

# Our next drawcard



By Bernadette Uzelac, CEO Geelong Chamber of Commerce

**A**s we head closer to a Federal Election, it is opportune to consider some of the key projects of importance to our region's future development and growth.

The Geelong Chamber of Commerce supports, and will continue to support, the advocacy of G21 Geelong Region Alliance's (G21) priority projects.

Each of these projects is important and, as the largest business advocacy body within the Geelong region representing nearly 900 organisations, which collectively employ nearly a third of Geelong's workforce, the Chamber has a key role to play in advocating for the interests of the business community.

There are more than 16,000 businesses operating within the City of Greater Geelong alone and, of those, about 96 per cent are small businesses – the lifeblood of any community.

These are the businesses that support the local footy and netball clubs, rattle cans for charity and employ the sons and daughters of our community. For these businesses to grow and continue to be sustainable, they need to be able to operate

in an environment that will provide continuous opportunities for business growth and long-term sustainability.

The Chamber has previously expressed that its top priority for Geelong is the construction of a convention and exhibition centre.

The business case for this project is compelling and the estimated returns to the Geelong community in terms of job creation, tourism and long term economic benefits are unequivocal.

The newly established Geelong Authority has this game-changing project clearly in its sights.

It is one of a number of key projects being investigated by the authority and, ultimately, a recommendation back to State Government for funding and planning approval is the anticipated, desired result.

It's an impressive project which, according to the business case data published by G21, will be a multi-purpose facility for different-sized events with a seating capacity of up to 1000 people in auditorium, theatre and banquet-style settings.

The project is estimated to provide a direct and indirect economic value to the region of \$350 million during the construction phase with an ongoing annual economic contribution to the region of \$50 million.

During the peak of construction it is estimated that about 6000 jobs would be created with a further 270 direct and indirect jobs ongoing.

**T**he opportunities for tourism are obvious. A convention and exhibition centre would be an iconic catalyst, bringing to our region diverse groups of people for conferences, who would then potentially return with their families.

Naturally, small businesses would benefit greatly from the flow-on effects of a convention and exhibition centre through the sourcing of goods and services locally and the downstream opportunities for retail, hospitality and tourism operators.

Geelong already has a vibrant conference market but lacks the scale of facilities and venue design required for the variety of different conference and exhibition requirements. The city is turning away potential conferences due to lack of

suitable facilities so there is clearly a demand that is currently unable to be met.

A purpose-built convention and exhibition centre, appropriately located, would create an iconic revenue-generating building in Geelong and act as a drawcard for a vast array of conferences, including international.

Geelong is perfectly positioned and has all the right ingredients to become a major conference destination. Coupled with a minimum 200-room hotel, the Geelong region could rapidly become the newest 'hot spot' destination for the growing

national and international conference market.

The current ask of the State Government is \$2.5 million towards a detailed business case, including investigating the ideal location, plus \$120 million for base design.

The proposed State Government contribution represents a significant

investment by the State but, ultimately, the project will require a public-private partnership investment model, so the full cost of the facility and risk to the State Government will be defrayed.

It's an ambitious project, but the economic modelling stacks up and there's evidence of high demand coupled with lost opportunity currently, so the risk associated with such an investment has to be considered extremely low.

A convention and exhibition centre in Geelong could be a catalytic, game-changing project. Other game-changing projects, such as attraction of an international carrier to Avalon Airport, revitalisation of Central Geelong through initiatives such as 'City in a Park', and expansion of GPAC and The Geelong Gallery to round out the cultural precinct would all benefit from the positive economic and community flow-on effects of a convention and exhibition centre in Geelong.

This project is not only of significance to the Geelong region, but is of national significance with the potential to attract international conferences and visitors to Australia and while Federal Government funding has not been sought at this stage, it makes sense that both the State and Federal governments work collaboratively in turning this game-changing, inter-generational project into a reality. **BL**

