

## **JUNE 2020 PRESIDENT'S REPORT**

Many restrictions have been lifted in recent days so we are finally able to meet as an organisation; so I look forward to seeing those of you who can attend our General Meeting this Wednesday, June 17<sup>th</sup> at the RSL Club at 6pm. Unfortunately, we cannot enjoy a drink and a meal together that night as the club is not open for trading until this Friday.

We will of course obey the social distancing requirements and urge all attending to use the sanitising stations provided.

Much has happened in the last four months – I won't recant all the COVID-19 dramas as I think we all know what has happened in our society. We are not out of it yet and many of our members and other local businesses are still feeling the pressure of low (or zero) revenue so please buy local when you can.

In the background we have been busy advocating for local and regional businesses at all levels with frequent videoconferences with TCCI and the Minister for Small Business Sarah Courtney and her staff. The Minister has done a great job supporting Tasmanian businesses; she and Premier Gutwein are to be commended upon their efforts and tireless work. So too the federal government which has had an even tougher job; did they get everything right? No – but in the timeframe to react and implement I feel they did a pretty good job and the low death toll and support mechanisms for business are testament to that.

The crunch is coming in around three months when JobKeeper is phased out, JobSeeker drops to half when the COVID allowance ends and the banks end the "mortgage holiday – all around the same time! I have written to the Treasurer Josh Frydenberg urging him to extend the JobKeeper allowance to those industries yet to recover, specifically tourism, hospitality, entertainment and retail. Without interstate tourists, cruise ships and mainland businesspeople coming here these sectors are very fragile and we may lose some businesses forever.

As advised in last month's report we received a grant from Dept of State Growth and Justin McErlain and his team has been developing an e-commerce platform to provide online stores for small businesses and market stall holders to assist them in getting through COVID-19. The setup of a store is free of charge due to the grant funds.

Just today we have released the "go-live" version of the *Cradle Coast Online Market* and are now actively working with vendors to build online stores. We will be working closely with DCCI and local market operators in all coastal municipalities to get their members online. Justin and his team have created an attractive and powerful platform and we look forward to building out the merchant base then launching it to the region.

Many smaller businesses do not have a lot of IT capabilities and the task of going online can be quite daunting. We are partnering with Switch Tasmania using the federal government ASBAS digital solutions program to provide up to eight hours of free assistance to get merchants on-board and to advise on how to manage their online store and maximise the benefits of being on the platform. We will be sending out an Expression of Interest request in the next week or two so if you would like to sell your goods or services please let us know and we can open your online store.

I hope you are able to join us at the meeting as we will provide a brief look at the system.

Our regional brand suffered a lot due to the outbreak of the virus and the closure of our hospitals. I am working with Brand Tasmania to develop a strategy to rebuild our brand. We will be competing with other regions around Australia to attract new workforce members to relocate here for the many infrastructure projects in the pipeline, and need you to complete this short [survey](#) to assist us in this exercise.

The Minister for Energy, Guy Barnett gave our Executive Group an update on the Renewable Energy Action Plan last Friday which was very interesting - it was great to hear yesterday that the PM has the Marinus project in his top three projects to be accelerated as it is the key to Tasmania's economy in coming decades.

Finally, I expect our breakfast sessions to start again in July and am working on establishing a list of quality speakers now restrictions have lifted.

Until next month – please stay safe.



**Ian Jones**

President

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