



OAKESHOTT INDEPENDENT

www.roboakeshott.com

TAREE OFFICE

Shop 6, Manning Arcade
20-24 Manning St
Taree NSW 2430
Email: robert.oakeshott.mp@aph.gov.au

PO Box 330
Taree NSW 2430
1300 301 836

PORT MACQUARIE OFFICE

Shop 1/143 Horton Street
Port Macquarie NSW 2444
Email: robert.oakeshott.mp@aph.gov.au

PO Box 1112

Port Macquarie NSW 2444

02 6584 2911

Small Business Edition

Rob's Word

It is noticeable how much information from Government doesn't make its way into the local marketplace, and when it comes to local business, this can mean losing opportunities that might be sitting right under your nose. For this reason, I hope you appreciate this small business edition newsletter, as it is an attempt to break down what is on offer for you in business. You might be a business owner, an employee, thinking of starting a business, or you might even know someone trying to make a business work and grow. Whichever it is, I hope you read this in detail and take up, or pass on, some of the opportunities that are available right now. Every single 'win' of a job, or a government grant, or a

capital spend on your business is ultimately a 'win' for our community. Our region is showing great resilience at the moment, and if we can continue to 'ferret' out every single dollar on offer from Government, then we are doing all we can to expand our local economic base, and making an even more resilient and sustainable local economy for the future. If you have any issues or questions after reading this newsletter, feel free to ring our office on 65-842911 (Port Macquarie) or 1300-301-836 (Taree) or contact us via www.roboakeshott.com.

INSIDE

**Key contacts
for your business**
page 2

**Services and support
for your business**
pages 3-4

**Innovation and
your business**
page 5

**Government funding
for business - how to
claim your slice**
page 6

**Stimulus opportunities
for business on the
Mid-North Coast**
page 7

**New Workplace Laws
affecting your business**
page 8

IF you're in business on the Mid-North Coast, you need to know these people and the organisations they represent. They are available and willing to assist you with any questions you may have about how you can grow or improve your business.



Graham Baker - AusIndustry

As the Federal Government's hub for business information and support, AusIndustry is a key point of contact for businesses on the Mid-North Coast. An estimated \$2 billion is delivered by AusIndustry to more than 10,000 businesses and 100,000 individuals each year and there is no better time for business owners in our region to claim their share of government assistance.

AusIndustry delivers a range of more than 30 business programs, including:

- innovation grants
- tax and duty concessions
- small business development
- industry support, and
- venture capital

For grants-based programs, customers compete for limited funds based on the merit of their application, whereas concessions such as the R&D Tax Concession require customers to make a claim, based on their self-assessed eligibility.

AusIndustry's regional manager for our area, Graham Baker, is available now to talk about how AusIndustry may be able to support your business. Mr Baker can be contacted during business hours on 0434-606-779. Alternatively, to find out more about AusIndustry's suite of programs you can call the AusIndustry hotline on 13-28-46 or visit the website at www.ausindustry.gov.au. Customers can now subscribe to e-bulletin or to email updates from the website to receive regular information about its programs.



Mark Almond - Local Employment Co-ordinator

PRIME Minister Kevin Rudd's recent decision to recognise the Mid-North Coast and North Coast as priority regions for government support will bring a range of important benefits to business in the area. One of the most significant of these is the interim appointment of Mr Mark Almond to the role of Local Employment Co-ordinator for the Mid-North Coast.

Mr Almond will initially have the task of acting as a conduit between government and local business, councils and community groups to attract government assistance through programs like the Jobs Fund, which has already attracted a number of applications from our region. His appointment is directly related to the allocation of priority status for the region, in recognition of the extreme weather events, economic pressures and social disadvantage that continue to impact on us.

This now provides us with targeted assistance to continue the work of addressing the entrenched problems of high unemployment, low education levels and low wages on the Mid-North Coast. It is up to us, however, to embrace that opportunity and work with the Local Employment Co-ordinator to take full advantage of any support available from government. To this end, anyone with an idea or interest in generating local employment is encouraged to phone Mr Almond directly on 0412-834-590.



Brian Sherwood - Enterprise Connect

Enterprise Connect provides support to Australian small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) in the manufacturing sector to help them become more innovative, efficient and competitive.

There are a wide range of resources available through Enterprise Connect, starting with a comprehensive business review which is conducted by an experienced advisor free of charge for qualifying businesses. On the Mid-North Coast, we are currently supported by Mr Brian Sherwood and he can be contacted on 0417-277-152.

