

Tasmanian Inclusive Economies Project: Indigenous and other Tasmanians working together

Proposal for PESRAC, July 2020

RegionxLink, Centre for Social Impact, Swinburne University of Technology, Burnie, Tasmania

Strategic Growth – A Regional Social Economy Lens

Making the economy work for all Tasmanians requires stepping out of a traditional economics frame and adopting a social economy lens. A *social economy lens* recognises the role of people and communities in economic and social value creation and distribution. A *regional social economy lens* further contextualises this within the spatial, social, and cultural dynamics of regional communities.

Creating Inclusive Regional Economies

Innovation is a key driver of economic growth. Regions innovate when people and organisations ‘play to their strengths’: by identifying and leveraging their unique place-based strengths to generate new forms of value. Yet many of the strengths of Tasmania’s rural regions are latent and unrecognised.

A regional social economy lens can reveal this hidden potential, and empower innovation through inclusion. Tasmania’s economic potential is largely invisible because it doesn’t look like traditional business entrepreneurship. It often has a deep community base and aims to create both social and economic value.

In the post-COVID environment, our state can no longer afford to ignore the latent potential in our regional communities. We need an inclusive economy approach that empowers entrepreneurs and innovators from diverse backgrounds to create value and positive change in Tasmania that supports Tasmanians.

The Centre for Social Impact

The Centre for Social Impact at Swinburne University of Technology is the largest social economy research centre in the world. We have an international reputation for our work on inclusive economies, regional development, and social innovation. The Centre for Social Impact has national reach with nodes in Victoria, NSW, and Western Australia. **In late 2019, the Centre for Social Impact committed to invest in establishing the RegionxLink program office in North West Tasmania.**

The RegionxLink program is a distinctive approach to linking a world-class technology university with a rural region to create a locally embedded, globally connected regional development program. Swinburne University of Technology is a leader in creating, designing and implementing Industry 4.0 through partnership agreements for Australian test labs (including a MoU with UTAS). RegionxLink is co-located with the Cradle Coast Authority and staffed by internationally recognised experts in rural regional innovation and Indigenous regional development.

Examples and Impacts

The Centre for Social impact is the architect of the national Telstra Digital Inclusion Index, the Victorian government’s social enterprise strategy, and the world-first Social Startup Studio and Social Enterprise Impact Lab (SEIL), among others. We are evaluation partners for major initiatives such as the Federal DSS’s Be Connected Program, and we sit on influential national policy bodies (e.g. Voice to Parliament National Co-Design Group; Council for Australia Latin America Relations). In Tasmania, we have demonstrated how Indigenous leadership can catalyse a whole-of-government strategy for Aboriginal Affairs through ‘Reset the Relationship’. Our recent work on women’s entrepreneurship (with Switch Tasmania) and Indigenous cultural food tourism (with MONA) have provided concrete evidence of how an inclusive economy approach can create new opportunities in regional Tasmania.

Inclusive Economies – A Proposal for Tasmania

We propose a **partnership with the Tasmanian State Government** to deliver a cutting-edge approach to developing inclusive regional economies. The proposal has three components: a practical project (Regional Innovation Hubs), an evaluation partnership with PESRAC (Impacts of COVID-19 Recovery Initiatives), and a strategic policy advice role (Tasmanian Inclusive Economy Framework).

- 1) Deliver **Regional Innovation Hubs** in four regional towns, building on international best practice and established local partnerships:
 - Regional Innovation Hubs are physical spaces that bring together people and organisations across boundaries to stimulate innovation. They combine the attributes of a co-work space, a start-up incubator, a learning hub, a training and events space, and a community-building space. Regional Innovation Hubs provide a welcoming, inclusive space to work, learn, connect and exchange ideas, empowering latent local talent through curated programs (e.g. speakers, short courses, ideation sessions, business bootcamps, community coffees, hackathons, studios) and networking events delivered with local, national, and international organisations.
 - Regional Innovation Hubs were recently the topic of an extended conversation with the Federal House of Representatives Select Committee on Regional Australia and have been identified as having the potential to create multi-dimensional social, economic, environmental and cultural outcomes in regional communities, including: remote work opportunities, population attraction, digital inclusion, reduced commuting, educational engagement, business innovation, social innovation, decreased social isolation, and increased social cohesion.
 - We are currently working with local partners to establish Regional Innovation Hubs in four regional towns in North West and West Tasmania (Cradle Coast). The model leverages existing, under-utilised physical and digital infrastructure, established community partnerships and programs, and university networks to create a low-cost, high-impact model (at estimated investment of only \$150,000/ hub per year). The pilot initiative over 12-18 months will provide demonstration and evidence for impact and scalability of Regional Innovation Hubs for rural regions across Australia.
 - Regional Innovation Hubs can be structured with shared, or joint management, functions that incorporate Aboriginal Tasmanian portfolio functions. For example, the 2020 draft Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (TWWHA) Tourism Master Plan (TMP) outlines how cultural tourism hubs could operate as the statutory function for interpretation and promotion of Aboriginal Tasmanian cultural values. The Regional Innovation Hubs can act as both incubator and capacity-strengthening for Indigenous regional development. This shared space and crossover of skills and communities can fortify the tourism economies of the North West post-pandemic.
- 2) Design an impact framework and metrics to assess the **Impacts of COVID-19 Recovery Initiatives**, to enable PESRAC to track the economic and social impacts of initiatives across multiple Tasmanian communities and maximise the effectiveness of economic and social recovery investments:
 - Work with PESRAC and local and regional stakeholders across Tasmania to co-design relevant, validated process and impact metrics, drawing on the internationally recognised expertise of the Centre for Social Impact;
 - Monitor and support continuous learning and improvement across projects and communities, linking in additional resources (such as the Swinburne Social Startup Studio and best-practice social procurement frameworks) to support strong socio-economic outcomes across Tasmanian communities; and
 - Provide evidence of scope and scale of the impacts of specific initiatives to inform future investment.

3) Provide expert, globally informed strategic policy direction to the Tasmanian government for a **Tasmanian Inclusive Economies Framework:**

- Integrate evidence-based work on regional development, regional innovation, inclusive entrepreneurship, diverse economies, impact investing, social enterprise, social procurement, digital inclusion, community finance, philanthropy, Indigenous Regional Development, and Indigenous leadership into a clear policy framework for Inclusive Economies relevant to the Tasmanian context;
- Connect with other state governments' social enterprise and social procurement policies and develop international comparatives to inform the development of inclusive economy policy in Tasmania (Victorian Government wholly adopted and implemented CSI policy and research); and
- Position Tasmania to be a world leader in inclusive economy policy for rural regions.

A funding commitment to Inclusive Economies in partnership with the Centre for Social Impact's RegionxLink program in North West Tasmania would be directly re-invested in regional Tasmania, while leveraging world-class expertise to create positive social and economic impacts in regional communities post-pandemic.