

Presidents Report 2014/15

It has been a most pleasing year for the Launceston Chamber of Commerce this past financial year. As flagged in my report last year, we completed a new strategic plan during August last year and have used that to focus our efforts in representing our member's interests. We have continued to not only support our members through networking opportunities but by being thought leaders on issues of importance and substance to our region.

New Board Members

We welcomed new Board members this year to strengthen our intellectual capacity and community reach. These Board members are John Kirwan, CEO of the Royal Flying Doctors Service and former General Manager of our THO – North and Tim Gardner, Managing Director of Stornoway, a state-wide operating organisation. They have provided further valuable insights through their networks and knowledge of their industry sectors. So I thank them for their contributions so far.

Economic Development Committee

This year, Donna Bain, our Treasurer picked up the role of Chair of this committee. Donna and her fellow committee members have focused on Education this year. This focus has led to the development of a partnership between the Chamber and Beacon Foundation which has engaged our members in providing opportunities to give back to our schools by showing the importance that business places on education and in particular how the student's educational experience translates into what they might do in their chosen vocation. It has identified issues and barriers to employers which are being further explored.

This committee, together with the Chamber Board, also continues to both challenge and consult with the University about their proposed changes to the University offerings in the North of the State. We welcome the relocation of the campus to the Inveresk site, subject to Council and State approval, and continue to encourage them to focus on the provision of quality degrees both at the University and at the AMC. Whilst the figures that we have seen indicate that by getting more people into degree and diploma courses will merely drag Tasmania up to the National average, we are mindful that not everyone sees this initiative as we do. Therefore we continue to engage at the highest levels within the University to ensure that the vision results in action to put our State, and in particular our region, into the 21st century regarding the educational offerings available to our children and our businesses.

The Chamber also partnered with Ausindustry and other stakeholders to map the existing capacity and capability of some of our manufacturers in the North. Whilst this project has only issued a draft report, the Chamber hosted an event in late August to provide feedback to those who participated in the mapping exercise and key stakeholders in the North. This financial year will see increased focus on the findings and looking at how best to assist advanced manufacturing in this region.

The Economic Development Committee has also reviewed and provided feedback to NTD in relation to its Northern Regional Futures Plan and engaged to potentially review the future structure and engagement of this organisation.

The Chamber also facilitated a number of meetings and courses around trade opportunities with Asian countries, in particular China. Maree refers to some of this in her report but notable was the meeting held with Andrew Robb, Minister for Trade who met with our Platinum members and export facing members to discuss the work he has just completed on the China Free Trade Agreement and the Trans Pacific Partnership. This was an excellent opportunity for those members to provide feedback and receive a briefing from this senior Government Minister. Thanks go to Sarah Courtney for hosting and Andrew Nikolic for organising this meeting.

Infrastructure Committee

This committee, ably Chaired by Vice President Richard Ireland, continued its work on the findings from the Inner City Living Case Study by engagement with the Minister for Planning, Peter Gutwein, and nominated Council and State representatives with a view to easing the burden on developers in our region in dealing with often Heritage listed inner city buildings with the capacity to develop accommodation above shops. This work continues and we await the outcome of new Council planning legislation that streamlines planning opportunities across the State meaning, we trust, greater transparency and consistency for property developers.

This committee has also reviewed various models regarding the development of an appropriate strategy for the development of State-wide infrastructure and recently met with the new CEO of Infrastructure Tasmania, Allan Garcia, and Minister for Infrastructure, Rene Hidding, to further our understanding of where this body is at and the Chamber's ideas for how this might be developed. It is in our members' best interest to present these ideas whilst the plan for the body is still being developed.

The Chamber has floated the notion of potential further developments at Bell Bay. We have prosecuted an argument that this port may well be better off in private hands. In addition, we have recently organised a meeting of interested stakeholders to get together and discuss the potential of a Maritime Services Hub, using the port on a more proactive basis. All this is a work in progress but we have scheduled a meeting this month to work out the logistics of any further discussions and what actions can be taken in the near term to develop this concept.

Membership and Communications Committee

Bede Clifton, one of our newer Board members, stepped up this year to take on this role. This committee focussed on the further development of our new website and our database of members and contacts. We now have a list of more than 750 contacts that encompasses both our members and interested Stakeholders across the State, allowing us to engage with various industry groups, small and medium sized businesses, geographic location and so on when we need to consult or get information for submissions.

In addition, this committee has developed a pack for the use of Board members to provide to prospective members of the Chamber.

The Business Excellence Awards is another initiative that this committee oversees. Last year was a tremendously rewarding process with equal record entries, recognising businesses across the region. The Awards night was both fun and professional. Make sure you get your tickets this year!

The Board approved additional funding this financial year to employ a part time events co-ordinator and membership strategy co-ordinator. Welcome back to Ellen French.

Financial

This year the Chamber posted another strong result which has been banked to reserves to give the Chamber the flexibility to participate in specific strategic or operational projects into the future. I thank Maree, Merylyn and Ciska for their oversight of the Chamber finances and to Donna for her hand in revamping the financial statements this year.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to thank my fellow Board members who have worked with enthusiasm and passion on various Chamber projects this year. In particular, I thank the Chamber Executive, Richard Ireland and Ian Wright as Vice Presidents and Donna Bain as Treasurer. Inevitably the burden of being so active falls on the shoulders of those who step up to the Executive Committee positions.

Thank you to our members who have contributed their views on surveys and provided constructive feedback when asked and who have participated in our networking and other major events at an unprecedented level this year. The Business Excellence Awards sold out about 4 weeks before the event which is testament to the interest our members have in celebrating success in this region.

Finally but never last, thanks go to Chamber staff Merylyn, who left part way through the financial year, Ciska, who started with us in May, and Ellen who both filled in and then started with us as events co-ordinator. None of this would have happened however without the dedication, strategic analysis, networking and intellectual clout of Maree. She has worked tirelessly for the Board on our strategic projects, continued to develop significant networks throughout the State and has continued to advocate for the region's priorities via submissions and presentations. It has been a great pleasure from my perspective to work with her on these projects, to work through the analysis, and put forward a position to the Board and to the broader membership base.

On behalf of the Chamber Board, we look forward to the continuing development of our initiatives over the next year and continuing engagement with our members on things that matter to this region.

Janine Healey
President