Mr Sherwood also has information on a series of workshops – to be held across the country this year – on how to manage your business through the global financial crisis. To learn more about Enterprise Connect, go to www.enterpriseconnect.gov.au.

Women make it their business to network

Women on the Mid-North Coast trying to get ahead in the business sector are only a click away from linking into a supportive network of their peers. The **Macleay River Business Women's Network**, **Hastings Business Women's Network** and **Taree Women in Business** group all provide a friendly and inspiring networking environment for women to meet regularly and expand their professional horizons. Benefits to members include facilitation of career development and the support of other women from a variety of industries and backgrounds.

More information on the Hastings group can be found at www.hbwn.com.au, the Macleay River network can be contacted via its website at www.mrbwn.org.au and Taree Women in Business can be reached via the Manning Valley Chambers of Commerce at www.manningvalleychamber.com.au.



Kylie Little, who launched The Little Brewing Company with her husband Warwick in 2007, has enjoyed the benefits of networking with other business women in the Hastings. Go Kylie and go The Little Brewing Company!

Your local Chamber of Commerce

On the broader issue of networking, every community in our region has a chamber of commerce that is active and relies on the involvement of local businesses to promote the economic and social well-being of the community. To get connected with the chamber closest to you, phone our office on 6584-2911 (Port Macquarie) or 1300-301-836 (Taree).

Hastings Business Enterprise Centre

ANOTHER valuable source of business assistance on the Mid North Coast can be found in the Hastings Business Enterprise Centre (BEC). A community-based not-for-profit organisation, the Hastings BEC aims to help create and retain sustainable business enterprises and foster local economic development.

Through public/private partnerships with governments, private enterprise and local communities, BECs provide practical and confidential business facilitation services, including access to a range of professional services and government programs.

If you'd like more information on the Hastings BEC, phone 6583-3211 or visit www.hastingsbec.com.au.

NSW Business Chamber an advocate for members

NSW Business Chamber is an independent member-based company that aims to connect business operators with the information, people and advice they need to make sound business decisions.

Businesses of all sizes can be supported to manage their people and growth more efficiently, including the challenges of industrial relations, Occupational Health and Safety and overseas expansion. The Chamber also advocates on behalf of members and provides information on legislation and industry statistics and publications.

One of the Chamber's six regional offices is located in Port Macquarie and Manager Kellon Beard can be contacted on 6584-0910.

As well, every industry sector has specific, local lobbying and advocacy groups. Examples include the **Master Builders Association**, the **Housing Industry Association** and **Restaurant and Catering Australia** and all are available for your business where relevant. Contact details for your industry group are available by phoning my office on 6584-2911 (Port Macquarie) or 1300-301-836 (Taree).

Export advice

A key goal for our region is to expand our economic base, and that includes getting more businesses to explore market opportunities outside the region and even overseas.

Existing and potential exporters on the Mid-North Coast can benefit from the knowledge and experience of companies already active in international markets by joining the **NSW Exporters Network**.

The network provides members with access to reliable, up-to-date information and advice on topics including markets, customer preferences, distribution and marketing practices, political issues, cultural requirements and risk factors.

A schedule of informal meetings and seminars offers further guidance and provides an opportunity for personal interaction between members. Membership to this free service is open to any existing exporter or company which is export ready or capable.

For more information on how to link up with the network, go to <http://www.smallbiz.nsw.gov.au/small-business> or phone 9338-6958.

Local exporters can also call on the **Regional Export Adviser Network** to help negotiate the complex procedures and regulations associated with export markets. Specialist adviser Gabrielle Oriol is located in Port Macquarie and can be contacted on 6583 5647.



Taree-based export business Stebercraft has been exporting its fibreglass boats to countries including Japan, New Zealand, Fiji and the United Arab Emirates since it began 62 years ago. General manager Alan Steber, pictured at work here inside his factory complex at Taree, is a very good example of a businessman who networks locally and also taps government funding opportunities whenever available. It can be done! Well done Alan and go Stebercraft!

Mentoring for success

Mentorship, often a key ingredient in the success of a new business, is the focus of a program due to begin shortly in the region for interested business owners.

The six-month Mentoring for Success program is set to begin between **June 22 and June 30** in various locations on the Mid-North Coast. The program, partly funded by the Federal Government, includes group workshops of no more than 10 participants and one-to-one support with trained facilitators that will help you identify the strengths and opportunities in your business, plan and implement solutions and build rapport with a local network of like-minded business owners.

