

"A Thriving Rural Australia"



*A shared vision for rural Australia by Course 1 of the
Australian Rural Leadership Program*

September 1994

"A Thriving Rural Australia. "

*Central to our vision is a commitment
to inspiring effective leadership
to unify and empower
Australian rural communities,
businesses and industries
to build a vital and prosperous future
for all Australians.*

Course 1 (1993-1994)

Foreword

The inaugural Australian Rural Leadership Program was conducted during 1993 and 1994. The rationale for this innovative concept was to form a strong bond between the 30 participants, enrich their leadership capabilities and establish a leadership network. The program brought together a diversity of rural background, and set in place a foundation for succeeding graduates to extend the network for the betterment of rural Australia.

The overall Australian Rural Leadership Foundation objective is:

*To improve the competitiveness and profitability of rural industries
in an international context, for the benefit of all Australia,
through the development of highly capable leaders
in rural industry and the support community.*

The participants were selected from a broad spectrum of applicants representing primary industry, agri-business and the communities in which they live. They were drawn from geographically distinct areas: the Kimberley and Tasmania, Albany and the Burdekin, and many places in between. They have been challenged and confronted by both experiential and issue based learning.

This document represents the shared values and beliefs of the group who have been exposed to the insights and convictions of key figures both in Australia and overseas.

Our vision is the culmination of 18 months of intensive examination, analysis, and dissection by the group.

The vision is a guide to focus thoughts and actions during daily interactions with families, communities, industries and the nation as a whole.

While this vision provides a set of guidelines for the participants, it is also offered to those who share its perspectives.

Our Shared Vision

"A Thriving Rural Australia."

*Central to our vision is a commitment
to inspiring effective leadership
to unify and empower
Australian rural communities,
businesses and industries
to build a vital and prosperous future
for all Australians.*

Five key areas have been identified to provide the drive to achieve the vision:

Rural Australians

Foster the human potential of rural Australians by encouraging a positive and creative outlook, and a will to be professional, informed, self-reliant, and outward looking.

Regional Focus

Ensure regions have the ability to develop and implement policies that maximise the strengths and opportunities of their communities, businesses and industries.

Production and Marketing

Cultivate and develop a customer driven culture. This involves the processing and marketing of commodities, products and services as specified by domestic and international customers, while maintaining a sustainable return on resources.

Resources and Infrastructure

Facilitate the planned development and management of Australia's rural resources and infrastructure for the prosperity of current and future generations.

Building Bridges

Encourage and establish recognition, understanding and linkages between rural and urban communities, industries, government and other nations.

Implementation Strategies

Rural Australians

Foster the human potential of rural Australians by encouraging a positive and creative outlook, and a will to be professional, informed, self reliant, and outward looking.

Australia's greatest asset is its people, and the future prosperity of our nation is in their hands. A significant challenge facing rural Australia is the development of the full potential of its people through a positive and creative community enterprise that is professional, informed, self reliant and outward looking. In addition, there is also the challenge for rural Australia to harness the best talent to serve its communities and the nation.

The need to further develop a significant culture change is central to the development of rural Australians. This includes a positive attitude towards the value of education and training, communication, promotion, access to information, and self reliance.

Strong leadership is required to develop the necessary climate for change. Change includes securing access to the latest technology and communication options, promoting success, ensuring that communities retain and attract educated and innovative talent, as well as appropriate reforms of structures and systems. These strategies should include the philosophy of continuous improvement.

The following key strategies are essential to this process:

- Identify and develop people with the potential to articulate the needs of rural Australia.
- Encourage representation of rural people in a broad range of community, business and industry organisations.
- Develop leadership skills in rural communities to engender commitment of communities, businesses and industries to the future of rural Australia.
- Enhance the effectiveness of business people in rural areas through community based programs and initiatives aimed at increasing managerial skills and the uptake of technology.
- Promote access for all rural people to excellence in education and training within their regions which incorporate financial, social and emotional support of families and communities.
- Promote and celebrate the achievements and qualities of rural Australia to generate high self esteem.

Regional Focus

Ensure regions have the ability to develop and implement policies that maximise the strengths and opportunities of their communities, businesses and industries.

Control over regional policy is essential in developing a strong identity. A strong regional identity attracts investment and creates a market presence for its products. Devolution of policy decisions to regions will enable them to develop the focus necessary to achieve an identity.

Regional responsibility for policy ensures that the decision makers are close to the economic, social and environmental effects of their decisions. It encourages assessment of their resource base, strengths and weaknesses, and opportunities for the development of long term goals and strategies.

The determination of regional boundaries should be flexible, depending on the function they serve. Size and level of control should be designed to maximise the likelihood of achieving results. Amalgamation of regions may be required to attract economies of scale and develop an identity that is recognisable at state, national and international levels.

Combining resources within and between regions may enable the establishment of a critical mass capable of sustaining long term development and recognition. Regionally based tourism programs, for example, that span a number of local government areas have been successfully marketed both nationally and overseas.

The key strategies for the development of a regional focus are:

- Ensure regional development is devolved to those who live in the region, ensuring that decision makers are close to the economic, social and environmental effects of resource management.
- Encourage regions to be pro-active in promoting their major attributes through co-operative community effort, and to establish linkages with other regions.
- Foster co-ordination, communication and collaboration amongst significant stakeholders in regions, including all levels of government.
- Recognise and promote the importance of regionally focused research and the links with national research programs.

