

South Australian Sustainable Communities Program

Consultation Summary



Government
of South Australia

Department of Primary
Industries and Regions

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Program design informed by consultation

The South Australian Sustainable Communities Program was co-designed across government and informed by place-based consultation, existing stakeholder engagement, and regional and local economic development strategies and plans. The program aligns with the community adjustment assistance principles outlined in the Australian Government's *Restoring Our Rivers Framework*.

The Department for Primary Industries and Regions (PIRSA) is delivering South Australia's \$20 million Sustainable Communities Program. PIRSA consulted with South Australian River Murray Basin communities identified as being most vulnerable to the socioeconomic impacts of the Australian Government's water purchasing program for the 450 gigalitres of water for the environment. To gain deep insight into the local context without duplicating effort or unnecessarily burdening communities under pressure, PIRSA also leveraged existing consultation and engagement conducted by other government agencies, local government and regional economic development bodies through a variety of strategic programs and reports.

What we heard

- Water for the environment is important for the long-term health and viability of the whole River Murray system.
- South Australia has been a leader in water efficiency – River Murray communities have done the heavy lifting early.
- Challenges facing the regions are broader than just water recovery – challenges are integrated and government agencies needs to work together for regional transformation.
- Stakeholders in the most vulnerable communities are experiencing engagement fatigue – have already told government agencies what we think, need and want across multiple programs.
- Grant programs need to include funds for feasibility so good proposals aren't missed and barriers to applying are removed.
- Minimise bureaucracy and get money on the ground in the region faster.

How this informed the Sustainable Communities Program design

- Existing consultation and engagement insights were used to reduce duplication of stakeholder effort and open the grant program sooner.
- Incorporated the investment themes identified by communities that are most vulnerable to the impacts of water recovery.
- Feasibility grant included in round one.

Investment themes

Investment themes were identified during the consultation and supported by insights gained from existing stakeholder engagement and regional and local economic development strategies and plans. These themes informed the design of South Australia's Sustainable Communities Program.

Investment themes:

- agricultural diversification and innovation
- business growth and industry diversification

- community infrastructure and liveability
- First Nations economic development
- health, ageing and community services
- infrastructure and urban development
- renewable energy and green transition
- resilience through transition to new industries
- sustainability and circular economy
- sustainable industries
- tourism and cultural development
- workforce development, education and retention.

Consultation overview

This document provides a summary of the consultation and engagement that informed the design and development of the South Australian Sustainable Communities Program. The consultation built on other available evidence to ensure a whole-of-community understanding of the potential socioeconomic impacts of water recovery was considered.

Other evidence included:

- complementary regional development programs and initiatives
- feedback and insights from existing stakeholder engagement with similar themes and enquiry questions
- lessons learnt from previous community adjustment assistance programs
- publicly available information and advice on anticipated water recovery impacts
- regional and local economic development strategies and plans
- [Sustainable Communities Program](#) principles set by the Australian Government.

Co-design across government

PIRSA led the co-design of the South Australian Sustainable Communities Program with relevant federal and state government agencies to enable collaborative decision making in the design and development of the program. A cross-jurisdictional Steering Committee was established and met quarterly from February 2024 to June 2025 with representatives from:

- Department for Climate Change, Energy, Environment and Water
- Department for Environment and Water
- Department of the Premier and Cabinet
- Department of Primary Industries and Regions
- Department of Treasury and Finance
- SA Water
- Small Business Commissioner South Australia.

Stakeholder consultation

The purpose of stakeholder consultation was to engage with representatives from the most vulnerable South Australian River Murray communities including First Nations, local government and regional industries to ensure local perspectives and priorities informed program design and delivery. It also served to strengthen relationships, build trust and support communities and stakeholders to identify local solutions that build capacity, help diversify economies and prepare for a future with less water.

Sustainable Communities Program consultation

Stakeholder consultation was undertaken to identify alignments and opportunities for socio-economic projects that mitigate the impacts of water recovery. The following activities took place:

- email conversations
- email updates
- facilitated discussions
- meetings (face-to-face and online)
- phone calls
- workshops (face-to-face and online).

Existing stakeholder engagement

PIRSA is aware the South Australian River Murray communities most vulnerable to the socio-economic impacts of water recovery are facing complex and compounding issues and as a result, are experiencing engagement fatigue.

To support the needs of these communities and avoid engagement duplication, PIRSA used knowledge from existing stakeholder consultation activities to help inform the design of the South Australian Sustainable Communities Program. This included programs, plans and reports.

The South Australian River Murray Communities Water Transition Program worked with relevant stakeholders to develop a business case to assist South Australian River Murray Basin industries and communities to adapt to a future with less water should significant volumes of water be recovered under the Basin Plan's 450 gigalitre for the environment. This work informed the design of the design of the Sustainable Communities Program.

PIRSA's Thriving Regions Fund – Enabling Infrastructure Program consists of medium to large grants for infrastructure projects that strengthen and build strong regional communities. This includes value-added investment in priority community infrastructure that enhances quality of life and helps attract and retain people in our regions, as well as enabling infrastructure that supports business attraction, retention, and a strong regional economy. This program is now in its third year. The monitoring and evaluation report from the previous grant round informed the design of the Sustainable Communities Program.

The Murraylands and Riverland (MR) Plan was an evidence-based approach to resilience planning guided by a local and expert Steering Committee across the Mallee, Murraylands and Riverland region. Extensive community engagement and public consultation was undertaken, involving a total of 550 people with over 4,080 hours contributed by the community. This included people from across various

industries, social services, the unemployed, the self-employed, families, friends, churches, sporting and service clubs, live-in, work-in, artistic groups and committee representatives.

The Murraylands and Riverland Pipeline report is collated quarterly by Regional Development Australia (RDA), Murraylands and Riverland (MR) for public and private projects valued over \$250,000 that have economic and regional development benefits. The report allows both RDA MR and PIRSA to understand the pipeline of opportunities in the region and their economic benefit, staging and barriers to effective support and advocacy.

Regional and local economic development strategies and plans

A desktop review of existing regional and local economic development strategies and plans was undertaken to identify common priorities, gaps and opportunities for alignment with the Australian Government's Sustainable Communities Program principles. The review included among other documentation the following documents:

- Economic Development and Tourism Strategy 2021-2026, District Council of Karoonda East Murray
- Economic Development Report and Project Plan 2019-2023, District Council of Loxton Waikerie
- Economic Development Strategy, Renmark Paringa Council
- Investment Prospectus and Community Vision Plan 2021-2025, Coorong District Council
- Murraylands & Riverland Regional Profile 2023, Regional Development Australia, Murraylands and Riverland
- National Agreement on Closing the Gap, Australian Government and the Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations
- Regional Blueprint 2024-2025, Regional Development South Australia
- Regional Development Agenda 2024-2030, Ngarrindjeri Ruwe Empowered Communities
- River Murray and Mallee Country Plan 2020-2025, River Murray and Mallee Aboriginal Corporation
- Strategic Direction 2023+ Murraylands and Riverland, Regional Development Australia, Murraylands and Riverland
- Strategic Plan 2024-2028, Mid Murray Council
- Strategic Plan 2025-2035, Berri Barmera Council.