The **"Mentoring for Success"** program is delivered in our region by the Enterprise & Training Company, which also operates the **Mid-North Coast Business Advisory Service** and therefore provides free business advice, guidance sessions, information resources and subsidised business skills training workshops. Information on these programs is available by phoning ETC on 1800-007-400 or visiting www.etcltd.com.au.

Business support for our indigenous communities

Indigenous Business Australia (IBA) helps create opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals and communities to engage in the wider economy. On the Mid-North Coast, IBA can assist Aboriginal community members to engage in financial and commercial activities including home ownership, small business development, joint venturing with industry leaders and construction services.

Business support and mentoring is provided free of charge and clients are able to choose a consultant that they feel works best with them.

Information on IBA is available by phoning 1800-107-107. Also consider talking with our region's Indigenous Coordination Centre at Coffs Harbour (1800-079-098) and local Land Councils about possible business ideas. To locate your nearest Land Council, contact our office on 6584-2911 (Port Macquarie) or 1300-301-836 (Taree).

Home is where the business is

Home-based business operators in the Port Macquarie-Hastings region have access to a service established specifically to meet their unique business needs.

The Home Business Forum provides an environment where businesses operating in the Port Macquarie- Hastings area can support each other

through utilising services, becoming alliance partners or providing referrals. Guest speakers present on a variety of subjects and gatherings are typically held every two months.

Further information is available by visiting <http://aushomebizforum.blogspot.com> or by phoning Renee Bell on 6584-8866.

Inaugural Innovation Festival a winner for business

WHILE 2009 will be remembered by many in business for its economic challenges, the staging of the inaugural **Mid-North Coast Innovation Festival** should make this a landmark year in the region for vastly different and more positive reasons. The staging of this hugely successful event over a full month from Taree to Coffs Harbour represents an important step for the region towards business growth and economic development. The festival has been held in other locations for the past seven years but a mood of optimism, eagerness and resilience from within the local business community led to the event being conducted in our region for the first time. Although there were many positive outcomes from the festival one example of a very tangible win came with the establishment of the Formula1inSchools program on the Mid-North Coast. Thanks to the work of Re-Engineering Australia, AusIndustry, the North Coast Institute of TAFE and local secondary schools, students in our region will now have access to the latest computer design software to build and race their very own model cars.

Businesses are welcome to get involved in this and anyone who wants more information can contact Deborah Maloney at Re-Engineering Australia on 0439-173-426. Anyone who wants to get involved in the Innovation Festival for next year should contact Graham Baker at AusIndustry on 0434-606-779.



Peta Simmons, proprietor of Wauchope-based business Bennett's Steel, was delighted to receive an Excellence in Innovation Award at the Mid-North Coast Innovation Festival last month for her new Beaut Press machine, which was developed locally for the frame truss industry and is now part of a business deal with global magnate Warren Buffett. Go Peta and go Bennett's Steel!

Tax credit for research and development

From 2010-11, the Government will replace the R&D Tax Concession with a simplified **R&D Tax Credit**.

The new Tax Credit will provide a 45 per cent refundable credit for firms with an annual turnover of less than \$20 million – equivalent to a Tax Concession of 150 per cent. This means that firms will receive a tax refund of 45 per cent of their R&D spending when they file their tax return.

As a transitional measure for the coming financial year, the R&D expenditure cap for the existing **R&D Tax Offset** will be lifted from \$1 million to \$2 million. This cap is the maximum amount a firm can spend on R&D to be eligible for the Tax Offset.

Some of these increased benefits are to be offset by the removal of the R&D Tax Concession Premium and tightening eligibility criteria, which will be the subject of industry consultation in coming months. For more information, go to www.ato.gov.au.

Researchers in business

Got a new business idea even though you're already in business? If so, you may be in the running for a share of \$10 million committed by the Federal Government to help with the implementation of creative business initiatives. The funding has been provided to support researchers from universities or public research agencies to help businesses develop and implement new ideas with commercial potential. The aim of the program is to accelerate the adoption of new ideas and technologies and to increase competitiveness of firms.

Funding is available for up to 50 per cent of salary costs, to a maximum of \$50,000 on placements between two and 12 months.

To find out more or to apply, visit www.enterpriseconnect.gov.au, or call Brian Sherwood on 0417-277-152 and start thinking!

Re-tooling for climate change

Small and medium-sized manufacturers looking to 'green' their business have until late August to apply for financial help to implement changes which will reduce their impact on the environment.

The \$75 million **Re-Tooling for Climate Change Program** offers grants to manufacturing businesses for projects that improve the energy and/or water efficiency of their production processes.

Grants of between \$10,000 and \$500,000 are available, up to a maximum of one third of the cost of each project.

