

Speech to Business Forum

5:00 PM Monday, 21st July 2014

Oatlands RSL, Albert St, Oatlands

On behalf of the Southern Midlands Council I would like to welcome you to this Southern Midlands Business forum *Harnessing the Potential*. Mayor Bisdee extends his apologies for the beginning of this forum, and business leader Clair McShane also extends her apologies. My name is Alex Green, and I am a Councillor with the Southern Midlands Council, and also Chair of the Heritage Highway Tourism Region Association, and an independent Director on the board of Destination Southern Tasmania, the peak Tourism body for Southern Tasmania.

Last year Tasmania broke through the 1 million visitor mark for the first time. The number of Chinese visiting doubled to 18,900. Visitor growth to parts of regional Tasmania has also increased – East Coast 20%, North 12% and Cradle Coast 10%. The State Government has set a target of 1.5 million visitors by 2020, a 50% increase over the next six years. If this is achieved, a significant opportunity is presented to the Southern Midlands.

Where are we now with tourist visitation? Regions other than those mentioned above have seen less dramatic results. Visitors to the Heritage Highway region, which includes the Southern Midlands has increased by 2.2% compared to the same period last year. Visitor numbers to our region, however, are 20,000 fewer than 2010-2011. Before we become too alarmed, these figures are from the Tasmanian Visitor Survey, and are indicative only and based on a limited sample. But I am sure most businesses would agree that there are fewer visitors around now than when compared to the last few years.

Southern Midlands Council is committed to assisting businesses benefit from the surge in visitor numbers to Tasmania. Council is in the process of announcing an Events and Festivals Working Group to develop a plan for attracting and enabling more activities to attract intra-state and inter-state visitors to our region. There is a surfeit of excellent facilities well-suited for

festivals and events in the Southern Midlands, and our central location provides a strong competitive advantage over other communities.

With the recently completed Midlands Economic Development and Land Use Study key tourism infrastructure issues were identified, and Council hopes to progress these initiatives over the coming months.

Council is also supporting the implementation of the regional Destination Marketing Plan, including the appointment of a regional Industry Development Officer to assist businesses with training, IT integration, marketing and related activities. The regional organisation is also committed to assisting industry become *Asia Ready*.

Chinese President Xi Jinping has indicated he may visit Tasmania following the G20 meeting in Brisbane this upcoming November. Following the Chinese President will be hundreds of Asian journalists and media outlets. Tasmania will receive unprecedented media exposure, and potentially tens of thousands of prospective visitors. If President Xi Jinping visits, we need to be ready to maximise the benefits to our region.

Developing new products, new attractions, renewing the existing suite of products and attractions, and promoting the region effectively are all essential if we are to gain from the increase in visitors to Tasmania. Working co-operatively, business, Council and the community can ensure this opportunity is converted to reality.

It is important to focus on promoting our regions' unique strengths and advantages. There are some fields we cannot compete in. We can, however, draw strength and inspiration from our location, our heritage, our produce and our people.

I am pleased to introduce Troy Bennett of Bennett's Petroleum. From a fuel distribution business founded in 1977, Bennett's has expanded into retail fuel sales across at least ten sites in southern Tasmania employing over 130 people. Troy has very kindly agreed to provide some insights into the drivers of success in his business – and potentially yours.

The Successful Dynamics of a Rural Enterprise – the Bennett Family Story