion of this new format. The transition went smoothly and the upside is that the program allows equitable access by small businesses no matter how remote their location, as long as they have a reliable internet connection. We are also promoting free **C19 Biz Booster webinars** developed by Business Station and ASBAS Advisors are on general business advisory as well as digital topics to assist businesses through the crisis.
  
- RDAB continues to take a lead with **innovative clusters**:
  - We have representatives serving on **cluster advisory committees** including METS and Queensland Robotics and provide advice and support to the **Queensland Bionics Cluster** which secured Queensland Government funding to run Australia's first ever Bionics Challenge 2020 to encourage innovation in life-changing medical technologies
  - During the year we formally auspiced the **Queensland Robotics Cluster**, opening a bank account for them, applying for round 2 SME Export Hubs funding (which unfortunately was unsuccessful but served to secure industry sponsorship for the cluster) and arranging accommodation in the Queensland Government's innovation hub - The Precinct in Fortitude Valley – located in the midst of the AI Hub, which presents important opportunities for collaboration. We were also instrumental in connecting the cluster with the opportunities in the space industry and the Advanced Robotics for Manufacturing (ARM) Hub with the result that 2 cluster members were accepted to conduct projects there to adapt their technologies for advanced manufacturing. During the pandemic the cluster

- members have grown and prospered against the national economic downturn trend, showing this is truly an industry that can help to lead jobs growth and recovery
- In partnership with NERA (the Australian Government's industry growth centre) we initiated a forum of interested hydrogen technology businesses which has resulted in a **SEQ Hydrogen Cluster** being formed H2SEQ which is still in its initial phases
  - A scheduled **inaugural SEQ Cluster Muster** event organised by RDAB was converted to an online event for cluster managers and supporters representing 9 clusters who cross-shared their COVID response measures, proving just how businesses in a cluster are more supported in times of crisis. Cross-cluster collaboration was facilitated resulting in meaningful collaborations taking place, such as between Robotics and the Food and Agribusiness Network to incorporate robotics technologies in agriculture and food production
  - RDAB supported the **TCI Oceania Cluster Conference 2020** "Clustering for Positive Futures" which was converted to a 3 part online event instead of a physical event in bushfire-ravaged Gippsland (Victoria). The online event featured international speakers and had a focus on disaster recovery and crisis management.
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- RDAB continues to be a partner in the **EXPRESSWAY™ Network Forum**, along with Microsoft and TAFE Queensland. This innovation business network connects innovative businesses and scalable startups, offering opportunities for businesses to make connections, share ideas, form collaborations with each other, connect with investors, and find out about services available from government and business support agencies. Since March 2020 meetings have been held via Zoom which has enabled attendees from other areas of the state to attend. Even though informal networking was a strong feature of the forums, we still maintained around a 75% attendee rate each month online.
  - RDAB is an active leader of regional networks. It continued to facilitate the **GIBIN (the Government Industry Business Information Network)** with representatives of over 60 Business and Industry Associations, RDAs, Universities and Government agencies (Local, State and Federal) that deliver services or develop initiatives for business. During the COVID period many of the GIBIN agencies were issuing their own alerts, items of which were shared amongst the network members. RDAB initiated the formation of a **Brisbane Connect group** comprising key GIBIN member agencies from the 3 levels of Government to share intel and provide some coordination with respect to economic recovery plans and actions. RDAB continued to maintain the **The Biz Buzz** Facebook page which is a direct conduit to business, providing information on government grants, resources and events.
  - RDAB is a go-to organisation and has made numerous **strategic connections** both nationally and internationally throughout the year for and between business/industry, the 3 levels of government, regional, national and international stakeholders, using our extensive networks (including GIBIN, EXPRESSWAY and cluster partnerships), knowledge and influence to foster innovation and economic development outcomes. During the year we presented on our specialist industry sectors and clusters to a delegation from the Arizona University and a PNG Government study tour.

- RDAB provided **feedback to government** through surveys, consultative forums including helping to organise these, and serving on the national SME Export Hubs assessment panel (for round 2 funding), and on the industry stakeholder group for the SEQ City Deal (providing feedback to SEQ RDAs). With the COVID crisis, RDAB has been:
  - participating in Brisbane City Council industry stakeholder consultations for its Economic Recovery Task Force
  - a Regional Recovery Representative for the SEQ region to provide information on COVID-19 impacts, opportunities and priorities for future growth, to inform the development of a COVID-19 Regional Recovery Strategy for the SEQ region
  - participating in departmental teleconferences with the Assistant Minister to provide feedback and advice.

With a new focus on recovery, RDA Brisbane plans to build on these achievements and develop new strategies to lead and support economic response, recovery and growth as Australia and the world face a long period of economic uncertainty.