Applications for the fourth round of program funding close on August 24. Further information can be found at <http://www.ausindustry.gov.au/InnovationandRandD/Pages/home.aspx> or by phoning the AusIndustry hotline on 132 846.



The Observatory in Port Macquarie has become an industry leader in Australia by setting its sights on becoming carbon neutral. Managing director Chris Denny, pictured here with State MP for Port Macquarie Peter Besseling, myself and Federal Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Minister Tony Burke, is reducing the hotel's carbon footprint through initiatives such as infrastructure changes, education programs for staff and guests, and offsetting by buying carbon credits. The hotel is reportedly on target to be carbon neutral by 2012. Go Chris and go the Observatory!

Apprenticeship makeovers

Like it or not, our region is 'older' than the rest of Australia! This includes our workforce, so a program for Australian apprentices starting later in life which has been expanded and re-badged in the Budget may be worth exploring for businesses in our area. The current Support for Mid-Career Apprentice payment, which is available to apprentices aged 30 and over, will soon be re-named the **'Support for Adult Apprentices'** payment and offered to eligible apprentices from age 25 onwards. The scheme is open to mature-aged apprentices taking up a trade apprenticeship in an identified 'skills shortage area'.

Rates of payment are \$150 per week for the first year of the apprenticeship and \$100 per week in the second, with payment made to either the employer or the apprentice (depending on industrial arrangements). The change of name and age criteria will take effect on January 1 2010.

The Budget also brought changes to a number of other apprenticeship schemes, including the Apprenticeship Training (Fee) Vouchers Program – to be superseded by the Productivity Places Program on July 1 – and the Tools For Your Trade voucher initiative, which was replaced last month by the Tools For Your Trade payment initiative.

To find out more about the government's apprenticeship reforms, contact the Australian Apprenticeships Centre on 13 38 73 or visit the Australian Apprenticeships website at www.australianapprenticeships.gov.au.

Is your business eligible for fuel tax credits?

As tax time approaches, it is important to make sure you are claiming everything you can for your business – including your **fuel tax credits**.

In July 2008 the list of equipment and vehicles eligible for fuel tax credits was expanded to include machinery, plant and equipment used in activities such as construction, manufacturing, wholesale, retail, property management and landscaping – meaning most businesses can now claim them.

The only fuels that are not eligible are aviation fuels, alternative fuels and those used in light vehicles of 4.5 tonne gross vehicle mass (GVM) or less.

For more information or to register for fuel tax credits go to the Australian Taxation Office's website at www.ato.gov.au or phone the ATO on 13 28 66.

Small Business Tax Break 'upsized'

One of the biggest free kicks currently being offered to small business through the range of government stimulus measures is the **Small Business Tax Break**. Initially introduced as a 30 per cent rebate on assets purchased prior to July 1, the initiative received a boost in the Budget and now represents even greater value for business operators on the Mid-North Coast. Here's how it works:

Who is eligible?: Taxpayers who operate a business

What do you get?: Business owners with a turnover of up to \$2 million can claim a 50 per cent tax deduction on assets bought by December 31 2009 at a cost of \$1000 or more, provided the assets are used or installed by 31 December 2010. **This represents a 20% increase on the rebate figure in the original tax break.** Businesses with a turnover of more than \$2 million may be eligible for a deduction of either 30% or 10%, depending on when the asset is purchased and first used or installed.

How?: The allowance will take the form of a tax deduction on top of the usual capital allowance deduction claimable for the asset as part of the business owner's income tax return.

When: The 50 per cent reduction applies only to purchases made between 13 December 2008 and 31 December 2009. **This represents an extension of six months on the time frame for the original tax break offered to small business.**

Action required: If you are in the market for a business-related asset investment, consider seriously the potential savings available by purchasing before December 31.



Joyer Consulting proprietor Daniel Jordan is pictured with a recently purchased computer server, which will attract a 50% tax deduction at tax time this year. This is a practical example of 'stimulus' at work in your business! Go Daniel and go Joyer!

Cashing in on stimulus

Stimulus measures regarding infrastructure and home improvement will generate significant opportunities for tradies and suppliers on the Mid-North Coast over the next 12 months. With work required to commence on most projects almost immediately, there is no time to waste for businesses wanting to get involved. The following list of programs and contacts should help guide you towards the most relevant information for your business.

Ceiling insulation:

A rebate of up to \$1600 is available to home owners-occupiers for the installation of ceiling insulation. Any qualified tradesperson wanting to install insulation on the Government's behalf (after July 1) should phone the government hotline on 1800 808 571 to register their business.

