

SEGRA 2026

Event Summary for Lithgow City Council

National Regional & Economic Development Summit | Lithgow, NSW

24-26 March 2026

Theme: 'A Future Made in Regional Australia'

1. Event overview

SEGRA 2026, the SEGRA Foundation's 29th National Regional & Economic Development Summit, was held in Lithgow across 24-26 March 2026.

SEGRA, LEEP and the Central West Joint Organisation held a 'New Horizons' workshop on Tuesday 24th March, facilitated by Wendy Agar (Engaged Outcomes, QLD). The workshop featured short presentations from other communities in QLD and NSW who had been through renewable energy transition. The attendees at the New Horizon workshop included Councillors, General Managers, energy proponents and community advocates. A Community Benefit Framework / Principles for the Central NSW JO members was drafted as a result of the workshop.

On the afternoon of Tuesday 24th March, prior to SEGRA officially commencing we worked with locals to provide two tours prior to the Welcome Drinks held at Blast Furnance. The event then progressed over two days at multiple venues; Union Theatre, Charles Hoskin Centre, Workies Club and Foundations Portland.

The Summit convened regional 'thinkers, tinkerers, doers and improvers' from across Australia to share practical approaches to regional transition, renewal and inclusive growth, with a strong place-based focus on Lithgow's own structural transition and future industries.

Lithgow City Council supported SEGRA 2026 as an event partner, helping to showcase the Lithgow Local Government Area, connect delegates to local leaders and projects, and position Lithgow as a national case study in regional transition and a 'Future Made in Regional Australia'. The event was delivered with event partners including the Lithgow Emerging Economy Plan (LEEP), Regional Development Australia (RDA) Central West, and RDA Orana.

The organising committee included: Jessica Gadd (LEEP), Jess Jennings, Ashley Bland (SEGRA Foundation Chair, NSW) and Caroline Robinson (SEGRA Foundation Director, WA).

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2. Participation snapshot

Presenters / speakers	31 presenters and workshop facilitators
Delegates/attendees	102 delegates
States represented	WA, SA, NT, QLD, NSW, VIC, ACT, TAS
Expenses distributed	Local Lithgow businesses 87% Central West 5% Outside of region 8%
<i>Please note the Foundation operates a cost recovery model for our annual event. Unfortunately, this was not achieved.</i>	

Delegate sector	Count	Examples from attendee list
Government (local/state/federal)	27	Local councils; NSW Dept of Education; Productivity Commission; Jobs and Skills Australia; NSW Parliament office
Industry / private sector	23	Energy, mining, consultancies, photography/creative services
Not-for-profit / community organisations	42	RDAs; FRRR; NRM bodies; unions; chambers; community organisations; a number of local Lithgow NFPs were in attendance
Universities / research / education providers	10	ANU; Taree, Curtin Uni; Adelaide; TAFE NSW

3. Partners and supporting organisations

Event partners: Lithgow City Council, Lithgow Emerging Economy Plan, Regional Development Australia Central West, and Regional Development Australia Orana.

Additional collaborating organisations represented in event delivery and/or program roles: Central NSW Joint Organisation, The van Diemen Project, Engaged Outcomes Consulting, AEC Group, Sunny Corner Wind Farm, and 150Square.

4. Program and highlighted topics covered

The Summit combined keynote presentations, A Big Ideas for Rural Australia panel, workshops and SEG TALKS. Across the program, speakers returned to a consistent set of themes: implementation (not just strategy), cross-government coordination, local capability and leadership, and the importance of place-based approaches that link economic outcomes with community wellbeing.

- **Lithgow the past present and future:** keynotes highlighting industrial past, economic challenges and opportunities, as well as local stories

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- **State of the Regions:** A presentation from AEC on the current economic and community state of regional Australia
- **The importance of storytelling:** An interactive presentation about the importance of young people in telling their stories about their rural communities and why this is of value in positioning the regions in national conversations
- **Economic development and diversification:** building local capability and supply chains; leveraging underused assets and infrastructure; improving productivity; and strengthening liveability as a competitive advantage.
- **Post-mining transition and land use:** planning for mine closure and post-mining land uses at a regional (not just site) scale; and practical tools to support post mine planning and decision-making.
- **Artificial intelligence in regions:** low-cost, accessible AI tools as a capability shift for regional organisations and businesses emphasising the need for strategy, AI policy guardrails and internal skills to realise value.
- **Community governed organisations:** the role of community-led models, education foundations, volunteering, and 'country capital' in sustaining services and liveability.
- **Arts, culture and place activation:** arts and culture positioned as 'load-bearing' infrastructure that strengthens cohesion, leadership and liveability in #RRR Australia.
- **Energy transition and major projects:** capturing lasting benefits through early planning, local procurement, skills strategies, benefit-sharing, trust and transparent governance.
- **Workforce attraction and retention:** whole-of-family settlement supports, community connection and belonging as critical enablers of long-term workforce stability.
- **Health and liveability:** structural determinants (housing, transport, food systems, insurance) shaping outcomes for regional communities.

