



# BUSINESS BEAT

## Jobs the bottom line

**Bernadette  
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THE Geelong Chamber of Commerce recently undertook a rebranding exercise — the first change to the chamber's visual identity in more than 160 years.

The logo, for so long synonymous with the primary production industries associated with Geelong's roots in commerce and trade as a port city, somehow bypassed the 'smoke stack' manufacturing era.

Geelong today is a city on the cusp of greatness as the dawn of a new era emerges. With an abundance of natural assets, a highly skilled workforce, a city steeped in history and pride, the chamber's new brand reflects the diversity, complexity and optimism that underlies our city's evolution towards a new age of prosperity.

I'm in Canberra this week with chamber president Kylie Warne meeting with senior Federal Government ministers, bureaucrats, industry leaders and the office of the Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman to expand relationships and prosecute the case for business in Geelong — particularly the 97 per cent of small businesses that make up the business landscape in our region.

Some of the many issues covered have included the Federal Government's business simplification process, the competitiveness agenda, industrial relations, science and innovation agenda, the digital economy and advocacy and assistance for small business.

The Geelong Chamber of Commerce is the largest independent chamber in Australia. The strength of our membership numbers and the deep engagement of the business community in Geelong is sending a compelling message to Canberra.



**WORKING ON MORE JOBS:** Upskilling existing businesses holds the key to jobs growth.

If there was ever a place to test business policy levers, it is in Geelong. and Canberra's radar is tuned intently on the city — it's a palpable vibe like never before.

And while the start-up economy is gaining traction, and Geelong is perfectly positioned to build an entrepreneurial culture that nurtures start-ups, another concept is also gathering momentum: the scaling up of existing businesses.

It is evident that there is an appetite federally to support and develop opportunities for existing businesses to scale up and becoming more competitive through innovation and upskilling.

While reskilling of the workforce is an ongoing priority, the upskilling of business operators to become more competitive and productive, not just locally, but more broadly, is an imperative that is rapidly garnering attention.

At the end of the day it's in the interests of the community and the nation that jobs are the outcome. In a post-Brexit, post-Trump world, jobs are the common denominator that transcend economic policy. Levers that create jobs will not only win the hearts and minds of the people, but elections.

While the productivity agenda is critical to our nation, at a grassroots community

level, it's all about jobs. So supporting businesses to scale up to the next level will undoubtedly result in jobs. Geelong's 16,000 businesses collectively hold one of the keys to jobs growth.

If just one out of every two businesses employed one extra person, Geelong's unemployment issues would be solved. But it's not as simplistic an equation as that.

Entrenched unemployment is a factor of disadvantage, socio-economic circumstances and low educational attainment levels.

The chamber is supporting the GROW program (G21 Region Opportunities for Work),

an initiative that seeks to address social disadvantage through driving social and local procurement.

By supporting smaller businesses to participate in and become more visible in procurement, more jobs will be created. Some of those jobs will go to those from socially disadvantaged backgrounds.

Assisting businesses to scale up is one of the missing pieces of the business growth equation that will result in long-term sustainable growth.

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