



CANBERRA  
BUSINESS COUNCIL

# Canberra Business Council: thirty years strong



By Chris Faulks  
Chief Executive Officer

This year marks the 30 year anniversary of Canberra Business Council. The Council began as the Committee of 22 in February 1979 later becoming the Canberra Association for Regional Development (CARD) in September 1980 and then Canberra Business Council (CBC) in 1991.

**F**rom the outset Canberra Business Council has had a strong regional focus and actively fostered economic development for the benefit of the community.

In those days, Canberra was a much smaller place. Michael Hodgman was the minister for the Capital Territory and Malcolm Fraser was prime minister. In its time, Canberra Business Council has seen five prime ministers of Australia and five chief ministers of the ACT.

Thirty years on, 2009 is likely be the most challenging period that the ACT and Capital Region has faced for a long time.

Access Economics's report released on 19 January predicted 7.5% unemployment and recession for Australia in 2009 and an unemployment rate of 5.4% in the ACT by 2010. The latest unemployment rate for the ACT (Dec 2008) is 2.6%. To put this into perspective, over the last 30 years the ACT has had unemployment rates of 5.6% in 1999, 4.3% in 1989 and 5.6% in 1979.

The capital region economy is as subject to variations in the fortunes of its primary economic base as any other region in Australia. One of the largest contributors to this regional economy is the Australian Government.

The Australian Government has the capacity through its employment policies and purchasing power to ameliorate the impact of the economic downturn on the ACT and surrounding region. Public sector jobs account for over 40 per cent of employment in the ACT and surrounding region and many ACT businesses rely heavily, for their survival, on supplying services and products into the public sector. The Australian Government can have a positive impact on minimising unemployment and business closures in the ACT simply by continuing to procure services and products from the private sector and not cutting public sector employment.

Investment in infrastructure is another way for governments to minimise the impact of an economic downturn while improving productivity and building for a low carbon future. The Council believes the time is right for consideration of a truly national low-carbon transport project in high speed rail along the east coast of Australia from Melbourne to Brisbane via Canberra, Sydney and Newcastle.

Sustainable public transport will also be a key to the low-carbon future of our cities and light rail, as part of a fully-integrated public transport system for Canberra, can provide the national capital with an opportunity to demonstrate the way toward that future. Water and energy security, including solar energy, are two other

crucial infrastructure components of the ACT's sustainable future.

Encouraging innovation is the third plank for positioning the ACT for growth beyond the current economic downturn. Canberra Business Council encourages the Australian and the ACT governments to establish an environment where the public and private sectors work together to encourage innovation and secure our competitive advantage.

Finally, clever employers will do whatever they can to retain their skilled staff – their most valuable asset for growth when the economic downturn passes.

In the 30 years of the CBC, the times of economic growth and prosperity for the ACT have far outweighed times of economic downturn. In the times ahead, we need to work together to ensure that any downturn is minimised so that Canberra and the capital region can continue as a vibrant economic centre for the next 30 years.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### February 10

Recession Proofing Your Business Forum

Time: 6.30pm – 8.30pm

Venue: Orion Room, 92 – 96 Corinna St, Southern Cross Club, Woden

Cost: \$25 per person

### February 25

EFIC Presentation Luncheon

Guest Speaker: Colin George, Export Finance & Insurance Corporation

*How will I finance my export operations and how will I get paid?*

Time: 12.00pm – 2.00pm

Venue: Murrumbidgee & Black Mountain Room, Hyatt Hotel

Cost: \$25 members, \$35 non members

### March 4

Speed Connect. – Networking

Time: 5.00pm – 7.00pm

Venue: Federation Ballroom Hyatt Hotel

Cost: \$35 members

\$45 non members

*Proudly sponsored by: B2B in Canberra magazine and eWAY*

Registration for all events:

[www.canberrabusinesscouncil.com.au](http://www.canberrabusinesscouncil.com.au)

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