



RIVERINA AND MURRAY JOINT ORGANISATION

BOARD MEETING MINUTES

Minutes of the meeting of the Board of the Riverina and Murray Joint Organisation, held in the Ian Gilbert Room of the Murrumbidgee Council on Wednesday 28th August 2019 at 10:00am.

VOTING BOARD MEMBERS

CHAIR: Cr Kevin Mack (Albury)	Cr Matthew Hannan (Berrigan)	Cr Darryl Jardine (Carrathool)
Cr Norm Brennan (Edward River)	Cr Patrick Bourke (Federation)	Cr John Dal Broi (Griffith)
Cr Paul Maytom (Leeton)	Cr Chris Bilkey (Murray River)	Cr Neville Kschenka (Narrandera)
Cr Bill Sheaffe (Hay)	Cr Ruth McCrae (Murrumbidgee)	

NON-VOTING BOARD MEMBERS

Frank Zaknich (Albury)	Rowan Perkins (Berrigan)	Rick Warren (Carrathool)	Adam McSwain (Edward River)
Adrian Butler (Federation)	Brett Stonestreet (Griffith)	Kirstyn Thronder (Hay)	Jackie Kruger (Leeton)
Des Bilske (Murray River)	John Scarce (Murrumbidgee)	George Cowan (Narrandera)	Cameron Templeton (OLG, DPIE)

MEETING PRESENTERS

Jillian Kilby	The Infrastructure Collaborative (via video link)
Ken Gillespie	Regional Infrastructure Coordinator (via video link)
Don Murray	John Holland (via video link)

GUESTS

Peter Evans	Office of Local Government, DPIE
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EXECUTIVE OFFICER (NON-VOTING BOARD MEMBER)

Bridgett Leopold	Executive Officer RAMJO
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AGENDA ITEM 1 – WELCOME

The Chairperson welcomed the Board Members and guests to the meeting.

AGENDA ITEM 2 – APOLOGIES

Voting Board Members: Cr Matt Hannan (Berrigan Shire Council), Cr Peter Laird (Mayor Carrathool Shire Council), Cr Neville Kschenka (Narrandera Shire Council)

Other Members: Brett Stonestreet (Griffith), Rowan Perkins (Berrigan), Des Bilske (Murray River), James Bolton (DPIE)

RESOLVED that the apologies be accepted and that leave of absence be granted.

(Moved Cr Brennan and seconded Cr McRae)

AGENDA ITEM 3 – DECLARATION OF PECUNIARY OR OTHER INTEREST

There were no declarations of pecuniary or other interests lodged at the meeting by Board Members or other Designated Persons.

AGENDA ITEM 4 – MINUTES OF 8TH MAY 2019 BOARD MEETING

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the RAMJO Board Meeting held on 8th May 2019 are confirmed.

(Moved Cr Dal Broi and seconded Cr Maytom)

AGENDA ITEM 5 – MATTERS ARISING FROM MINUTES 8TH MAY 2019

Executive Officer informed the Board that all outstanding actions from the previous meeting are now complete.

RESOLVED that the Board Members noted the verbal update.

AGENDA ITEM 6 – CAMERON TEMPLETON AND PETER EVANS, OFFICE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT ENGAGEMENT OFFICERS, DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING, INDUSTRY AND ENVIRONMENT

The Far West Engagement Officer, Peter Evans, provided a background on his experience working with and in Local Government, including assisting with recent mergers from a Human Resources perspective.

The Engagement Officer for Riverina and Murray, Cameron Templeton, provided a briefing on the \$150,000 offer from Office of Local Government to Joint Organisations. The future direction of Office of Local Government and Joint Organisation cooperation is as follows:

- OLG to take a greater role in the governance of the Joint Organisations
- Optimistic that JOs across the state can use the opportunity to demonstrate ability to deliver on a strategic priority/priorities and demonstrate ability to becoming financially sustainable

Discussion from Board Members focussed on ongoing concerns relating to the (in)ability for the JO to function without appropriate resourcing to deliver on any projects, cooperation or collaboration. There was expression from Board Members that \$150,000 isn't sufficient to demonstrate ability to deliver any permanent outcomes or change, and that JOs who are performing, cooperating and moving forward shouldn't be penalised.

