



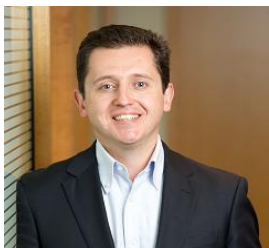
The ties that bind: why maintaining strong links between locals at home and those living away can deliver long lasting benefits to rural areas

Presentation to Rural Councils Victoria (RCV)

September 2012

# Christian Zahra has 20 years of experience working with government and business including at senior level in national and state roles

## Christian Zahra FAICD



Christian Zahra FAICD is an Executive Director of Pacific Strategy Partners. He has 20 years of experience working with government and business and has provided high-level strategic and public policy advice to some of Australia's leading corporations and peak-bodies across the agriculture, resources, energy, infrastructure, communications, health and not-for-profit sectors

### Education

- Master of Assessment & Evaluation, University of Melbourne
- Bachelor of Economics, La Trobe University

### Selected Consulting Skills

- Provides insights on government processes and public policy development
- Is a trusted advisor to governments on a range of sensitive policy issues, including forestry, energy and regional development
- Supports clients to better understand the impact of public policy shifts and how they can align their commercial strategy to government policy objectives to avoid negative impacts and take advantage of new business opportunities
- Provides significant insights into rural and regional development issues to clients with interests in regional areas

### Current Board Appointments

- Chairman of the Australian Government's \$1bn Regional Development Australia Fund Advisory Panel
- Director of the Regional Australia Institute
- Member of the Australian Government's Ministerial Advisory Council on Regional Australia
- Director of Waardi Limited – an Indigenous Economic Development Corporation in WA

### Prior work experience

- Director, Government Relations Australia Advisory – Australia's leading bipartisan government relations firm
- Manager, Government Relations and Strategy, Loy Yang Power
- Federal Member of Parliament – six years as Member for McMillan (Eastern Victoria), three of these as a Parliamentary Secretary
- CEO, Aboriginal Health and Housing Service, regional Victoria

# One of the most pressing issues for the future sustainability of rural communities is the exodus of young people

## European Parliamentary Report – 2010

### Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development

- *'One of the most pressing issues for the future sustainability of rural communities is the exodus of young people'*
- How do you halt the out-migration of young people from rural areas?
  - **'Stop educating them'**
- We seem to struggle with the tension between individual goals and aspirations, and the larger idea of ensuring a future for rural areas
  - Critically, the two are linked
- *'It is only by moving away that individuals acquire the key ingredients needed to help the rural community. Out-migration is therefore not the over-arching problem for the future of rural communities. Instead it is the small numbers who return'*

# So how do we attract a larger number of people back to the country areas they grew up in?

## Key Questions

- How do we celebrate the achievements of our young people as a way of 'keeping them connected to our rural communities' for their whole lives?
- How do we utilise their talents and capability effectively through the different stages of their life recognising that part of this will be away from the rural area they were raised in?
- What are the critical elements of living locally that will bring people 'home' and how can you involve this group of people in being a part of making that vision a reality?

