

Simplifying business red tape



By Chris Faulks
Chief Executive Officer

The Canberra Business Council, along with its affiliate the NSW Business Chamber, has been lobbying governments to cut back and simplify business red tape.

Most recently, the Canberra Business Council met with the Federal Minister for Small Business, Independent Contractors and the Service Economy and Minister Assisting the Finance Minister on Deregulation, the Hon Dr Craig Emerson, and discussed issues of major importance to small business in Canberra.

Despite a focus by both the federal and NSW governments to reduce and rationalise red-tape and regulation, businesses report they are still experiencing cumbersome compliance obligations. For every regulatory impost being pruned, additional ones have been applied in new areas of regulatory control. Tax compliance costs remain a major area of concern for small business. At the very least the Canberra Business Council is seeking a government commitment to a 'one-in one-out' policy for regulation.

The Council stressed to Minister Emerson that, while small business operates in the same commercial, economic and legal environment as larger businesses, policies must allow for the different needs and capacities of smaller enterprises.

In addition, ACT businesses that operate across state borders are faced with different rules in each state, sometimes duplicated by national regulation. The Canberra Business Council conveyed its strong support of the harmonisation of inconsistent and overlapping business regulation and red tape to Minister Emerson. While this problem area was targeted for reform by COAG two years ago, there hasn't been a great deal of progress. In the meantime the OECD found that Australia was the world's worst performer with respect to regulatory harmonisation.

High speed rail

Momentum for a high speed rail link between Canberra and Sydney is gathering. The Canberra Business Council believes that a high speed rail link between Canberra and Sydney will be of enormous economic benefit to Canberra and to businesses, small and large, in the region. The Sydney–Canberra link (with a terminal at Canberra airport) remains the logical first step in a larger network. One of the Council's members has just returned from the high speed rail congress held in Amsterdam in March this year and attended by experts from many countries with high speed rail services.

Next steps

There would be no value in undertaking yet another feasibility study. High speed rail has been studied in Australia since 1986. The key question to be resolved is how the network will be funded.

The Canberra Business Council has recommended that the new entity Infrastructure Australia, should

- adopt a policy position that high speed rail has a role to play in Australia's transport in the future,
- commission a study on how (not if) high speed rail should be funded. Specifically, the study should consider the roles and contributions of the public and private sectors in developing the system and should examine the range of financing models used overseas.
- following completion of the funding study, the Government should seek competitive proposals for the construction and operation of the Sydney–Canberra line as the first stage of the network.

Events not to be missed

Finally, in the next few months, the Canberra Business Council has a great line-up of events and guest speakers which are not to be missed.

Upcoming CBC events:

Wed 7 May: ACT Budget breakfast
7:00 am- 9:00 am National Press Club
Guest speaker:
ACT Chief Minister, Mr Jon Stanhope MLA

Wed 14 May: Federal Budget breakfast
7:00 am-9:00 am Parliament House
Guest speakers:
Minister for Finance and Deregulation, the Hon Lindsay Tanner MP, Shadow Minister for Finance, Competition Policy and Deregulation, the Hon Peter Dutton MP, and business commentator, Mr Robert Gottliebsen

For more information and bookings, contact: Kate Holland on 6247 4199 or kate.holland@canberrabusinesscouncil.com.au



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