## April event

13 / Wednesday

After 5 and AGM

hosted by Waurn

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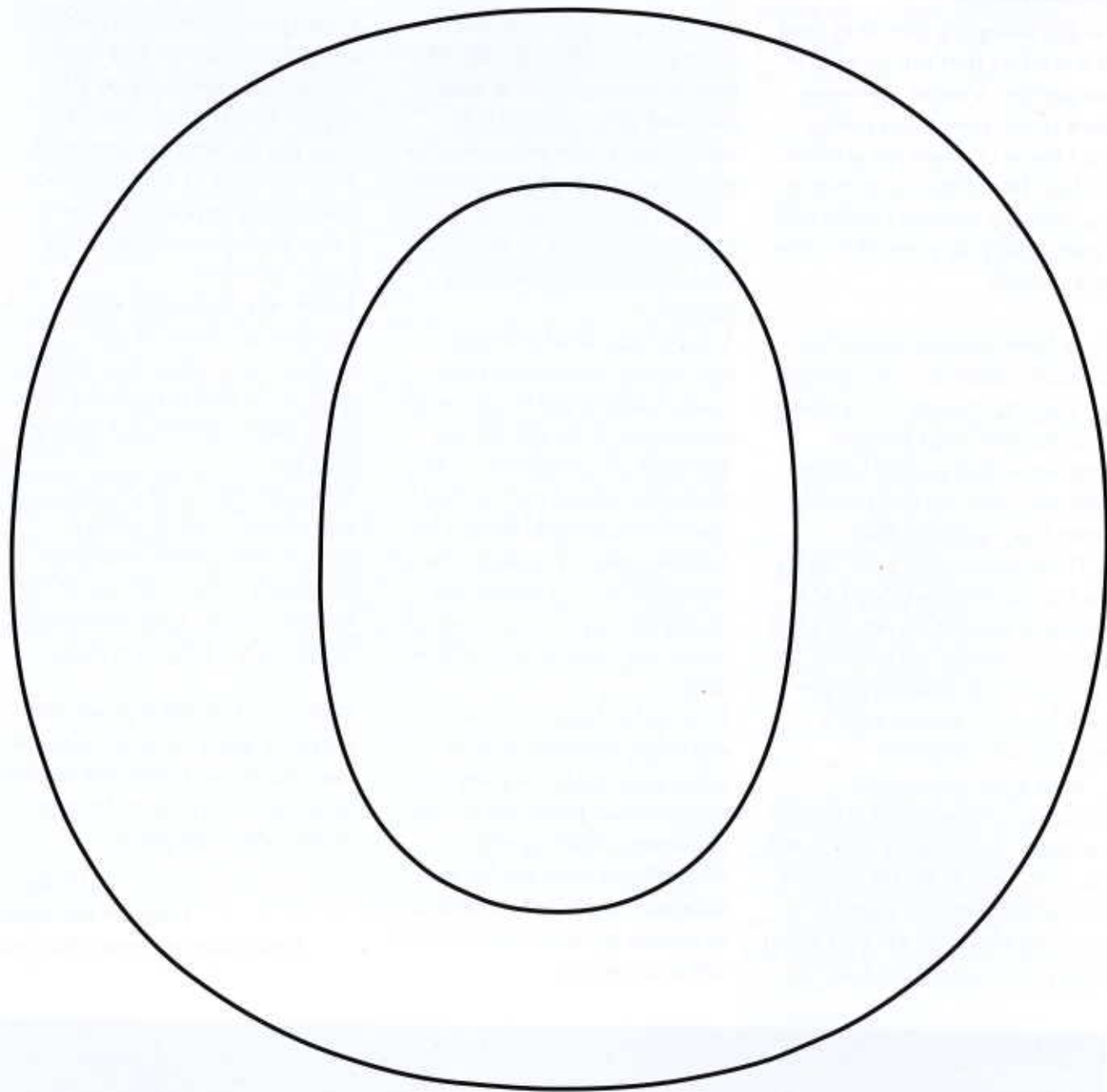


