REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Strategic Priorities 2026-28

Regional Development South Australia – who we are

Regional Development South Australia (RDSA) advocates for and advances regional priorities, supports economic development, and strengthens connections across government, industry, and community.

Funded by all three levels of government, the seven regional RDAs act as intelligence brokers, cross-sector conveners, and facilitators of private-sector investment — helping government understand emerging pressures, aligning planning with housing, industry, and economic development priorities, identifying co-investment opportunities, and supporting project readiness and delivery.

Funded by the Australian Government, RDA Adelaide plays a strategic support role to RDSA and the RDA network, with its work aligned to RDSA's highest priorities and the RDA National Charter.

Our purpose

RDSA unites the eight RDAs in South Australia, providing a coordinated, evidence-driven voice to advance sustainable growth and prosperity in regional communities.

Our vision for regional South Australia

South Australia's regions are the backbone of a diverse and competitive state economy. They are home to thriving population centres that drive sustainable economic growth and support vibrant and resilient communities.

Target outcomes

Released in July 2025, the **RDSA Regional Priorities Statement: Strong Regions, Smart Growth** (RPS) (https://www.regionaldevelopmentsa.com.au/resources/regional-priorities-statement-2025) reflects the collective view of the RDA network about what regional SA needs to thrive — and what role our network should play in making that happen.

The RPS is built around three target outcome areas:

Accelerate Our Advantages

- Pursue opportunities for value-adding and greater economic complexity in regional industries.
- Grow the capability of regional businesses to participate in major projects, new and emerging industries, and export markets.
- Ensure that regional SA benefits from the economic transitions underway in energy, defence, critical minerals, and agriculture.

Power Our Potential with People

- Build the population, workforce, and service capacity that regional communities need to grow and remain viable.
- Ensure housing, health, education, and social infrastructure keep pace with the demands of growing and transitioning regional economies.

Make It Matter

- Foster effective government-region partnerships and improve data and intelligence sharing.
- Ensure that regional perspectives genuinely inform government decisions — at every level — and that investment in regions is driven by evidence of long-term economic and community returns.

This document sets out RDSA's top strategic priorities and the approach we are taking to achieve them.

Aligned with the RPS aspirations, RDSA has identified three specific strategic priorities for 2026–28. Each priority directly connects to decisions that span multiple government portfolios. None of them can be advanced by RDSA alone. All of them require a genuinely collaborative relationship with all levels of government to achieve meaningful outcomes for regional communities.

RDSA's strategic priorities for 2026-28 provide specific focus for resource allocation for the next two years. The priorities are ordered by importance and will inform RDSA's advocacy, engagement, and analytical work (with support from RDA Adelaide).


Credit: South Australian Tourism Commission | Destination Riverland

Priority 1 — Water

Why this priority:

The challenge is not simply water shortage or quality. Regional SA needs stronger information flow and a formal voice in water planning and investment decisions. Better two-way sharing of intelligence, including SA Water's network capacity and hydrological data, would give investors, developers, councils, and RDAs greater certainty to plan and invest.

There is also an opportunity to explore financing models that share risk fairly and recognise the long-term economic returns of regional water investment — including PPP, risk-sharing, and interstate utility models.

Challenges vary markedly across regions — from remote communities reliant on trucked-in water, to industrial demand and major projects, to environmental and climate pressures, to supply and infrastructure to support housing growth. The common thread is the need for a whole-of-system approach covering all water types.

Our intent is for RDSA (and the RDA network) to be a trusted regional voice and partner, providing and receiving information to and from SA Water (or its successor) and the government; supporting informed investment decisions and infrastructure planning at a systemic level.

GOAL:

RDSA will deliver a coordinated, evidence-based regional water advocacy platform that brings together whole-of-system intelligence to help inform government and utility planning across all water types (potable, recycled, stormwater, groundwater, wastewater, and industrial and primary industry water). This will support constructive engagement on regional SA's water challenges and opportunities, resulting in:

- A formal, acknowledged mechanism for the RDA network to contribute regional intelligence, needs, and potential solutions into SA Government and SA Water network planning, investment, and broader policy processes
- A structured information-sharing process that provides the RDA network with relevant demand, supply, and network capacity information from SA Water, where appropriate, to support better regional planning and project delivery
- Government consideration of financing, risk-sharing, or PPP models for priority regional water infrastructure projects, informed by the long-term economic and community return on regional investment

Priority 2 — Infrastructure

Why this priority:

Infrastructure investment decisions are typically guided by population projections. Economic contribution and forecast growth potential are equally important considerations, and the RDA network can provide the evidence base to support them.

RDSA has identified two distinct, but linked, advocacy arguments:

Outer regional SA

Investment decisions should be informed by economic contribution and the forecast investment pipeline, not population alone.

Peri-urban SA (Greater Adelaide growth areas)

Population growth IS the right driver. The key is sequencing: employment land and enabling infrastructure must come before residential growth. Upholding government policy requirements around this is critical.

Both arguments require RDSA to be present at the right government tables, with the right evidence, supporting well-informed decisions for the right geography. Housing-enabling infrastructure is explicitly within scope.

GOAL:

RDSA will lay the foundation for a sustained, evidence-based engagement program to support State and Federal Government decisions on enabling infrastructure investment across regional South Australia — with two distinct but complementary policy considerations:

- That outer regional infrastructure investment should be informed by economic contribution and forecast investment, alongside population considerations; and
- That in high-growth peri-urban regional areas, coordinated planning sequences employment land and enabling infrastructure ahead of residential development.

This foundation will include:

- A clear articulation of both policy considerations and where each applies
- A practical assessment of RDSA's current evidence base and an agreed plan to strengthen it

Priority 3 — Business Capacity & Economic Diversification

Why this priority:

Synthesising the RDA network's regional economic intelligence into a shared statewide picture, supported by coordinated planning with government, can help local businesses capture opportunities from regional South Australia's major project pipeline—estimated at $115 billion in June 2026—and drive supplier development and economic diversification.

GOAL:

RDSA will lay the groundwork for a Regional Economic Development Strategy Framework for SA — assembling a shared evidence base that describes what is happening in each SA regional economy, where growth opportunities lie, and how major planned projects can support local supplier development, business capability, and broader economic benefit.

This will be achieved through:

- Accessing and synthesising existing RDA intelligence and publicly available economic data into a format that can inform government and regional decision-making
- Developing an engagement program for RDSA to progress this work with government and regional partners
- Positioning this work within broader high-level engagement with the SA Government, with the aim of being recognised as an informed, credible partner on regional economic development.

SA GOVERNMENT ENGAGEMENT STRUCTURE

Alongside our three strategic priorities, we want to evolve the conversation about how our network engages with the SA Government. We want to deepen that relationship and ensure our network is contributing at the right tables, at the right time.

Our network has the intelligence, credibility, and reach to be a genuine partner to government — and we are committed to building that engagement in a structured, proactive way. We have clear priorities, a shared direction, and the foundations being built to advocate with one coordinated voice.

GOAL:

Building on our strong relationship with the SA Government, RDSA seeks to work in partnership to establish a formal, proactive approach to strategic engagement across portfolios. Our goal is to bring a coordinated regional voice and shared intelligence to discussions that advance our three strategic priorities and deliver lasting benefits for regional South Australia.

CONNECT WITH US

RDSA invites stakeholders to engage with us on these priorities and to work together on practical, evidence-based actions that strengthen regional communities and support South Australia's long-term growth.

To contact us and find out more:
regionaldevelopmentsa.com.au

Or reach out to:

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