5. Lithgow showcase and place-based learning

Lithgow's venues and local program elements were central to the delegate experience and were very well received.

- **Welcome event:** Welcome drinks at the Blast Furnace site, providing an iconic local setting for the Welcome to Country and Mayor Welcome.
- **Local tours (24 March):** First Nations-led cultural experience; heritage and nature tour including the Lithgow Small Arms Factory, Hassans Wall Lookout and the Glow Worm Tunnel.
- **Networking dinner:** Hosted at The Foundations in Portland with the owners of the site and the Brewery owners, highlighting community transformation in action; Rich Evans also provided a tour of the site and its history, potential

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uses/investment, there was a Q and A with a Brewer and the Lithgow SHS did a drone show.

- **Big Ideas for Rural Australia Panel:** A panel was recorded for the ABC Big Ideas Podcast for distribution in 2026.

6. Feedback

Feedback received via direct emails and social posts was positive, with delegates highlighting the calibre of speakers, the quality of conversations, and the value of the Lithgow setting. All delegates received a copy of attendee contact details as well as presentations.

- Commissioner Catherine de Fontenay (Productivity Commission, Canberra): "It was a great opportunity and I enjoyed all the conversations and workshops."
- Adam Mostogl (The Shift Lab / The van Diemen Project, TAS): "People who arrived unsure what to expect... left feeling so empowered, encouraged and connected... a high-value conference."
- Dr Keith McNaught (Curtin Medical School, WA): "A genuinely energising experience... outstanding presentations... generous conversations... ready to move from ideas to implementation."
- Michael Campbell (Lucid Economics, VIC): "Thanks for another great SEGRA! I thought it was a great conference!"
- Carolin Buncle (Christmas Island, WA): "Thank you for putting together such a well-organised and genuinely valuable event. Lithgow was a great choice of location!"
- The Next Economy (VIC): Lithgow "brought a grounded quality to the conversations... with the challenges and opportunities of regional transition very much present in the room."

7. Keynotes, presenters and facilitators

Keynotes: Commissioner Catherine de Fontenay (Productivity Commission); Professor Andrew Beer (Adelaide University/LEEP); Bjorn Jarvis (Jobs and Skills Australia); Professor Jacki Schirmer (University of Canberra); Jonathan Atkins (ABC Heywire); Kate Haycock (AEC Group); Max Osborne (Thales); David Wilson (Energy Australia).

Workshops: Julian Canny (Euphorium); Michael Campbell (Lucid Economics); Cathy Treasure and Linda Tillman (Australian Centre for Regional Events); Saideh Kent and Jacqui Bell (The Next Economy); Simon Vaughan and Michelle Macaskill (Huber Social); Matt Pfahlert (Australian Centre for Rural Entrepreneurship).

SEGTALKS speakers (selected through a competitive EOI process): Ian Goodwin-Smith (Flinders University); Ben Hughes (Hughes et al); Bree Katsamangos (Mission Australia); Kate Dunn (Community Connector Program); Claudia Hodge (Community

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Power Agency); Jacqui Bell (The Next Economy); Jonathan Pavetto (QWool); Dr Keith McNaught (Curtin Medical School); Oumi Karenga-Hewitt (Our Corner HQ); Tiffany Leahy (Regional AI Co.); Professor Tom Measham (CRC TiME); Tony Matchett (Hope Vale Foundation); Wendy Mason (Country Education Foundation of Australia); Adam Mostogl (The Shift Lab); Julian Canny (Euphorium).

8. Next Steps

- LEEP has received all photos and videos (marketing collateral) from the event.
- The SEGRA Foundation will convene an online meeting with LEEP, Central West JO, RDA Central West and Orana to discuss the Community Benefit Framework that came from the New Horizons session.
- We will also discuss how we can support LEEP in state and national policy discussions.
- We are determining future ways to support Lithgow.
- LEEP can promote the two special announcements made at the event – EDA and SEGRA regional economies webinar series; ACRE Community Asset Ownership support and \$50K grant.

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