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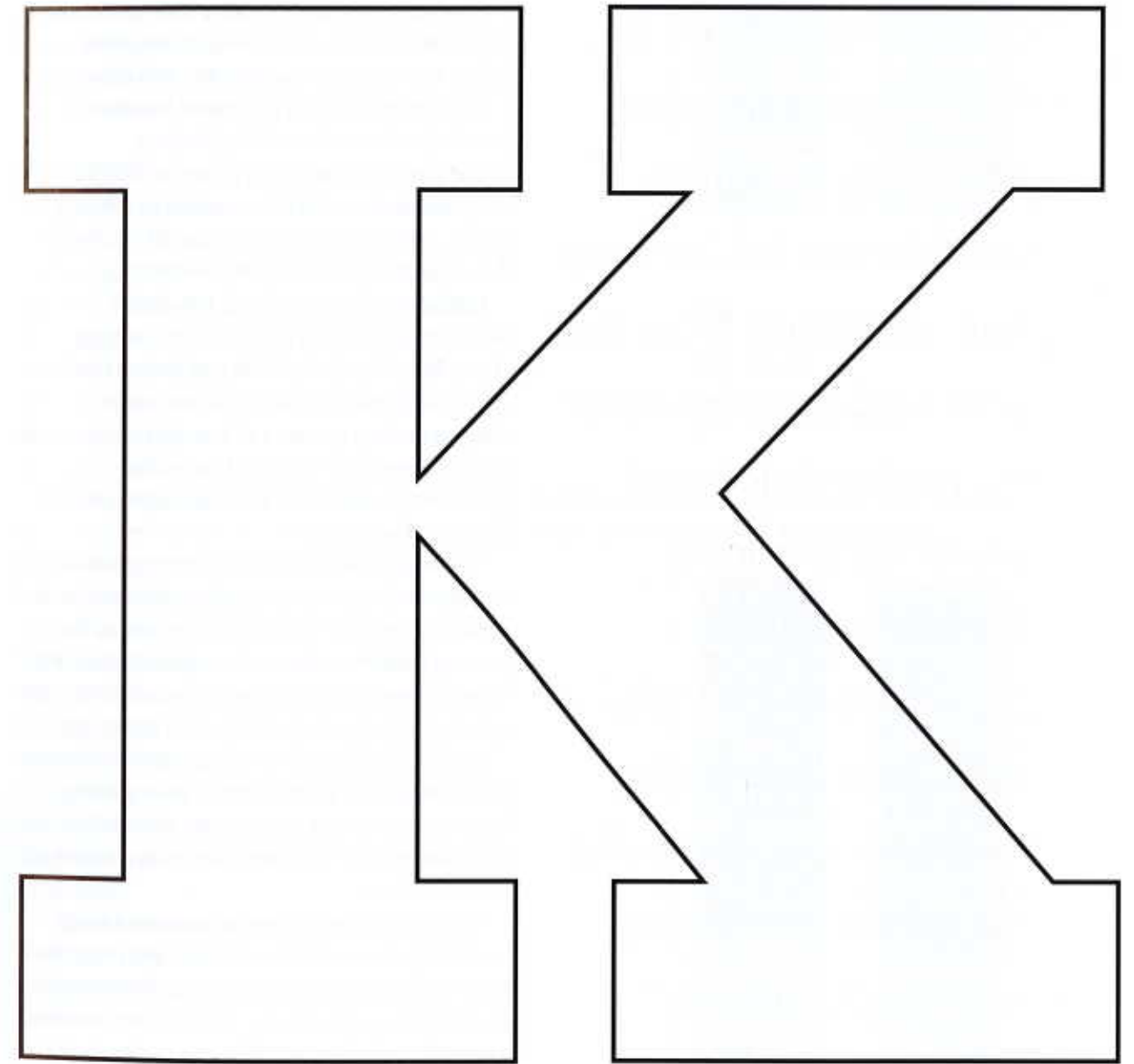
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**GEELONG BUSINESS**

**we're**



Business confidence is up – the results of the Geelong Business Trends Survey 2015 shows that Geelong business believes it is heading in the right direction.



Two of the four indicators of business sentiment reflect a positive outlook for Geelong businesses. Although business confidence in Geelong has increased from last year and expectations of greater sales and profit for Geelong businesses have also increased, there was little change in business expectations for future investment and employment.

**T**he Geelong business community has once again shown incredible resilience to shake off uncertainty brought on by manufacturing closures and regain

its economic confidence, according to Geelong Chamber of Commerce chief executive Bernadette Uzelac.

Speaking on the launch of the Geelong Business Trends Survey 2015, Ms Uzelac says the report shows that while Geelong businesses are embracing new opportunities in the government and health sectors, more needs to be done before that confidence translates into new jobs.

The report compiled by Deakin Business School also found that while Geelong businesses overall reported more confidence and profitability in 2015 compared to the year before, there was a fall in number of businesses that expected to increase their workforce.

Unsurprisingly, considering the recent relocation or planned relocation to Geelong of the TAC, WorkSafe, NDIS and parts of the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the report showed positive growth in "business professional and commercial services and especially government, education and community services, show positive growth."

"However, there has been a major reversal of confidence in the manufacturing, transport and storage sector (falling from 63 per cent to 38 per cent), much as would be expected given the impact of recent and ongoing structural changes in manufacturing in Geelong," the report says.

Ms Uzelac said the rise in business confidence could be seen as an indicator of the Geelong business community taking stock and feeling their way through the manufacturing closures at Alcoa and Ford.

"I think it could be seen as business saying 'we're OK'," says Ms Uzelac, who adds that the flurry of government departments relocating to Geelong has given the city, and business owners, a boost.

"There is a lot of good noise happening in Geelong and business people are feeling that; and that is creating a sense of confidence for the future."

