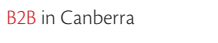
CANBERRA BUSINESS COUNCIL

Principal Members



Affiliated with

Business priorities for the next ACT Government

By Chris Faulks
Chief Executive Officer

Canberrans go to the polls on 18 October 2008 to elect the next ACT Government.

The choice of elected representatives and the policies they espouse will be critical to the ACT's ability to drive sustainable development over the next four years and ride out the economic uncertainty and instability that lies ahead.

Canberra Business Council (CBC), with input from ACT businesses, has presented to the major political parties a list of priorities for business for the next ACT Government.

Small business environment

Small business is the powerhouse of the ACT economy. Of the 24,000 businesses in the ACT, 90 per cent employ less than 20 people. Small business provides more than half of the ACT's private sector employment.

CBC would like to see the next ACT Government truly recognise the importance of small business to the ACT economy by giving priority to establishing a framework that is supportive of small business; which encourages innovation, risk-taking and investment by the private sector; minimises 'red tape', compliance and taxation and builds a distinctive competitive advantage to doing business in the ACT.

Other state governments have been investing in the small business sector for years because they understand that it is an investment in the future growth and sustainability of their economies. Victoria's 2006 Small Business Statement, for example, included a commitment of $42m to reduce the red tape burden by 25 percent over five years and a range of other policies to support small business.

Canberra Business Council urges the incoming ACT Government to develop and properly resource a comprehensive Small Business Strategy, including initiatives to:

- cut the cost of doing business by reducing business taxes and costs including indexing the threshold for payroll tax each year in line with wages growth;
- reduce the time businesses need to spend on compliance;
- assist businesses to plan their workforce needs and access appropriate skills development and training opportunities for staff;
- showcase and celebrate small business success in the ACT and Capital region through a 'Business Month' similar to *Business September*, NSW's small business month of events;
- facilitate business growth, investment and export;
- ensure small businesses are paid promptly by Government;
- make it easier for small businesses to sell products and services to government (new government procurement policies to assist small businesses).

Tourism

Tourism is a $1 billion industry in the ACT which employs 13,000 people. Tourism, particularly business and education tourism, has enormous potential to drive the ACT economy.

CBC has called on the next ACT Government to reinstate and increase *ACT Government investment in tourism promotion* and to work in partnership with the Commonwealth Government to develop an *integrated tourism strategy* for the National Capital. The *Event Development Program* should be expanded to incorporate two other major festivals or events throughout the year apart from *Floriade*. The next ACT Government should also establish a permanent site or sites for *Floriade* to allow that event to develop and expand and begin to develop the infrastructure for the *International Gardens and Arboretum*.

Infrastructure and sustainability

A number of infrastructure projects have been identified by the CBC as high priorities for the next ACT Government. These include marking the '*The Centenary of Canberra*' by leaving a legacy for Canberrans in the form of an iconic infrastructure project; continuing to promote and support the business case for a *Light Rail* network as part of an integrated public transport system for Canberra; a new *Convention Centre*; improved roads linking the national capital with the surrounding region; securing water, energy and telecommunications infrastructure and lobbying the Commonwealth Government to lead and co-ordinate the development of *High Speed Rail* as a major east-coast infrastructure project.

To view or download a copy of Canberra Business Council's *Strategies for Growth and Sustainability - Business Policy Priorities for the Next ACT Government* (August 2008) go to www.canberrabusinesscouncil.com.au

Upcoming events

14 October – OH&S Seminar
4.00pm – 6.00pm
Topic: Safety Compliance – As Easy as ABC
Guest Speaker: OH&S Commissioner Mark McCabe and David Segrott – Australian Health and Safety Services

6 November – Canberra Times Business Series
12.30pm-2.00pm
Guest Speaker: Dr Michael Schaper – ACCC Small Business Commissioner

For details and registration go to www.canberrabusinesscouncil.com.au or phone Kate on 2647 4199