

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT – 19<sup>th</sup> February 2024

The last few weeks have been quite turbulent for the Tasmanian business community.

The closure of the Avebury mine at Zeehan has had a major impact on the West Coast with around 200 workers losing their jobs and maybe waiting for some time for back wages. The price of nickel has gone from \$28,000 to \$16,000/t in just twelve months. Avebury and other nickel miners such as BHP are all under pressure to close down with cheap nickel flooding the market from Indonesia where it is mined in atrocious work conditions.

On Monday Bega announced the imminent closure of the Beta Milk processing plant on Old Surrey Road with the loss of 23 jobs. Beta has been an icon in Burnie for almost 70 years when it started as a cooperative of dairy farmers and ultimately sold to TasFoods in 2019. Soon we will see B-double milk tankers going from Circular Head to Lenah Valley for processing then onto a different truck to get back to local supermarket shelves. What a waste of diesel and a huge imposition on our highways.



Last week Premier Rockliff announced an election for March 23<sup>rd</sup>. Most believe that the expansion to 35 seats will result in a large "cross bench" with up to nine members leaving a difficult choice for either Liberal or ALP leaders to form a minority government. Business craves stability and we may have a prolonged period of instability as the "dust settles".

Giovanna Simpson, a member of our Executive has nominated as a Liberal candidate, and we wish her all the best for the election.

Our cruise ship season continues on, with another twelve more scheduled. The TasPorts' pilot strike caused the *Norwegian Spirit* to cancel its visit with local businesses losing thousands of dollars because of it. One can only hope when the pilots get their pay increase, they spend up big locally. If the strike had lasted for all of February it would have meant a \$1m revenue hit to the region.

Recently I was part of the re-opening of *The Makers* at the UTAS Cradle Coast campus at West Park. The revitalised facility houses the staff of the Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture (TIA) and a series of glass walled labs plus the Tech Innovation Hub displaying 3D printers, drone technology and other hi-tech systems. Another area is set aside for the creation of a business incubator and Business Northwest is working closely with UTAS to develop a working incubator where we can encourage entrepreneurs to establish themselves and help them grow.



UTAS will be conducting regular events so the public can view what is happening in the centre. Last week InVent (UTAS Innovation Ventures) hosted an entrepreneurship meeting featuring a panel discussion with Alchlymia Distillery, Mt Gnomon Farm and Tasmanian Biotech. The next event is in March (date TBC) and relates to advanced manufacturing – we will put out notices of this via email and social media once the tickets are available.



We resumed our breakfast networking sessions last week with a huge 38-person crowd to hear Stacey Joseph of TCCI. Next week (28/2) we have Jim Cavaye, former UTAS Pro Vice Chancellor speaking to us about the great projects that *Burnie Works* is undertaking. *West North West Working* is one sub-group that is doing great things across the region and has been busy working on helping the Avebury workforce get through this very difficult period whilst also conducting a driver mentoring program for young unemployed people.

In closing; our February General Meeting is tomorrow, Wednesday **February 21<sup>st</sup> at 6pm at** the Burnie RSL Club. I hope to see you there and maybe we can enjoy a drink and a meal afterwards.

Best regards

**Ian Jones** – President

<b>PLATINUM MEMBERS</b>					
<b>GOLD MEMBERS:</b>					
<b>SILVER MEMBERS:</b>					
<b>BRONZE MEMBERS:</b>					