

## **APRIL 2020 PRESIDENT'S REPORT**

I doubt our organisation has seen anything as disruptive as COVID 19 since World War II. Whilst they are very different events, both will be remembered as having enormous impact upon the economy and our society. We are only in the early days of the pandemic, but businesses need to be planning how they operate when we get to "the other side".

There haven't been many official events in the last few weeks but we have been active in conference calls with TCCI and Minister Sarah Courtney. We are fortunate that Sarah's portfolio covers both Small Business and Health, so we get a unique weekly insight into the current situation.

I have been impressed with the follow up that flows from issues raised in the calls. In particular, Sarah set up a grant fund via the Dept of State Growth for regional chambers and business organisations to support their efforts to respond to members' needs during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond into recovery. Our Executive will be submitting our application next week.

Initially, I believe many business operators were dumbstruck when the government started shutting down the economy. Our members in the tourism and hospitality sectors were first to feel the effects of the virus. Both state and federal governments responded quickly but many businesses were slow to apply for the \$2500 Emergency Support Grant. Those that did had their applications approved within 24 hours in most cases.

At that time, I put out an email urging businesses to contact their accountant plus speak to their bank and their landlord (if applicable). Fortunately, this prompted many into action and they were able to not only receive grant funds but loan and rent relief. The second round of funding which covers a wider range of industries is now open.

Also, the \$15,000 Small Business Financial Hardship Grant is now open but be aware that it requires much greater financial detail to be submitted. Well kept management reports may well be enough as not everyone will have their 2018/19 accounts finalised yet – once again a chat with your accountant may be a good idea. There is an amount of \$750 you can apply for to assist in obtaining financial advice.

Subsequently the federal government has released its *Job Keeper* package which has assisted many in retaining long term, quality staff through the pandemic period. The recent lockdown of our region is unfortunate but not unexpected due to the outbreak at the hospitals and sections of our community failing to meet the stay at home directives. We have been conditioned that we are in for a six month "hibernation" – let's hope we can come out earlier than September.

In the background, as we cannot meet your executive group is taking care of day to day operations (see attached financial report) and will be using this time to improve our IT with regard to videoconferencing and data sharing plus updating the website.

Thank you to Cyndia Hilliger who has been putting out mental health support posts to our Facebook page – they are very helpful, and I have had a lot of positive feedback on those. In these tough times we must provide support to each other. Justin McErlain (0410 590842) and I (0412 016501) are happy to receive phone calls at any time to discuss issues you may wish to chat about.

Until next month – please stay safe (and stay home!).

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ian".

**Ian Jones**

President

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