Primary Schools for the 21st Century:

More than \$17 million is being invested in improvements to schools on the Mid-North Coast through the *Primary Schools for the 21st Century* and *National School Pride* programs. Contractors, tradespeople and suppliers wanting to register their interest in the construction phase of these projects should visit https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/strat_direction/schools/ber/registration/index.htm.

Social housing build:

BUILDERS, engineers, architects, tradespeople, investors and developers on the Mid-North Coast have an opportunity to cash in on the nation's biggest ever spending spree on public housing. The \$6.4 billion social housing component of the Federal Government's stimulus package will deliver 9000 additional social housing homes and an extra 37,000 jobs and apprenticeships across NSW. More information can be found on the NSW Government's e-commerce website at tenders.nsw.gov.au/nsw/ or at www.housing.nsw.gov.au. Builders can also register for contract updates from the department by emailing buildinghousingnsw@housing.nsw.gov.au

Community Infrastructure Projects:

Kempsey, Port Macquarie-Hastings and Greater Taree City Councils have received almost \$8 million to fund a wide range of community infrastructure projects, including the Wauchope-Bonny Hills Surf Club and Taree Recreation Centre upgrade. This is record funding from the Federal Government direct to councils. There are opportunities galore within this, so tradies and suppliers interested in getting involved should go to www.australia.gov.au/economicstimulus and click the 'Information for your smallbusiness' link. Contractors can also register their interest through the Master Builders Association's website at www.mbansw.asn.au.

The Fair Work Bill - history in the making

HISTORY was made in March 2009 when the Parliament, including the two major political parties, reached agreement on a set of foundation principles for Australian workplaces. The three pillars of the agreed, bipartisan framework are; a) a move from a scattered, state-based industrial relations system to a national system, b) a set of 'fair work' principles, dubbed the '10 Commandments' of industrial relations, and c) the streamlining of an award structure in Australia to reduce the high number of awards currently operating. These principles fundamentally represent good, solid policy for the

future of workers and employers on the Mid-North Coast. The fact the Liberal/National Parties have said during debate that they are 99.98% in agreement with the package should provide comfort to businesses that 'security of tenure' beyond a change of government is now emerging. The challenge now as we get further into the detail is to ensure that employers and employees in our region maximise the benefits of this new structure. An example of this detail is the **Small Business Fair Dismissal Code**, which applies to employers with fewer than 15 employees and was one of the few sticking points between the major parties. More

details on this can be found at [www.deewr.gov.au/Workplace Relations](http://www.deewr.gov.au/Workplace_Relations) or by phoning the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations on 1300-363-079.

From a broad perspective, we can look forward to a more stable future for industrial relations in Australia, with only minor changes likely to result from any change of government. However, anyone needing advice or information regarding the new workplace laws is welcome to phone my office on 6584-2911 (Port Macquarie) or 1300-301-836 (Taree) or to contact the Department directly using the details above.

Early win on hospitality award

WITH the ink barely dry on the Fair Work Bill, the restaurant and catering industry on the Mid-North Coast had identified major concerns relating to the Hospitality Industry (General) Award, fearing its inflexibility would drive up costs and therefore cost jobs.

As a result of direct lobbying from local industry leaders, the Federal Government has now directed the Australian Industrial Relations Commission (AIRC) to review the award and its potential impact on local restaurants and catering businesses. This is a significant step forward for our vibrant local industry and a good example of the new system in action. Those who lobbied for this review, including Lou Perri (Stunned Mullet), Anne-Maree Crowe (Mercure Hotel), and Ross and Jo Gwatkin (SSS BBQ Barn) are to be congratulated and I look forward to working with them and all other interested stakeholders on building a modern award for hospitality that will work best on the Mid-North Coast.

As a community that relies on tourist trade, and enjoys a vibrant restaurant and catering industry, it is vital that we have our say on this issue. To offer your input, phone my office on 6584-2911 (Port Macquarie) or 1300-301-836 (Taree), or go to the AIRC website at www.airc.gov.au.



The Stunned Mullet's Lou Perri (right), who has been lobbying for a review of the Hospitality Industry (General) Award, is pictured at his restaurant offering some wine tasting for staff members Angela Brinkman (seated), Kim Lucas (left), Geoff Walsh, Nick McCrohon, Benjamin Bullivant and David Henry. Go Lou and go Stunned Mullet!

For more information, or to leave a comment or feedback, go to www.roboakeshott.com
Alternatively, call us on **1300 301 836** or **6584 2911**.