

MILDURA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE (MCC)

2008 PRESIDENTS REPORT:

What a year it has been; both for the MCC and our regional community.

We all went through many up's and down's; some with successful outcomes and others with disappointments.

What can be really said about the Mildura Chamber of Commerce over the past few months is that the Chamber is alive, but not functioning very well.

I should at this point thank the executive for their efforts, both in time and ideas, in attending to administration and operational matters to allow the MCC to apply for grants, to represent the interests of its members, and to be an advocate for the economic and social needs (fabric) of our business community.

I would like to specially thank Cosimo Cirillo (In-House IT Services) who, in many cases, singularly managed very complex and time consuming activities so that the MCC continues to conform to its governance constraints and expectations.

In the same vain a special thanks must go to Paula Mastrippolito (Australian Business Facilitators) who provided services to the MCC so that the MCC were able to seek and be engaged in two externally funded projects; one which we were successful in getting funds for based around '*Merbein Shop Locally*', and the other we are waiting notification of success (or not) from the Federal Government which is based on the provision of small business – mentoring – advocacy services to the great Mildura business area (one that would also include some financial support for a more permanent Mildura of Commerce Executive Officer)

During the past twelve months the MCC has been involved in a number of inter-related activities including:

- Providing commentary to local television, radio and written media agencies on various regional business issues including horticultural family business collapses, transportation, renewable energy industries, water allocation and pricing, retail business development, 'the water front', industrial relations
- Creating stronger and more workable relationships with other statutory or quasi-government business agencies including the City Heart Traders
- Seeking external funds for the provision of enhanced mentoring and advocacy services to local SME's

- Liaising with other local or intrastate employer or professional associations so as to use their networks to enhance the MCC ability to provide valuable services to its members, and
- Conducting and operating the MCC on a very tight 'shoe string' budget and in a way so that additional burden (especially financial and economical) is not further transferred to our members.

What I can honestly report to you, our members, is that the Mildura Chamber of Commerce has been somewhat successful in its operations, has been somewhat true to its mission, and has somewhat provided suitable services under its charter.

What has tested of the MCC in its ability to properly 'do its job' is a number of constraining (and still on-going) economic and social factors including

- Major reviews (including restructuring and source financing) of two key economic agencies in Mildura; both inter-related with the charter of the MCC and the overall sustainability of our region
- Climatic and water resource changes, and their efforts on business and community sustainability,
- An on-going unwillingness by many local small-businesses to be or stay a member of the Mildura Chamber of Commerce, and
- Unpredicted (unplanned, unexpected, unwanted) economic and financial market collapses, and its 'rolling' effect on smaller regional communities, especially social and retailing.

In summary, these and other related issues have contributed to the Mildura Chamber of Commerce having to restrict its potential mentoring and advocacy services to the bare minimum; particularly when its members are unable (or unwilling) to fund or support a wider bases of services and activities, and still maintain a self-preservation (even community preservation) mode of individual business operations.

It should be noted that this outcome is not unique to Mildura as there are many other Australian Chamber of Commerce's or business associations that are seriously considering its future in the light of quickly changing economic and social pressures and changes.

Therefore again I thank, on behalf of our Chamber, all executive and general members who have been willing to 'get their hands dirty, and attempted to keep the functional and sustainable values of our Chamber present in our own community.

So where to now, for 2009 and onwards.

Before you at the AGM will be four key motions, being:

- Put the Mildura of Commerce into a 'shelf mode, with a caretaker executive until such time that it is deemed suitable (practicable) for the to be 'reinvigorated' and engage more fully in its charter
- Be an agent of VECCI and seek new members for VECCI, possibly at a reduced fee basis,
- Through the acquiring of limited external funds become a 'cap-stone' advocacy entity that brings together, on a regular basis, various local or state business representative agencies in our region and through a 'think tank' process create common (mutual) strategic economic and social-community directives, or
- Restructure the Mildura of Commerce (through a process of strategic planning sessions) to better reflect 'newer' community representative agency needs and outcomes, to aggressively seek additional funds (members or external) to provide a more permanent advocacy workforce, to increase its financial membership to two-hundred plus members, and to be a more effective and dominant force in the general community, particularly in bringing towards multi-agencies and bodies into fewer but stronger agencies of 'voice'

I will be speaking to each of these motions on the night.

I believe that there is a role (and future) for the Mildura Chamber of Commerce to play in the greater Mildura area (even in these unstable times) providing that the business community is willing to 'stand up and be counted' through becoming active members of the MCC, through allowing their fees to be used to employ the right 'change agents', and lastly, being willing to state their personal and business sustainability views more strongly into the open community.

In the past the Mildura Chamber of Commerce has had a very proud history of 'stirring the pot' within our local business and social community through well-researched and timely statements and outcomes.

With these rapidly changing economic and social times it is even more appropriate for the Mildura Chamber of Commerce to be allowed to continue with that tradition in being an independent agent of change, a spokes-party for the business-person under pressure, and a catalyst for bringing together multi-agencies in our community to work as one, in the one direction, and with mutual outcomes that creates a more sustainable regional community.

I thank you for the opportunity to be your 2008 President, and to provide some guidance and encouragement to preserve the name and tradition of the MCC into the future.

I now leave the future of the Mildura Chamber of Commerce in your hands.

If you wish to discuss any of these issues please email or phone me, either before or after the AGM.

Regards

Jeremy Seward (Esq.) CPA, CD