

MEDIA RELEASE

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Transformation pending for regional advocacy body

A TRANSFORMATION of the long-running Wimmera Development Association opens new opportunities for the region's peak advocacy body.

WDA is behind many major, emerging projects in the region. It supports businesses, promotes economic development opportunities to investors and is a key link between industry and governments, lobbying for improved infrastructure and for regional priority issues.

The transformation will take its current Board from 25 members to 11 – becoming a skills-based board of representatives from Horsham Rural City, Northern Grampians, Hindmarsh, West Wimmera and Yarriambiack Shire councils along with industry representatives.

An independent chair will be appointed.

Current WDA Board Chairman Kevin Erwin said WDA had a proud, 30-year history and was an important player in attracting infrastructure projects, funding and people to the region.

These include running the gateway process for the Wimmera Agricultural and Livestock Hub (formerly the Wimmera Intermodal Freight Terminal), involvement from inception of the Wimmera Pulse Protein Plant initiative, and developing a business case to build the Rainbow Weather Radar.

WDA was heavily involved in advocacy for the Wimmera-Mallee Pipeline project; was a long-running supporter of Regional Living Expos – including its *The Wimmera: Everything you need project* – and attracts and supports migrants and refugee communities to relocate to the region.

It auspices Leadership Wimmera – local leadership development programs for people in the region – and hosts the Wimmera Business Awards.

“WDA has been a regional development organisation over a 30-year period,” Cr Erwin said.

“The time has come to review the organisation and ensure it is fit-for-purpose into the future.”

A Memorandum of Understanding is before the five councils for endorsement.

Councils will determine their representative to the new WDA Board following Statutory Meetings in November. The representatives, along with council chief executives, will then recruit an independent chair; and the collective will negotiate the parameters of the industry representatives.

The full Board is expected to be in place by March.

The WDA AGM is set for December 7, followed by an Extraordinary General Meeting to officially transition the Incorporated Association into a Company Limited by Guarantee.

Cr Erwin said the transformation afforded WDA new opportunities.

"As an incorporated association, the Wimmera Development Association was utilising a structure suited towards community groups and sporting clubs, with governing rules very much based around member engagement and rights. It was limited in the avenues of funding it could seek, in being limited in its ability to run any business and in the governance structure it adopted," he said.

“With the change to a Company Limited by Guarantee, WDA will have the benefit of being able to attract talented directors to a company working within a corporate structure which will have greater flexibility to attracting funding and being engaged in enterprises for the benefit of the communities it serves.

“It also means that the councils who fund the company can keep control of the company and have it aligned to the needs of the region.”

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