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Media release

New leadership team for RDA in the Illawarra

RDA Illawarra has today announced its Chair Eddy De Gabriele and CEO Debra Murphy are stepping down from their roles as the organisation transitions to expanded boundaries later this year. Mr De Gabriele retired as Chair on 31 December 2023. Ms Murphy's last official day will be January 31.

The changes follow the finalisation of a review of Regional Development Australia (RDA) boundaries conducted by the Minister for Regional Development, Local Government and Territories, which will see the Illawarra and Shoalhaven (including Jervis Bay) incorporated into one region. The changes will take effect from 31 March 2024.

Mark McKenzie was appointed Chair of the RDA Illawarra on 1 January 2024. Mr McKenzie will continue the work of the existing RDA Illawarra and lead the transition of the existing organisation to RDA Illawarra Shoalhaven over the next two months.

Mr De Gabriele's retirement comes after two decades as RDA Illawarra Chair during which time the organisation has worked with key stakeholders to deliver successful infrastructure project funding submissions.

These include the Kiama Council Events & Exhibition Centre, the Southern Gateway Visitors Centre, Historic Aircraft Restoration Centre and WIN Convention Centre. The Leadership Illawarra Program was also rolled out during Mr De Gabriele's tenure. Delivered in partnership with The Illawarra Connection and Sydney Business School UoW, more than 100 of the region's future leaders have participated in this program since its inception in 2012.

"As Chair of RDA-Illawarra since 2003, I have had the great pleasure of serving under seven Prime Ministers and eight NSW State Premiers, but I particularly enjoyed my personal interactions and the direct support I received from both Simon Crean MP and our current Prime Minister, Anthony Albanese, when they each served as Minister for Regional Development," Mr De Gabriele said.

"It was truly an exciting and vibrant time with a strong focus on regional Australia from them both."

“I would also like to thank Debra Murphy who, as CEO, contributed significantly to the organisation's growth and success. Under Deb's leadership, RDA Illawarra has achieved notable milestones, fostering economic development, promoting innovation, and strengthening community partnerships across the Illawarra.

“She has played a pivotal role in strengthening the now highly sought after Leadership Illawarra Program and championed the Illawarra Shoalhaven City Deal/Partnership – an initiative which has complemented the work of other key stakeholders to help attract more than \$600 million in funding and over 8,000 jobs to our region since 2020.”

Ms Murphy is leaving RDA Illawarra after more than seven years in the leadership role.

“I have loved being a part of RDA Illawarra for the last 7.5 years and it was after much consideration that I came to the decision that now is the right time,” she said.

“It has been an honour and a privilege to serve the region and put its interests first. Our region has more than \$30 billion in major projects in the pipeline in the next 18 years, testament to the value the project owners see in expanding and establishing their projects here when they could easily consider other regions.

“I'd like to thank the RDA Illawarra Board and outgoing Chair Eddy De Gabriele for their support and guidance over the years along with the various industry stakeholders, project owners, Councils, peak bodies and State and Federal politicians.”

Incoming Chair Mr McKenzie thanked the outgoing leadership team for their exemplary service and said he is keen to continue the pivotal work of the RDA Illawarra under the umbrella of the Federal Government's recent revision of the national RDA Charter.

“It is a privilege to be appointed as the new Chair of RDA Illawarra Shoalhaven and to build on the exemplary work advanced by former Chair Eddy De Gabriele over the past 20 years,” he said.

“Our central challenge is to work collaboratively with all stakeholders to leverage the strategic advantage of our region for the benefit of all who choose to live and work in the Illawarra Shoalhaven. Key elements of this advantage include our proximity to Australia's largest capital city, our international port, our heavy manufacturing base, our Defence facilities, our leading academic/research institutions, and the beauty of our natural environment.”

“My immediate priority will be to install a new Board and CEO for the broader region as soon as possible, with a specific focus on ensuring that the priorities of the Shoalhaven are given appropriate weight in a revision of the RDA's Strategic Plan for the Illawarra Shoalhaven Region. This will include discussions with the Board and CEO of RDA Far South Coast to ensure that the good work done by that organisation to date, is continued.”

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