Production and Marketing

Cultivate and develop a customer driven culture. This involves the processing and marketing of commodities, products and services as specified by domestic and international customers, while maintaining a sustainable return on resources.

A customer driven culture is considered essential in establishing a thriving rural Australia. Such a focus not only meets the expectations of the customer, it also ensures quality and a high standard of service.

The change towards a customer driven culture involves moving away from the production of undifferentiated bulk commodities towards marketing quality products which emphasise Australia's most desirable attributes.

Producers benefit from developing closer ties with their market, increasing both their motivation to improve efficiencies of production, and returns. Additional benefits derived from a customer driven culture include a commitment to product development, production sustainability, risk management, and the development of innovative production and marketing techniques bench marked to world best practice.

The key strategies aimed at improving Australian competitiveness includes:

- Commitment to marketing systems that communicate customer requirements back through the value chain to the producer, including an understanding and appreciation of cultural difference.
- Seek opportunities in international markets as the resolutions of the Uruguay Round of GATT are introduced.
- Encourage industries to benchmark themselves, and adopt, 'world's best practice' to maintain domestic and international competitiveness.
- Promote an ethos and acceptance of change within industries and organisations to engender confidence, self esteem, and the maximisation of marketing opportunities.
- Develop policies to promote efficient transport, handling, marketing of products, and a competitive labour market to optimise returns to rural Australia.
- Support efficient technology transfer to ensure effective commercialisation of research and development.
- Encourage commitment to production sustainability and product development.
- Facilitate the adoption of risk management practices.

Resources and Infrastructure

Facilitate the planned development and management of Australia's rural resources and infrastructure for the prosperity of current and future generations.

Australia's abundant physical resources provide an international advantage that benefits all Australians. Fundamental changes to practices that are not ecologically sustainable are required to ensure these benefits flow to future generations. Commitment from all stakeholders to careful and planned management is essential.

The current status of resources needs to be documented, the benefits of multiple use explored, and best management practices defined to provide the tools for future resource development and management.

We recognise the strengths of social programs such as Landcare in changing the culture of land management, and ensuring that options for future use are retained.

In a country as large as Australia infrastructure often limits development. A planned approach focussed on the long term benefits for Australia will enable infrastructure provision to be the pathway for development, rather than an end in itself.

A transparent, integrated and collaborative decision making process which recognises all stakeholders should be undertaken in the early stage of resource development proposals. Once development is underway, security of access to resources should be guaranteed, conditional on adherence to codes of practice.

Key strategies to ensure improved development and management of resources and infrastructure are:

- Facilitate an integrated research approach to define resources, establish best practices, and ensure optimal provision of infrastructure.
- Encourage the participation of all stakeholders in the planning and development of regional resources.
- Emphasise the long term benefits for Australia of effective regional planning.
- Encourage ecologically sustainable use of resources while providing security of access.
- Utilise community based programs such as Landcare to facilitate cultural changes in resource management.

Building Bridges

Encourage and establish recognition, understanding and linkages between rural and urban communities, industries, government and other nations.

For too long the tyranny of distance has been allowed to hinder the development of national unity, enforcing entrenched parochial views about each other and our overseas customers.

Australia derives considerable wealth from the rural sector. It is important that rural Australians be able to access urban and international markets, and equally for those markets to access rural areas. Equity of facilities and services will ensure access, and encourage further development of wealth.

The long term prosperity of Australia is dependant upon establishing linkages throughout Australia, and between Australia and other nations. The primary goal is a national focus, national pride, and the development of strong and positive attitudes about our ability to provide a vibrant and prosperous social and economic society.

The key strategies to achieve the objective are to:

- Foster a sense of unity and the need for a focused national approach to enable Australia to prosper and develop national pride.
- Facilitate dialogue between rural and urban Australia, stressing the need for the provision of up-to-date communication, information and technology transfer systems.
- Promote a strong and positive image of rural Australia's integral role in the Australian economy and Australia's future development, both domestically and internationally.
- Inspire knowledge and understanding about rural Australia, and facilitate its inclusion into core education curricula.
- Utilise the ARLP network to encourage the concept of collaborative and vertically integrated partnerships between rural, urban and international business communities, and to ensure a more effective transfer of business knowledge.
- Identify common ground with urban Australia on issues such as Landcare, oceans and pollution; and lead debate on topics such as water resources, soil degradation and animal welfare.

Moving On

This vision distils five key areas which we believe underpin rural Australia. Evolution is a fundamental truth for people who work with resources. We expect this vision will also evolve as future courses contribute to the dynamic debate on where rural Australia is positioned in the future prosperity of this Nation.

People in regional areas must be empowered to both influence and make decisions affecting resources, infrastructure, production and marketing. They share current reality, and through effective community networks are well placed to manage change. They have the capacity to do so.

As we look to the future we also need to be mindful of major global initiatives and their relevance to us. For instance the Rio de Janeiro 'Biodiversity Conference' highlighted the harmony of peace, development and environmental protection as being interdependent and indivisible. The question is – are we adequately addressing issues such as this?



Course Participants

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Vision without action is just a dream

Action without vision is just activity

Vision and action together can change the world

Joel Barker
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