Questions were placed regarding what success looks like from the perspective of the OLG, and this was met with the suggestion that within one year the JO should be able to demonstrate that they can act collectively as a team on one priority to demonstrate progress and create an income stream.

The Chair raised the point that Southern Lights was an example of a strategic collaboration across more than 40 Councils, which was met with lack of support from a State Government perspective. Other RAMJO Board Members expressed that large regional funding opportunities need to be more flexible, or created in

consideration of JOs and their ability to apply. Furthermore, segmenting a parcel of regional grant funding for JOs only will create competition and collaboration. There needs to be an element of creating opportunity for JOs to leverage and thrive within current frameworks.

Uncertainty regarding the future sustainability was expressed from Board Members, and the question regarding what options are available to Member Councils should the JO model not be successful and not continue. This was met with further discussions regarding expectations from JOs, given resourcing for base costs are not being met.

Requests for OLG to consider that success from a JO perspective requires an ear from State Government, and genuine partnership. RAMJO can act as a think tank for State Government, with mutual understanding and commitment to a regional collaboration model. There was genuine agreement from Board Members that given the long standing partnerships in the room and aspiration to deliver on regional priorities which benefit our regional communities, our Member Councils would continue to collaborate on regional issues regardless of the model.

Board Members also requested transparency around the State Government's position on funding models and the space in which JOs can operate, as lack of clarity remains in this space.

RESOLVED that the Board received and noted the update from Cameron Templeton, Council Engagement Officer in the Office of Local Government function in Department of Planning, Industry and Environment.

AGENDA ITEM 7 – DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY SURVEY AND SUB-COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

The Executive Officer provided a presentation on the outcome of the Digital Connectivity Survey and the trends in the data.

RESOLVED that the RAMJO Board noted the update and endorsed the following actions of the Digital Connectivity Sub-Committee

1. That the Digital Connectivity Sub-Committee commence discussions with telecommunication providers, NBN Local, Canberra JO and local / federal members regarding the finding of the survey. The Sub-Committee will also plan to reconvene to refine a set of policy positions on Digital Connectivity needs of our communities.
2. That the Digital Connectivity Sub-Committee prepare a regional submission to the design of the Federal Government's Regional Digital Connectivity Program (due 9th September), including the following:
 - a. Support Local government authorities being allowed to lead a bid for funding. Refer "Discussion Paper", page 6, Question 2.
 - b. Nominate RAMJO survey as a source of information to support applications by Local Government.
 - c. Possibly nominate the boosters for households as a realistic project to address the blacks opt issue at the grass roots level. Refer Question 6, Page 7.
 - d. Support case for very localised projects. I.e. this well under \$2m but have real benefits for local communities. Refer question 11, page 9.
3. Continue advocacy actions with local members and other relevant MPs
4. Prepare a scope and draft points for future funding opportunities, possibly:
 - a. Increasing reliability and capacity of Council internet connectivity to allow possible future internet hubs, public office spaces, study hubs for distance learners
 - b. Advocating for drought affected farmers: seeking access to drought assistance, mental health assistance via web, apps, etc, but without the connectivity (boosters, small cell, etc)
 - c. Supporting families with students who are studying or are home schooled
 - d. Home Businesses: offering support or improvements for those who are currently disadvantaged due to their lack of internet connectivity.

Moved: Cr John Dal Broi (Griffith), Seconded: Cr Pat Bourke (Federation)

AGENDA ITEM 8 – JILLIAN KILBY & DON MURRAY – JOHN HOLLAND

Jillian Kilby and Don Murray provided a presentation to the Board via Zoom on the future of the Country Regional Network, and John Holland's preparation for the maintenance contract which commences in 2021.

Discussion relating to non-operational lines and the future for Country Regional Rail Network included concerns that individual Councils have spent time before investing into these studies, with little outcome. Jillian expressed her understanding of this matter and provided Board members with contact details for Councils to reach out and discuss individual matters with the team preparing the bid.

RESOLVED that the Board Members await the distribution of contact details of Jillian, Don and Ken, so that they may reach out and provide localised or regional input where desired.

AGENDA ITEM 9 – JACKIE KRUGER - AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY RIVERINA AND MURRAY – RAMJO RESPONSE

Jackie Kruger represents RAMJO Member Councils on the Riverina and Murray Regional Plan Monitoring Committee. Jackie briefed the RAMJO Board on the Draft document "Planning for Agriculture in the Riverina and Murray" which has been released for comment.

