



31 January 2023

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Founding Members

The Australian Government
The Sidney Myer Fund

Patron in Chief

His Excellency General the Honourable
David Hurley AC DSC (Retd)
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Mr Bill Kelty AC

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Dear Treasury,

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the *Measuring What Matters* consultation.

The Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal - FRRR - (phonetically: F-triple-R) - is the only national foundation specifically focused on ensuring the social and economic wellbeing of remote, rural and regional communities. Established in 2000 with the Australian Government and The Sidney Myer Fund as members, FRRR connects common purposes and funding from government, business and philanthropy with the genuine local needs of rural people and places. FRRR provides funding and capacity building support at the hyper-local level; aligning funding, big and small, to community-led solutions that build resilience and long-term viability and vitality of smaller remote, rural, and regional communities across Australia. Since FRRR's establishment in 2000, FRRR has delivered in excess of \$155 million to more than 13,000 local projects.

FRRR's vision is for a vibrant, resilient and revitalised remote, rural and regional Australia, something that can only be achieved with a continued focus on community wellbeing and sustainability.

FRRR supports the concept of a Wellbeing Framework and welcomes the development of indicators as a mechanism to help move away from purely economic indicators toward a broader assessment of wellbeing, equality and progress in Australia.

In this submission, FRRR would like to make four brief comments:

1. An Australian Wellbeing Framework should focus primarily on understanding Australian (domestic) wellbeing so that it can influence policy within Australia, with international comparison a subordinate consideration.

FRRR agrees with the contention contained within Budget Paper No. 4 (2022), that utilising OECD frameworks provides a range of benefits, however welcomes the development of indicators that inform a deepened understanding of the Australian context. There is a risk that relying heavily on the OECD framework as the basis for developing a wellbeing budget lends itself to a framework that is predicated on international comparison rather than being primarily focused on Australia's unique context and what is important to our sense of wellbeing. FRRR welcomes the development of a framework that allows for international comparison, but is specifically responsive to the needs and context of Australia and Australians.



2. An Australian Wellbeing Framework should account for the diverse experiences of remote, rural and regional communities and include targeted measures to identify and highlight inequities between urban and rural populations.

As Budget Paper 4 (2022) acknowledges, single national figures often hide location-specific or demographic inequities. FRRR contends that for populations outside urban areas understanding the intersection between national indicators and the remote, rural and regional context in which they are measured is critical to establishing an accurate picture of wellbeing for non-urban Australian communities.

While we appreciate that there is value in a macro aggregated view of the overall wellbeing of the nation, this framework also represents an opportunity to highlight the differences between particular cohorts – especially the distinctions between urban and non-urban experiences. In FRRR’s experience two factors in particular - low density of population and the distance of travel required to access services - are unique barriers to the remote, rural and regional experience. These factors can create and amplify inequity if not properly understood and factored into policy development. A Wellbeing Framework that is able to differentiate between the experiences of remote, rural and regional communities (and subsets thereof) and the majority of Australians living in urban areas could provide significant insight into the inequitable circumstances of these communities and inform targeted policy responses to build a fairer and more just Australia.

Australia’s large geographical footprint and relatively small population mean remote, rural and regional communities face particular challenges accessing services, equal opportunities in work and education, and maintaining connectivity. Statistics such as the fact that 42,000 Australian’s live more than an hour’s drive from any primary healthcare services¹ or that rural Australians are significantly more likely to have experienced flooding or fires but are also more likely to state that there are too little mental health services after disasters² help to illustrate this. Another example can be found in FRRR’s Heartbeat of Rural Australia study, where only three in ten organisations rated their internet access as extremely reliable³. These kinds of issues are unlikely to be captured unless they are considered and assessed in a manner that both incorporates the feedback of communities across Australia, and enables geographically specific data collection and analysis.

3. Indicators that could assist in understanding wellbeing across remote, rural and regional Australia

FRRR recognises it will be important to measure a range of indicators supporting a systems-level understanding of wellbeing in Australia. In seeking to support the ongoing vibrancy, resilience and sustainability of remote, rural and regional (RRR) communities in Australia, FRRR utilises five principles to guide our work:

¹ Equitable Patient Access to Primary Healthcare in Australia (2020); [RN081_Equitable_Health_Research_Report_P4_Digital.725b.pdf \(flyingdoctor.org.au\)](#)

² Summary of results from national study of the impact of climate-fuelled disasters on the mental health of Australians (2023); [Mental-health-survey-results_IL_230112_V13.pdf \(climatecouncil.org.au\)](#)

³ The Heartbeat of Rural Australia Research Study (2021) www.frrr.org.au/heartbeat



1. RRR communities should have self-determination and agency;
2. RRR communities deserve equitable access to services;
3. Social connection is vital to the wellbeing of RRR people and communities;
4. Local community infrastructure forms an important element of the resilience of RRR communities; and
5. It is essential to promote healthy natural environments and to minimise the impacts of climate change for RRR communities.

FRRR encourages Treasury to consider indicators that enable an assessment of:

- The levels of self-determination or agency in decisions that impact local communities;
- The ease of access to, and quality of, services such as those addressing and supporting physical and mental health, all levels of education, and welfare supports;
- Social connection with family and friends, but also vitally important is connection with their community and local grassroots organisations, which fill many of the critical service gaps in RRR communities;
- Access to infrastructure that facilitates social connections (including public gathering spaces such as town halls, digital connectivity, and the arts); and
- State of the natural environment, the presence of local food systems, and capacity to act on a changing climate.

4. An Australian Wellbeing Framework could be an excellent vehicle for building standards around indicators and data collection allowing for more comparability of data.

The development of an Australian Wellbeing Framework could allow for improved data integrity across a range of actors. Establishing uniformity around indicators of wellbeing would allow greater sharing of local, regional, state or sector-based data that could support and inform a national wellbeing framework. All levels of Government, in addition to organisations such as FRRR, academic institutions, and business collect significant data that could be of value to an overall understanding of wellbeing in Australia. Utilising a national framework could allow other agencies and organisations to adopt and adapt from a central source, in essence providing a rich source of data that can provide nuanced information in response to complex contexts, and could provide greater recognition of the interdependence of indicators and the interventions employed to make progress.

FRRR is supportive of the development of a Wellbeing Framework and indicators that will inform a greater understanding of the wellbeing of Australia(ns). Should you require additional detail regarding our submission we would welcome the opportunity for further discussion, please contact us on 03 5430 2399 or email ceo@frrr.org.au.

Yours sincerely,

Sarah Matthee
Acting Chief Executive Officer