

DECEMBER 2020

CHAIR'S ANNUAL REPORT

2020. What a year. Going in we were expecting a good year in terms of the national and regional economies. By the end of the March Quarter our expectations were starting to be challenged by Covid-19, yet still unknown. By the end of the June Quarter and the end of FY 19/20 – our expectations of the future had been reshaped and recast.

However enough said, we all know what has transpired over the past six months and on the positive side, Covid-19 created an unexpected benefit of driving Digital Transformation in industries such as Health and Education forward at a speed that would not have been achieved otherwise. Forward thinking businesses have taken the opportunity to reinvent their business model to survive and thrive.

What I would like to focus on is the silver lining and the things we would like to see addressed and changed to assist the regional economy and job growth. Things such as:

- Accelerating decisions around future transport strategies. There are a few major balls in the air at present and clarification is required by mid- 2021 on just what modes are recommended and why. Then and only then can three-tiers of government hope to get the community on board supporting the recommended and budgeted transport strategy. It is largely the responsibility of State Government to get to this point with input from other tiers and the community. Anything less is just going to continue to widen the divide that has happened.
- Leading from the point above, it is time for the Sunshine Coast Council (SCC) to engage in an effective community engagement plan explaining their thinking around the proposed mass transit corridor and positives and negatives of density versus sprawl. Life and urban planning is about trade-offs and not enough constructive effort has been invested in explaining and defending transport and density strategies. If there is strategy that can be supported, then Council needs to better explain and defend the strategy and seek industry's support in doing so. Currently we are not seeing that being executed effectively.
- Another area that needs to mature is the ability to assess and agree on the big projects and their priorities and to agree and work together to fund and implement major projects and then move on to the next priority. It is time to acknowledge that funding and investment constraints mean we need to be smarter in prioritising and advancing projects to get meaningful outcomes for the region.
- Maybe it is time to start the discussion that SCC considers the merits (or not) of moving to the Noosa Council model where councillors are expected to make decisions in the best interest of the whole of the Noosa Council area both now and into the future.

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Whereas currently the Sunshine Coast councillors are expected to make decisions that benefit their divisions as well as the whole Sunshine Coast region, This is a subtle but critical difference and arguably encourages Sunshine Coast councillors to put the interest of their division above the interest of the whole of the Sunshine Coast region. Maybe it is time to consider which model provides the best outcome for the region as a whole.

- 2021 is a time to continue to build cohesion within the region: working together effectively, addressing social issues, working as a pack to improve social housing and homelessness in the region and to encourage people into work rather than seeing Job Seeker as the only option.

These are all challenging issues to tackle but the time seems to be right in the spirit of doing things smarter and getting better outcomes for the future. I think we are up to it as a region and many of our members indicate they want to see the big issues tackled. Roll on 2021 and we will again rely on our members getting involved to contribute to advancing some of the big regional issues.

The year in review

Covid-19 restricted what membership-based groups could achieve in terms of events and revenue generation. SCBC held two small paid events and three free forums. This has significantly impacted the first 6 months of the 2020/21 budget and we will attempt to hold several paying events in the six months January – June 2021 as we work towards achieving our projected revenue targets.

Events

SCBC Annual Strategy Workshop - held on 12 March when over 40 members and stakeholders joined in discussion on the regional economy with an emphasis on the Sunshine Coast Mass Transit Interim Report and the North Coast Connect Business Case.

Meet the Mayoral Candidates Forum – was held directly after the strategy workshop on 12 March and provided SCBC members and stakeholders an opportunity to hear from regional candidates running for the 2020 council elections.

Deb Frecklington MP, Leader of the Liberal National Party and Shadow

Minister for Trade – webinar held on 20 July so members could hear views from the Leader of the Opposition regarding the state of the Queensland economy and how her government would approach economic recovery should they be elected. Included a Q & A session.

Lunch with Queensland Senator Gerard Rennick – held at the USC which provided an opportunity for the Senator to tour the university and to meet with university and business leaders over lunch. Discussion topics included small business, tax and IR reform and the Job-Ready Graduate Package.

