

May 13th, 2019

## President's Notes – May 2019

The election has dominated the last few weeks and we have had a procession of politicians of all ilks through the region making commitments and promises. The most recent (at time of writing) was the \$40m pledge by the Liberal Party to fund a new bulk ore loader for the Burnie Port. I attended the media event for this and spoke with both Senator Colbeck and Wayne Bould (Tasmanian Minerals and Energy Council chief executive) at length on the benefits of the new loader.

The current loader has capacity restrictions and reliability issues which a new loader would circumvent and provide faster loading which in turn allows ships to get turned around in less time making better use of the port and relieving congestion. As the mining industry expands (and it seems like it could dramatically in the next five to ten years) this facility will make a big difference to the efficiency of our port. Labor has also agreed to significant funding for the port (a more recent announcement!).

Today I read that former Premier Paul Lennon, now Chair of Australian Bauxite Ltd. is proposing for \$35m to be spent on infrastructure and dredging to allow the very large Panamax bulk carriers into the port. This would reduce the export cost by half and increase our competitiveness in the world market; plus make some major projects more viable with the resultant increase in jobs and revenue to the state government and local businesses. It seems like a good idea to me.

The three NW Chambers has just concluded a survey into wages and conditions among small businesses. Responses were received from Smithton to Devonport and across the wide diversity of businesses and industries our Chambers represent.

Over 60% of businesses said an increase in the Minimum Wage to a Living Wage would affect their decision to hire more staff, or preference casual or part time appointments over full time positions. Those businesses open on Sundays indicated they now break even on Sundays under the new award rates instead of running at a loss. The reversal of penalty rates and proposed wage increases will have a dramatic effect on business – especially small businesses and they are the largest proportion in our region.

The Chamber Presidents noted it was clear from the survey results that while small business on the coast expected to do the same turnover or better next financial year they were vulnerable to wage hikes in excess of the CPI and appeared to have no strategies in place to deal with this, other than further casualisation of the workforce or redundancies.

The Chamber is combining with the Burnie Tourism Association to host the Tourism Operators Networking Session at Wellers Inn on Thursday May 30<sup>th</sup>. This event will focus on the results of the past tourism season and future directions; it will feature presentations by a range of industry operators and representatives plus a chance to network with other members of this vital sector.

This Wednesday we have a breakfast session at Wellers Inn featuring a presentation from Jacqui Lambie entitled *Every Tasmanian, Every Day*. That will be just three days prior to the election, and it will be interesting to hear her take on the situation at that time – who knows; the following week Jacqui could end up holding the balance of power in the Senate when the upper house convenes again in July.

*Project Hercules* (our videographic tales of people who have relocated to the region) continues with another filming occurring later this week and we are in discussions with a person to be the final subject in our series of six. Post production and background filming has been performed in the last few weeks with a view to complete the project in July - we plan to show the first one or two videos in an exhibition on the *Make it Tasmania* booth at the Population Symposium in Launceston next month.

The Chamber has submitted an application to Regional Development Australia for funds to conduct an employability training program later this year under the *Regional Employment Trials Program*. If successful we will need the support of member businesses to provide assistance in conducting the activities of the program; this could be speaking to and/or hosting a site visit for 5-6 job applicants to help improve their awareness of the real world that is small business. Additionally, we may seek work experience opportunities within the membership - please help us to help build your future workforce.

Our aim is to improve the employability of young job applicants so they can “hit the ground running” when they succeed in gaining employment. Many thanks to Kirk Pinner who has done the majority of the work on the submission.

I had a lengthy session with senior officials from the Dept. of Jobs & Small Business (parent of RDA) two weeks ago and was able to let them know of these two initiatives and the detail behind the grant application – they were very supportive of what we are doing to try to help build a workforce, rather than use fly in fly out labour. I am mildly confident that our application will be successful - more next month!

I have had some success in applying for grants at various NFPs I have worked at in the last two years. There are many different grants available at local, state and federal level; and not just from government entities. *Business Tasmania* is conducting a Grant Writing Workshop at the Paranapple Centre, Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> of May, 9am – 1pm; I recommend you attend this if you have the need to apply for external funds.

Here's to hoping the election is over and done with quickly; and doesn't linger on for days or weeks after - business needs to get back to normal, whomever is successful.

best regards



Ian Jones - **President**

