

MEDIA RELEASE
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Coast 'think tank' to consider role of community engagement

Renowned academics Associate Professor Leo Bowman of Queensland University of Technology (QUT) and Dr Sam Wilson of the Swinburne Leadership Institute in Melbourne will lead the charge in considering the importance of leadership and community engagement on the Sunshine Coast when they present at an upcoming 'think tank' event being hosted in Marcoola on Monday, 21 March.

The event – hosted by the Sunshine Coast Business Council – will bring together special interest groups and academics as well as media, development industry and council representatives to discuss a range of issues affecting the quality of community engagement on the Sunshine Coast region.

Sunshine Coast Business Council Chair Sandy Zubrinich said the upcoming event was one of a series of 'think tanks' that consider how to strike the right balance between development, growth and the environment.

"This particular series is delving into the benefits effective community engagement presents to the community and regional councils, as well as the role of the media in informing public debate," Ms Zubrinich said.

"When we first set about planning these think tank sessions, community engagement was identified as one crucial area requiring further discussion amongst our key stakeholder groups."

"As the Sunshine Coast continues to grow in terms of the economy and population, it is clear that both the local government and the development industry need to liaise closely and more effectively with community members to deliver the best possible outcomes for the region as a whole."

"We really need to consider what is currently working well; what aspects of community engagement aren't being implemented effectively at present and what we need to change to ensure the needs of residents, businesses and governments are all met."

Ms Zubrinich said it was important that methods for engaging a broad cross-section of Sunshine Coast locals were identified to ensure the viewpoints of people of all ages and backgrounds were taken into account when planning for the future.

"At present, we tend to see a lot of older people having their say on the issues facing our region, whereas the younger generation appears to be grossly underrepresented," Ms Zubrinich said.

"This trend is particularly concerning when you consider that our young people and their families will ultimately be the ones making use of our infrastructure and environment over the longer term. More needs to be done to ensure these members of our population are given a voice and indeed seek to have an important voice."

Ms Zubrinich said as part of the ‘think tank’ event, Dr Wilson would explore the concept of leadership for the ‘greater good’ as well as the role everyday citizens can play in driving change within their community.

“Dr Wilson is a firm believer that communities need to cultivate a sense of collective responsibility in order to adequately grasp the social and environmental challenges they face. This enables them to combat issues jointly, addressing tensions between private and public interests and the interests of present and future generations.”

“I have no doubt his presentation will be very insightful and well received by attendees, who have indicated their understanding of the need to work together in developing positive outcomes that safeguard the long-term environmental, social and economic prosperity of our region.”

Ms Zubrinich said in addition to Dr Wilson’s address, attendees would also hear from the Sunshine Coast Environment Council, Development Watch, Sunshine Coast Council, Noosa Council and a range of media representatives including Associate Professor Bowman — Head of Discipline, Journalism Media and Communications at QUT — over the course of the morning.

“Judging by the success of our 2015 ‘think tank’ series and the agreed actions which are still being pursued, I believe this event will generate a lot of positive discussion and hopefully some positive conclusions for improving the outcomes of community engagement and ultimately contributing to protecting the prosperity, diversity and richness of the Sunshine Coast region.”

To find out more about the Sunshine Coast Business Council and its calendar of events, please visit www.scbusinesscouncil.com.au.

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