Prof. Barry J. Cooper, Associate Dean, Industry Engagement and Partnerships with the Deakin Business School, agreed with Ms Uzelac's sentiment, saying it appears that Geelong has responded well to manufacturing closures by embracing other opportunities and the new surge of office workers in central Geelong.

Prof. Barry said he believed that central Geelong will be buoyed by new customers resulting from government departments moving to Geelong and the health of the Geelong economy overall was supported by a range of sectors including health and large retail employers.

However, Ms Uzelac says while confidence is up, the report also indicates that Geelong business owners are taking a cautious approach to investment and employing more staff.

**T**he survey says: "Two of the four indicators of business sentiment reflect a positive outlook for Geelong businesses. Although business confidence in Geelong has increased from last year and expectations of greater sales and profit for Geelong businesses have also increased, there was little change in business expectations for future investment and employment."

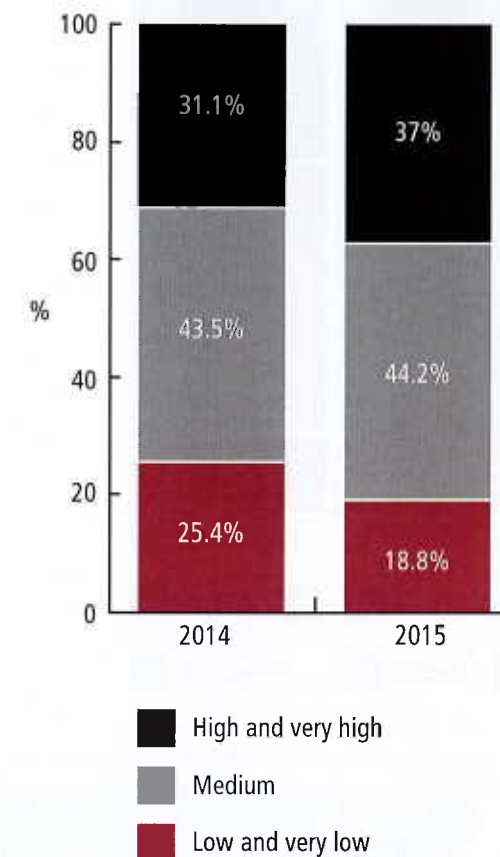
"There have been a lot of shocks in the Geelong economy in previous years. Understandably business is risk adverse in because we have had a lot of issues of the last 30 years that have shaken business confidence," Ms Uzelac said, citing the '80s recession, the Pyramid collapse in the '90s the Global Financial Crisis in the mid-2000s followed by recent major manufacturing closures.

But Ms Uzelac is optimistic that Geelong businesses will push through their cautious approach with a combination of resilience and innovation.

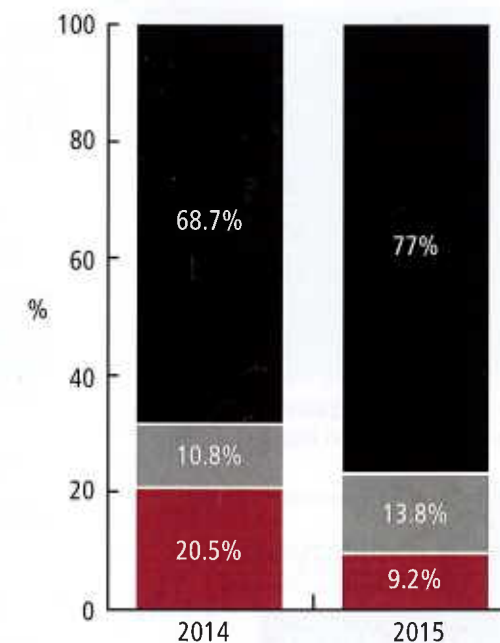
"Geelong businesses have survived because they have been resilient and have taken measures to future-proof their businesses," Ms Uzelac said.

The Geelong Business Trends Survey 2015 was compiled by researchers from the Deakin University Business School using the results of a 2015 survey of Geelong Chamber of Commerce's then 849-strong membership.

What is your level of confidence in the Geelong region's business environment?

