

### Central Australian Economic Development Forum 8 November 2005

#### Summary Assessment of Key Issues Arising

The following is a summary assessment of the key issues arising out of the Central Australian Economic Development Forum.

#### ***Employment***

Forum delegates expressed the following views:

- Businesses experience problems in the availability of potential staff including skilled workers. Nevertheless the strong preference is for the labour supply to come from the local population rather than skilled migration (from outside the region). Lifestyle is important to retaining young people in the region.
- The Indigenous population with its permanent residency currently represents a large under-utilised and largely unskilled source of workers. This population could potentially supply significantly more staff and skilled workers in the medium to long term. The challenge is how to involve more Indigenous people in the labour force with the particular emphasis being on “real jobs”. Key suggestions included primary and secondary schooling on communities, job training, and employment agreements with companies for work on larger projects. Innovative approaches and models are sought in relevant industries eg private mineral exploration where Indigenous staff could contribute knowledge of country. More good news stories are sought.

#### ***Indigenous business enterprises***

Forum delegates expressed the following views:

- The existing land tenure is perceived to constrain entrepreneurial investments and the ability of Indigenous people to leverage off the land resources on Indigenous lands. Associated with this business environment constraint is the quality of planning, governance and operations in the twenty or so community townships.
- A significant level of investment by Indigenous organisations already exists in business enterprises around Alice Springs. Concern was raised though that these provide relatively few jobs for Indigenous people.
- The level of Indigenous business management skills is a constraint.

#### ***Infrastructure***

Forum delegates expressed the following views:

- The transport infrastructure (including airline capacity) in the region is limited.
- The benefits for regional businesses achieved from some telecommunications developments were noteworthy. New technologies in telecommunications have considerable potential to make big differences to both regional businesses and to community and social relationships.

#### ***Industry opportunities***

Forum delegates expressed the following views:

- A number of industry opportunities were identified including film making and Indigenous Arts.
- Innovation and technology were seen as opening new industry opportunities in the region. Examples raised included a range of solar and solar housing technology opportunities and organic beef production in the pastoral industry.

## ***Business opportunities***

Forum delegates expressed the following views:

- The role and impact of government taxes and regulations were not viewed as significant constraints to doing business in the region. An adjustment of the remote area zone rebate (by the Australian Government) would be beneficial to the region. In terms of NT legislation some specific shortcomings were mentioned eg children acting in films. In a more general context the moves towards Statehood were seen as positive for business.
- The comparative strengths of regional businesses appear to be not well understood. Associated with this may be the difficulties experienced in gaining and keeping contracts (particularly with the larger projects and companies) for the local supply of various goods and services.
- The opportunity for improving business performance through the adoption of a Triple Bottom Line approach was advocated.