

## President's Report - December 2016

The Geelong Chamber of Commerce continues to go from strength to strength.

Our membership has grown by a net 30 per cent in the last three years and we now have 900 members, who employ a third of Geelong's workforce.

This strong, sustainable position does not come without the loyalty of you, our members. Thank you for your continued support of the Chamber.

Nor does our compelling position come without hard work.

I'd like to thank my fellow Directors - all volunteers - and the Chamber CEO Bernadette Uzelac and her team for their skills, knowledge and support provided throughout the year.

I stand on the shoulders of many giants!

For the Geelong Chamber of Commerce, 2016 was a year of delivering in our role as the "voice of business".

We made numerous submissions on behalf of our members and the broader business community, including over the future use of Point Henry, Bay West, reforms to the Local Government Act and Small Business Regulation and Infrastructure Victoria's 30-year Vision.

In late November, Bernadette and I travelled to Canberra where we met with several senior Federal Government Ministers and key industry leaders to expand relationships and advocate for the businesses of the Geelong region.

Meetings included ACCI CEO James Pearson, Deputy Small Business Ombudsman Dr Chris Latham, Federal Small Business Minister Michael McCormack, Regional Development Minister Fiona Nash and Assistant Minister for Innovation, Industry and Science Craig Laundry.

In part, we shared some preliminary findings of our 2016 Geelong Business Trends Survey, which was undertaken in partnership with the Deakin Business School. The Government was extremely interested to see our survey reflect strong levels of optimism within our business community for 2017.

We also provided the government with an update on the success of our Federally-funded Small Business Smart Business program through which we hosted 56 sessions and attended by more than 800 participants this year.

Late last month the Chamber was also invited to present at the Australian Small Business Advisory Services Conference in Sydney – great recognition for the SBSB team.

Our Powercor Geelong Business Excellence Awards went from strength to strength in 2016 with 21 category winners and many more finalists.

Next year's Awards are shaping up to be bigger and better, with new categories being introduced and other innovations being implemented.

With innovation and effective member representation in mind, the Chamber undertook the significant step last month of rebranding for the first time in our 162 year history.

Embracing a new identity was a major project delivered on a shoestring budget, and Bernadette and her team worked hard to deliver a smooth, seamless transition away from the previous brand.

Through the Chamber's networking activities and grassroots connections with members, we are in a position to take the 'pulse' of the business sector and we act as a conduit to voice their issues and represent their perspective to government, media and the broader community.

We work in a cooperative way with all sides of politics and many other stakeholders across our region, to create an environment which promotes economic development and job creation.

If you like what we do, and you know of any business who is not a member of the Chamber, do encourage them to join us and be part of our important community.

2017 is shaping up to be a terrific year, and we can't wait to share it with you.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

**'Til next year!**

**Kylie Warne**