Jackie has drafted a RAMJO submission on behalf of the committee, noting that the context of the response is the adopted vision for the Riverina Murray as espoused in the Riverina Murray Regional Plan:

A diversified economy found on Australia's food bowl, iconic waterways and a network of vibrant connected communities.

While RAMJO agrees with the implied intent of the 'Planning for Agriculture' draft outlined in the introduction of the document, the RAMJO summary recommendation is that the draft "Planning for Agriculture in the Riverina Murray" document be put on hold for further review once the following is completed:

- Important agricultural land mapping (underway)
- ACCC review on water trading (underway)
- Currency of data update (by DPIE Planning)
- Economic analysis of the value of formed irrigation areas in the Riverina Murray for delivering water as efficiently as possible for agricultural production (yet to be commissioned – if required this could be driven by RAMJO in collaboration with a range of stakeholders)

The full submission is at [Attachment A](#).

RAMJO Member Councils have further concerns relating to the proliferation of solar farms, which the outcomes were agreed to move to agenda item 12 on Solar Farm RAMJO Paper.

RESOLVED that the RAMJO Board:

- **noted the update from RAMJO's representative on the Riverina Murray Regional Plan Monitoring Committee regarding the draft "Planning for Agriculture in the Riverina and Murray" strategy.**
- **agreed to provide a RAMJO response based on the feedback provided at the Board meeting, with the response prepared by our representative on the Riverina and Murray Regional Plan Monitoring Committee, Jackie Kruger. The RAMJO response includes the recommendation that that the draft "Planning for Agriculture in the Riverina Murray" document be put on hold for further review once the processes listed in the bullet points above are completed.**

Moved: Cr Paul Maytom (Leeton), Seconded: Cr John Dal Broi (Griffith)

AGENDA ITEM 10 – BRIDGETT LEOPOLD – RAMJO BUDGET FOR 2019 - 2020

The Executive Officer confirmed a RAMJO Extraordinary Meeting was held on the 18th July 2019 in Berrigan, with the reconciliation for the 2018 – 2019 financial year noted, and the 2019 – 2020 budget adopted.

Of significance was the recognition that moving forward under the current funding structure and a draft forecast provided via a 4 year budget, RAMJO would not be financially sustainable in coming years under the current framework. This has prompted further options which will be pursued and investigated over the coming 6 months to provide clarity in the first quarter of 2020.

In addition, RAMJO Executive Officer presented a schedule of meetings with Ministers, Shadow Ministers, Government Departments and other Joint Organisations which have been underway to advocate for the future of Joint Organisations and share identified opportunities. RAMJO will apply for the additional \$150,000 being offered by the Office of Local Government, pending a decision from the presentation of options in agenda item 11.

RESOLVED:

1. That the RAMJO Board **noted** the successful advocacy outcomes and the offering of an additional \$150,000 from the Office of Local Government via the Minister for a work stream approved by both the RAMJO Board and the Office of Local Government.
2. That the RAMJO Board **consider** the most efficient and practical application of this funding to meet requirements and achieve the greatest outcomes for RAMJO, in line with the identified work streams in agenda item 11.

MOVED: Cr Pat Bourke (Federation), Seconded: Cr. Chris Bilkey (Murray River))

AGENDA ITEM 11 – BRIDGETT LEOPOLD – SUB-COMMITTEE UPDATE AND RECOMMENDED WORK STREAMS FOR PRIORITISING

The Executive Officer provided a presentation on the outcomes of the Sub-Committees and recommendations to the Board which have been further refined with the General Managers' Professional Officers group. These recommendations were provided with the condition that the Board consider RAMJO has limited resources and no further commitment from Member Councils or NSW Government for additional funding for staff. Therefore, a cautious and realistic approach to recommending projects was applied, with a lens that considers our ability to create change. Priority work streams were presented in each category, under the following categories:

- What can we control?
- Where can we influence?
- In which areas are we only able to advocate?

WATER

- **Control:** IWCMs and Water Quality (what are other JOs doing?)
- **Influence:** Social Media campaign and advocacy around “what the water situation is doing to us”
- **Advocacy:** continue to push NSW Government for clarity and commitment on future ‘new water’ infrastructure commitments.