Forums

Covid-19 Industry & Government briefing sessions – Five Zoom meetings were held between May and September 2020. Three tiers of government and councils were represented and approximately 10 industry leaders were involved over the five sessions. The objective of the sessions was to operate as a connected and informed regional leadership team to understand the impact of Covid-19 on regional economic growth and jobs.

The benefit was that industry leaders were able to brief all relevant political leaders at the same time and provide their evidence-based views on the performance and risks to industry from the pandemic.

A pipeline of major projects was prepared by SCBC with input from three tiers of government and industry leaders to guide discussions on large projects and ascertain the risks to the pipeline in terms of investment being withdrawn or delayed and impact to projects and therefore jobs associated with each project.

Digital Transformation – forum held in July as a follow up to the two events (conference and workshop) held in 2019. July forum topics included an update of the international submarine cable, digital assets coming off the cable and its last mile, digital lessons from Covid-19 for both the health and education industries as well as digital opportunities in agribusiness and cyber security.

Cyber Security Market Sounding Feedback Session - held in November to bring together participants to a market sounding project aimed at establishing the strength of the Cyber Security capability in the Sunshine Coast region. The aim was to ascertain next steps and the level of commitment by industry participants to work together to further develop the industry. It is expected this work will continue in 2021.

Annual Combined Government & Business Forum – held in October with 65 participants representing Federal, State and Local Government as well as SCBC members and stakeholders. The theme for the forum was 'Playing to our Strengths' and was opened by Jennifer Westacott, CEO Business Council of Australia.

Brochures and select speaker presentations are available on the website for events and forums. <https://scbusinesscouncil.com.au/forum.events/>

Delivering on SCBC advocacy and research focus

SCBC undertook a market sounding exercise between August – October 2020 to establish the strength of the cyber security footprint in the Sunshine Coast Region as a fact base to plan for any significant growth as a regional capability. RDA Sunshine Coast Inc. partnered with SCBC to fund the exercise and an external and out-of-region and unbiased cyber security specialist was engaged to undertake the work.

The study found that the regional cyber security was small but sufficiently established to develop into a stronger regional capability providing existing industry participants were committed to supporting and driving the momentum forward.

Media

SCBC worked again with Fresh PR & Marketing to consistently to take our messages to the broader community with:

- Around 239 relevant mentions in media
- 21 media distributions
- 5 on-site TV interviews and more radio interviews
- Media coverage included:
 - Local government election
 - Economic outlook
 - Impact of Covid-19 on the regional economy

- Impact of state border closures
- Federal government stimulus
- Unemployment
- Job creation
- Submarine Broadband Cable
- Digitalisation
- State election
- Infrastructure including Mass Transit Interim Report and North Coast Connect
- Unified vision and collaboration amongst business, government and community leaders

Focus in 2021

It's an election free year so we will kick off the year in early February with the annual Strategy Workshop. We plan to use this to gauge members appetite to initiate discussion around the topics introduced at the beginning of the Chair's Report (page 1).

We will keep true to our charter and continue to prosecute the case for:

- Job creation across industries
- Delivering on regional strategies that make a real and long-term difference
- Advocating for the sequencing of projects to seek investment
- Next generation planning scheme and ensuring its ability to support REDS and sustainable economic growth.

Summary

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the following:

- Our members for their continued and active support during the year.
- Patron Sponsor - TAFE Queensland East Coast for their continued sponsorship in 2019.
- Business partners – Lend Lease, Sekisui House, Stockland and Sunshine Coast Airport who provide significant support throughout the year.
- Event and research sponsors - RDA Sunshine Coast Inc. and the University of the Sunshine Coast.
- In-kind members for their contributions which lessens the financial burden on SCBC: BDO, Life Digital, Telstra and Fresh PR & Marketing.
- Kerrie Bryant-Adams and Barrie Adams who work tirelessly as a team to make a difference.

I would also like to thank the regional Federal and State members and Local Government councillors who have supported the Business Council throughout the year.

I warmly acknowledge our Board Members who give their time, energy and experience to work to make the Sunshine Coast a stronger economy and good place to live and invest.

On behalf of the board, I would like to thank Will Wilson who retired from the board during the year and welcome Ms Nicola Scott to the 2021 SCBC board.

Merry Christmas and all the best for a prosperous and successful 2020.