



Strong Upper Spencer Gulf Presence at National Summit

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Representatives from the Whyalla, Port Pirie and Port Augusta Councils have been continuing to push for change to Government policy, with the cities strongly represented at a national summit hosted by the Regional Australia Institute in Canberra.

Over 250 delegates participated in the inaugural "Regions Rising" summit, which included presentations from the Deputy Prime Minister, the Hon. Michael McCormack, Minister for Regions and Decentralisation the Hon. Bridget McKenzie, Shadow Regional Development Minister, Stephen Jones and Shadow Infrastructure Minister, Anthony Albanese.

The forum was also supported by industry experts and academics including Peter Strong from the Council of Small Business, Kate Carnell - Small Business Ombudsman, economist Dr Nicholas Gruen, John Salerian from the Productivity Commission, Gabrielle Chan – journalist and author of *Rusted Off*, Dr Denis Naphine - Chair of the Expert Panel on Rural Education and Mark Diamond from the National Rural Health Alliance.

The forum tackled a range of issues facing Regional Australia including the lack of skilled workforce in both the private sector and public service roles such as health and medical professionals; disparity in higher education rates; disconnect between central policy makers and the regional communities their decisions impact on and the need for a more tailored approach to improving liveability and amenity of regional centres.

Port Augusta Mayor Brett Benbow and Whyalla Mayor Clare McLaughlin explained that the forum really highlighted that the Upper Spencer Gulf is already tackling some of these issues head on.

"We are on the cusp of an amazing economic and social transition for our region, but we are not over the line yet and we cannot do it alone. "

"It will take a strong partnership across all levels of government and a strong voice for our region in the next parliament."

Spencer Gulf Cities Chair, Port Pirie Mayor Leon Stephens said the summit really highlighted the myths that are widely perpetuated in the capital cities, including that there are 'no jobs in the country'.

"As Shadow Minister for Regions, Stephen Jones pointed out, regional Australia doesn't have a jobs crisis, we actually have a skills crisis."

Mayor Stephens said one of the most exciting initiatives coming out of the summit's workshop sessions was the concept of a national population target of 50% of people to live outside the capital cities.

"It would force Governments to be pro-active about growing our regions and to have the conversation about what this would look like, which areas are defined as regional and importantly, how to achieve this target."

“As Bridget McKenzie, the Minister for Regional Development said at the forum – why should it be that 80% of Australia’s population lives in the biggest four capital cities?”

“Having a regional population target would completely reframe every policy and government decision about regions – and that is a good thing”, said Mayor Stephens.

The national summit followed the release of the Spencer Gulf Cities federal election strategy, which calls for:

1. A skilled migration and decentralisation programme tailored to meet the specific needs of the Upper Spencer Gulf.
2. Investment into strategic port, rail, air and road infrastructure to secure the long term economic transition of the Upper Spencer Gulf
3. Additional Commonwealth supported university places and operational funding for the Upper Spencer Gulf Regional Study Hub to enable students to stay, study and work locally.
4. A strong, credible and evidence-based national energy policy to provide stability and certainty for investment in the Upper Spencer Gulf.
5. Coordinated and collaborative investment into civic initiatives in Port Augusta, Whyalla and Port Pirie to foster well-planned city growth and liveability.

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Photo: (L to R) Port Pirie Deputy Mayor Alan Zubrinich, Whyalla Council CEO Chris Cowley, Whyalla Mayor Clare McLaughlin, Port Pirie Mayor Leon Stephens, Port Augusta Mayor Brett Benbow and Regional Australia Institute co-CEO Dr Kim Houghton at the ‘Regions Rising’ National Summit in Canberra