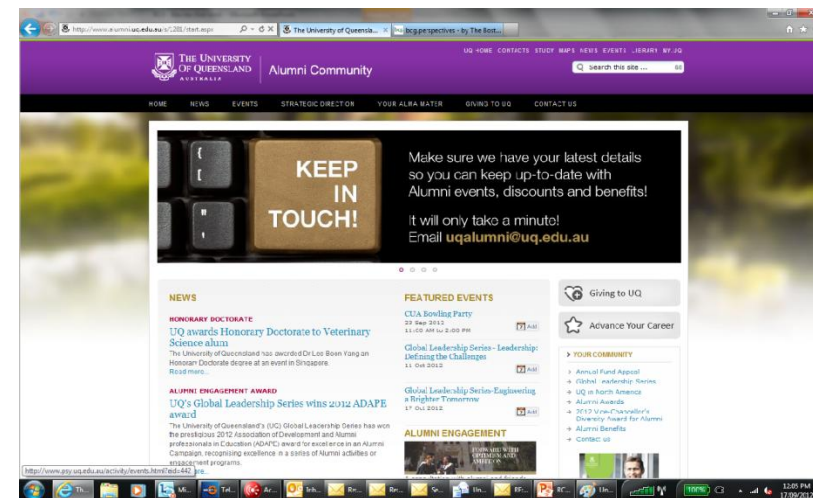
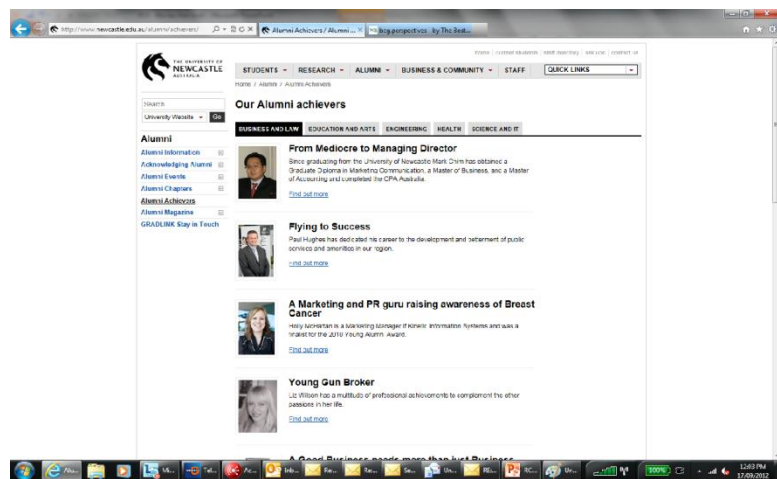
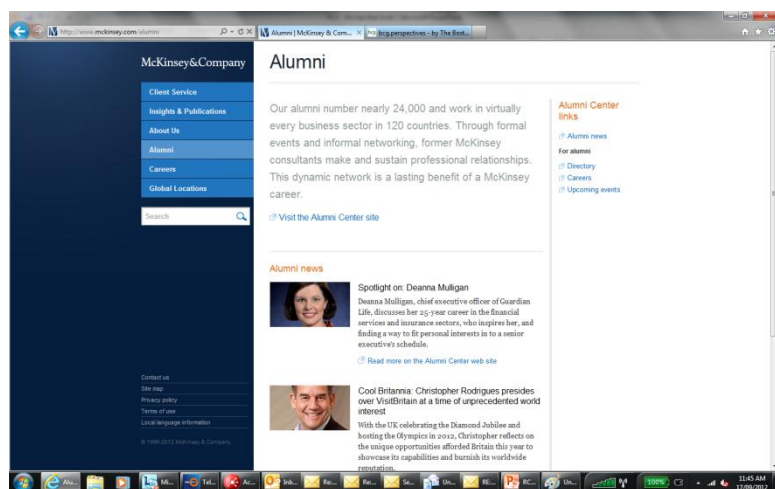
## Ideas (discussion starters)

- Keeping locals connected to where they grew up
  - Create a 'Rural Alumni' like Unis, strategy consulting firms and rural based higher education programs do
- Local events to attract people home
  - Think about school holidays
  - Involve 'rural alumni' in organising these
- Meaningful leadership roles for local living away
  - Utilise this network – Economic Development Boards, Gallery Committees
  - Promote achievements in council newspapers
- Bridging the gap between what locals away want (for them to come back) and what's there right now
  - Involve locals living away in this – make them part of the change process
  - Utilise their expertise and contacts to drive change

# Attraction and retention of young people in rural areas

Some examples of Alumni programs working in education and business.

ILLUSTRATIVE



## Ultimately, the answer lies in local ideas and action

### Good Ideas, Rapid Action

- There is a 'war for talent' in regional and rural Australia, just like that found in business
  - Advantages gained can be 'locked in' so delay can have significant costs
- The power of a good idea and local effort is much greater than government spending
- The question isn't 'how much can we get from government to do this?' It's 'how quickly can we do this ourselves?'
- The Bendigo Bank Community Bank Branch model is a powerful example of a great idea and local driven action
  - The results have been outstanding

Thank you

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