ENERGY

- **Control:** RAMJO Energy Strategy
- **Influence:** Attracting Industry and Shaping the Region

- **Advocacy:** Solar Farm development regulation changes (Development Application process for State Significant Developments, Voluntary Payment Agreements, modelling for understanding net economic impacts for the 'life' of solar farms).

DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY

- **Control:** Apply for grants to boost Council internet connectivity and offer community grant campaigns, such as in-house boosters, internet study hubs, rented office spaces, etc. Remain on track to identifying and acting on "SMART" opportunities.
- **Influence:** Meet with telecommunication providers, NBN Co and local members to demonstrate evidence collated and press for support.
- **Advocacy:** Use survey data to demonstrate systematic disadvantages in our region and impacts to small business, education facilities and health facilities. Request equity of access to reliable and sustainable infrastructure.

NOTE: During the discussion on this item, the General Manager of Murrumbidgee raised the option to create a RAMJO Internet Service Provider as a possible income stream, which also could bridge the digital connectivity gaps identified. This idea was added to the consideration relating to possible works streams which would fulfil

HEALTH

- **Control:** None. RAMJO identified that taking on management of health services is not helpful given the duplication and difficulty navigating in this space. However, the JO should act on funding opportunities where there are prospects to deliver small scale projects for our communities as they arise. (e.g. Empowering Our Communities).
- **Influence:** Create policy positions via the next Sub-Committee meeting for the following:
 - **GP postcode formulation**
 - **Attraction and retention of GPs and nurses**
 - **Mobile diagnostics**
 - **Expansion of school based programs**
- **Advocacy:** advocate for a reform of the visibility, marketing and online accessibility of all general health, mental health and specialist health services provided in our region to reduce the complexity and difficulty in navigating the health system. Advocate for 'low care' aged care reform of funded standards given the ageing population and employment opportunities in our region if the business case for low care beds is more attractive.

INDUSTRY

- **Control:** Local Government Industry – procurement and supplier development program
- **Influence:** Buy local, attract industry, regional economic development group (and possible prospectus)
- **Advocacy:** RAMJO Prospectus - Aerospace

TRANSPORT

- **N/A – awaiting completion of RAMJO Regional Transport Strategy which is in the final draft stages and being completed by the RAMJO Engineering Group.**

SUMMARY

RESOLVED:

1. That the RAMJO Board members discussed and endorsed **three projects** which deliver on the following:
 - a. Can be undertaken with existing resources
 - b. Can be undertaken via the \$150,000 OLG grant within 1 year

- c. Increase the financial sustainability of the Joint Organisation
 - d. Remain in our ability to control
2. That with these parameters in mind, the RAMJO Board agreed to adopt the following work streams as priority in this order:
- a. Procurement Program Scoping – 2019 (areas to be included to be determined after data received on the ‘nucleus’ of what we all spend)
 - b. Regional Energy Strategy scope and draft with short, medium and long term deliverables including cost savings, efficiencies and long term security and affordability - 2019
 - c. Digital Connectivity – possibility of creating our own Internet Service Provider functionality – 2020 ongoing into 2021

All other work streams will remain relevant, but cannot be progress until such time that funding or resourcing opportunities become available. RAMJO, it’s Board Members and networks will continue to influence and advocate on priority areas, with each sub-committee creating an advocacy platform.

Moved: Cr Chris Bilkey (Murray River), Seconded: Cr Norm Brennan (Edward River)

AGENDA ITEM 12 – BRIDGETT LEOPOLD – SOLAR FARM RAMJO PAPER

The free water trading market and rapid change from cropping to horticulture (such as nut trees), along with the proliferation of solar farms is intensifying the agricultural economic impact on our region. A detailed analysis into the long term economic impacts of these rapid changes in this landscape to understand whether these impacts are likely to result in a net loss or a net gain for our region would define which action we should take. Discussion relating to commissioning such a study was had with the agreement that the Executive Officer should approach The Hon Rob Stokes, Minister for Planning and Public Spaces, regarding these matters.

RESOLVED that the RAMJO Board support the Executive Officer to approach the Minister for Planning and Public Spaces, Rob Stokes, regarding the rapid changes in the use of land in our region, and a possible cooperative approach to commissioning a study on the full economic impact of long term changes in land use relating to solar farms and other rapid changes.