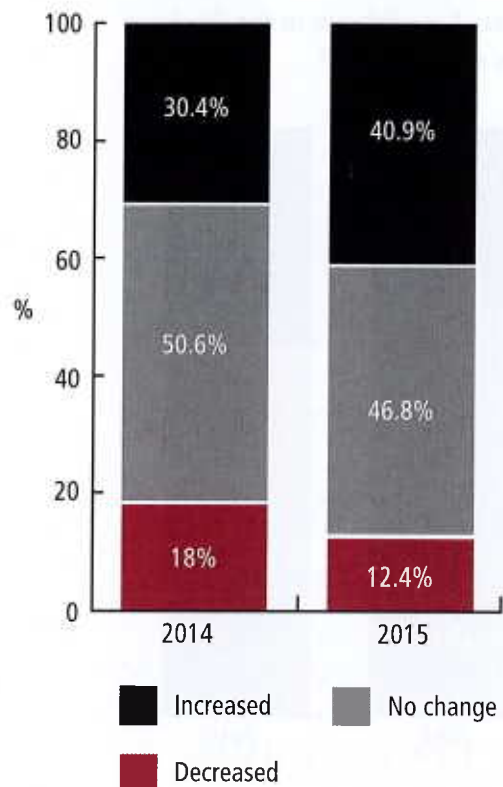


Compared to last financial year, how do you think profitability will trend this year



**SURVEY**

**Has the number of employees increased or decreased over the last 12 months?**



- The survey results also show:
- increased confidence and increased expectations of greater sales and profits;
  - more businesses reported an increase in profits compared to 2014;
  - Geelong business expects little change in the number of people they will employ in the coming year;
  - growth in the proportion of businesses reporting year-on-year increase in sales, increased profitability and increased employee numbers; and;
  - increasing numbers of people within Geelong have positive or neutral perceptions of Geelong and a decreasing portion of negative perceptions of Geelong.

Also significant was a substantial change in what Geelong business believes is the biggest barrier in taking on new employees. In the latest report it was the "cost of recruiting" while in the 2014 report employers saw "lack of work" the biggest barrier.

Overall, the biggest business barriers inhibiting

business growth were: economic uncertainty; government policy and increased competition.

The report also shows that the number of Geelong businesses exporting overseas has almost halved, a result the report says is surprising "given the drop in the Australia dollar".

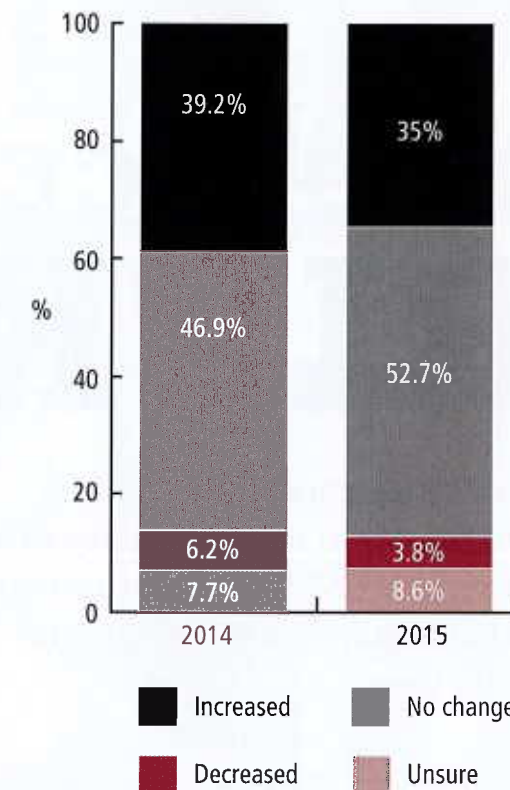
Ms Uzelac said the drop in exports demonstrates a great opportunity for Geelong businesses to enter the export market, especially on the back of the new North Asia Free Trade Agreements with China, Japan and Korea.

"This tells me that there is an opportunity for Geelong businesses to develop their export markets," said Ms Uzelac.

She said the Chamber was building strong ties with the Australian China Business Council and encouraged all Geelong businesses to actively engage with programs that assist them in developing export opportunities.

"Business owners really need to give themselves the opportunity to step back and have a helicopter view (of their business) because there is a lot of support out there," Ms Uzelac said. **BL**

**Do you expect the number of employees in your business to increase or decrease over the next 12 months? CAT**



**Karingal KarnivART '16 Geelong**



'Book of Dogs' by 2015 KarnivART winning artist Kirsten Waugh

Event proudly sponsored by



KarnivART Geelong is a unique art exhibition and competition featuring distinguished artwork created by artists with a disability or mental illness.

The exhibition is open to artists over the age of 16 who live in Victoria. KarnivART Geelong is proudly sponsored by Technology One and Provincial Media.

Works of art include sculptures, paintings, photography and canvas artwork. The Official Launch and announcement of prize winners will take place on Wednesday 4th May at the newly opened Eastern Hub Geelong; 285 McKillop Street, East Geelong.

The exhibition at the Hub will be open to the public from Thursday 5th May to Friday 27th May between 7am-3pm.

To attend the event or for more information please contact Karingal BaLinks on 5222 7445.

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- Sun Tzu



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