Moved: Cr Paul Maytom (Leeton), Seconded: Cr John Dal Broi (Griffith)

AGENDA ITEM 13 – BRIDGETT LEOPOLD – PROFESSIONAL OFFICER WORKING GROUP UPDATE

The Board received an update and minutes relating to each Professional Officer Working Group.

RESOLVED that the Board noted the updates from the Professional Officer Working Groups.

Moved: Cr John Dal Broi (Griffith), Seconded: Cr Pat Bourke (Federation)

AGENDA ITEM 14 – BRIDGETT LEOPOLD – RAMJO WASTE UPDATE

The Board received an update from the Executive Officer regarding a strategic meeting with the Regional Waste Coordinators on future direction, vision and progress to date. The redirection of funding to a regional role to determine opportunities and create business cases was supported in principle by the Regional Waste Coordinators. A clear area of responsibility and reporting guidelines to ensure we maintain the integrity of the existing waste groups and the relationship with EPA was agreed.

RESOLVED:

1. That the RAMJO Board agreed to proceed with the recruitment of the Office Manager role and Regional Project Manager role under specified terms, and in line with the funding arrangements presented at the RAMJO Extraordinary Board Meeting in July relating to the budget and surplus RAMJO funds.

2. That the RAMJO Board noted the recruitment of the Project Officer will be suspended until such time that the Project Manager identifies projects for endorsement and progression to the Board and to the waste groups.
3. That the Board noted detailed financial workings will be drafted with RAMJO's financial administrator, HR support services and the Executive, once salaries and on-costs are determined.

Moved: Cr. Pat Bourke (Federation), Seconded Cr. Paul Maytom (Leeton)

AGENDA ITEM 15 – BRIDGETT LEOPOLD – FUTURE MEETING PROTOCOL

The Executive Officer proposed to lengthen every second Board Meeting due to the increased strategic focus and additional work streams

RESOLVED that the RAMJO Board agree:

1. That each (or every second) Board meeting be an overnight dinner with an early start the following morning to allow for a longer meeting and reducing travel time pressures. (e.g. 8am – midday).
2. That every second General Managers meeting be an overnight dinner with a longer meeting the following day.
3. That the location and time of each meeting be flexible and be determined on an order or methodology open for discussion. Suggestions include:
 - a. Alphabetical
 - b. Identification of other meetings in areas and align RAMJO Board meetings to align
 - c. Volunteering (or being volun-told)
4. The RAMJO budget has allocated funding to allow for this capacity building of the Board and General Managers Group, which can only be achieved with more detailed input or consideration of key topics (i.e. more time to do so).
5. That the Executive Officer will attempt to invite a local member or other distinguished guest to the RAMJO Board dinner to share the progress of RAMJO and build the RAMJO brand.
6. That the next Board meeting be held in Griffith a week earlier than planned, with a dinner on Tuesday 5th November and the Board meeting on Wednesday 6th. Steph Cooke MP Cootamundra has agreed to attend the dinner to learn more about RAMJO.

Moved: Cr John Dal Broi (Griffith), Seconded: Cr Pat Bourke (Federation)

AGENDA ITEM 16 – GENERAL BUSINESS

GP REGISTERS

RAMJO should consider offering a letter of support to the Murrumbidgee Local Health District to employ rural GP trainees as NSW Health employees for the 4 years while they work across various rural hospitals and general practices. This continuity of employment would mean that GP registrars training to become rural specialists could benefit from entitlements such as accrued annual leave, long service leave, sick leave and access to paid parental leave. While this sounds inordinately sensible there is currently a barrier which prevents this from happening, and can be simply fixed via an adjustment to some limiting policy.

RESOLVED that the Board agree that RAMJO draft a letter of support for the Murrumbidgee Local Health District to request the Commonwealth Department of Health to find an innovative way to enable District employed GP trainees to undertake MBS billing as they see their patients.

Moved: Cr Paul Maytom (Leeton), Seconded: Cr Pat Bourke (Federation)

SUCCESSFUL RAMJO PILOT PROJECT FUNDING

RAMJO was successful in being awarded a \$30,000 funding for delivering a community coaching project in Deniliquin. This project has been specifically developed with a private company specialising in coaching and resilience. RAMJO will report back into the Board with the outcomes of the pilot workshop.

There being no further business, the RAMJO Board meeting concluded at 1:30 pm.