

### **Our Mission**

To provide strong, reliable leadership and advocacy on matters relevant to business in greater Ballarat.

### **Our Vision**

To be the number one relevant resource for business.

### **b2b 'Business to Ballarat'**

The biannual media campaign focuses on both business-to-business spending and encouraging awareness in the general public of the importance to our city of spending locally. A #ShopBallarat campaign ran across traditional and social media in November and December as well as our annual Christmas Competition. Participants had to spend \$30 at a participating business between November to December to go in the draw to win one of three \$1000 prize packs, more than 1.1k entries were received. This year Santa paid a visit to our sponsors to hear what they love about a Ballarat Christmas and the importance of shopping local. Our #GetYourWinterCoatOn campaign ran across the winter months through traditional and social media marketing, to encourage locals and visitors to get out about to businesses that make "Ballarat Amazing". Thank you to our current b2b Gold sponsors Simplex Insurance Solutions, Sovereign Press, Mercedes-Benz Ballarat, Technology Business Centre Plus IT, Central Victorian Investments, BGT Jobs + Training Ballarat, and Ballarat Removals and Storage.

### **Biznet Breakfast Series**

Our Biznet Breakfast series is held throughout the year, on the first Tuesday of each month (excluding January and November). The breakfasts provide networking opportunities, as well as insights from a broad range of guest speakers on a number of different topics.

Over the past year we have heard from:

2024: June- Tom Clark- Leadership, July- Yual Reath- Journey to the Olympics, August- Jason Clarke- How to change your thinking to become an innovator, September- Luv-a-Duck- Dammit we ducked up!, October- Ballarat Racing Industry- Breakfast with the Stars, December- Ballarat Foundation Christmas Appeal

2025: February- Central Highlands Growers and Producers Hub- Impact of migration on our food culture, March- Fiona Hayes, CEO 7/11, April- Panel – Increase Local Spend in regional and rural areas.

### **Business Weekly**

Weekly newsletter distributed to 1800+ Ballarat businesspeople. All members have the opportunity to promote their news and events within the various sections of the newsletter, including stories, achievements, community events and initiatives your business is involved with. These also feature on the homepage of the Commerce Ballarat website for the week. We are very proud of the reliable source we have become for the business community and our average 39% open rate over the past twelve months (average industry open rate 24.35%).

### **Business Awards 2024/5**

The partnership between Commerce Ballarat and Federation University continues to grow stronger with time, serving as a highlight for our business community. We extend our gratitude to Federation University, especially Professor Duncan Bentley and the dedicated team. The awards provide a unique occasion for businesses to assess and refine their performance. In 2024, participation remained robust, engaging over 1823 business professionals. In 2025 we are introducing two new awards: the AssistU Accessibility and Inclusion Award and the Western Bulldogs Community Spirit People's Choice Award. We thank Judges and Mentors who volunteer their time to ensure the integrity of the program and a big thank you to the 2025 sponsors Federation University, City of Ballarat, the WIN Network, Ballarat Times New Group, Power FM, Stoke Design Co, Regional Development Australia Grampians, Central Highlands Water, Gawak Outdoor, AssistU Care & Support Services, Hip Pocket Workwear Safety (Ballarat), Bartlett Manufacturing, Mercure Ballarat Hotel and Convention Centre, Nevett Wilkinson Frawley, Admedia, Haymes Paint, Western Bulldogs, and the Central Highlands Growers & Producers Hub.

### **B31 August Business Festival**

Commerce Ballarat facilitates B31 August Business Festival every year with a variety of networking and development opportunities delivered throughout the month. Continuing a practice started in 2023, our 2024 brochure and website featured a directory of corporate experiences, local dining options, meeting spaces, accommodation and regional tourist attractions to appeal to businesspeople from outside of Ballarat. The B31 2024 program delivered over twenty five events throughout the month of August. We are looking forward to forming an exciting program of events for the coming 2025 festival. Thank you to our 2024 sponsors, Ballarat Times News Group, Radio Ballarat, AusNet Services, Small Dog Design, Haymes Paint and Luv-a-Duck. Sponsorship opportunities are now open for 2025, so if you'd like some more information please reach out to [jodie@commerceballarat.com.au](mailto:jodie@commerceballarat.com.au)

### **Central Highlands Growers & Producers Hub**

Commerce Ballarat commenced work on the Central Highlands Growers and Producers Hub in September 2023, which had sixteen members at the time. Since then, membership has increased to over 150. The aim of the Hub is to create a vibrant and supportive network of businesses dedicated to promoting quality produce from our region. It's also about fostering collaboration, sharing knowledge and creating opportunities for local growers, producers, and artisans. We thank the six LGAs that came on board and put their trust in us, Hepburn Shire, Pyrenees Shire, Golden Plains Shire, Ararat Rural City, City of Ballarat and Moorabool Shire.

### **Forage and Feast**

Forage & Feast is a month-long festival that celebrates the growers, producers and venues in the Central Highlands region. It is designed to promote the region as a food destination and a producing powerhouse, a place that you visit, to explore & experience, rejuvenate & indulge, and connect with the space you're in. It is also designed to fill a gap in the tourism calendar in the Central Highlands and encourage visitation to the region during a time that is traditionally quieter. By offering unique experiences and exclusive events, Forage & Feast aims to offer a peek behind the curtain, and see, learn, taste and experience all that the Central Highlands has to offer. This year we were excited to deliver a festival consisting of over 120 events, hosted by forty businesses across the entire Central Highlands, featuring over fifty growers and producers from the Hub. A big thank you to Community Bank Ballan for seeing the vision and supporting this year's festival.

### **Uncover Central Highlands**

In conjunction with the launch of Forage & Feast 2025, we rebranded 'The Ballarat Experience' Facebook and Instagram to 'Uncover Central Highlands' allowing us to more broadly promote the region. Uncover Central Highlands aims to reveal the rich tapestry of life in Victoria's Central Highlands, highlighting the people, places, businesses, and products that make this region unique. Our goal is to foster a deeper connection between locals and visitors, driving both tourism and business growth in this vibrant heartland.

Embark on a journey to uncover the riches of Victoria's Central Highlands. For curious travellers and proud locals, we are your gateway to uncovering the stories, people, and places that make the Central Highlands, the heart of Victoria.

### **NextGen Collective**

Since September 2013, the Commerce Ballarat Young Professionals Network has been providing support, networking, and development opportunities to those in their 20's and 30's within Ballarat. In 2025, the Young Professionals Network becomes the NextGen Collective. NextGen Collective is the place to be for emerging talent in Ballarat. The Collective is dedicated to our city's young people and works to help them network, push their limits, and grow as individuals in their lives and careers. It's business-made casual, and the benefits extend far beyond the workplace. Opportunities abound, and there is a lot of fun to be had along the way.

NextGen Collective is an added benefit for Commerce Ballarat members. All young professionals who are employed by or are Commerce Ballarat members can attend most functions for a reduced fee. All other attendees are welcome to attend most events as non-members. Thank you to our new sponsor, InspireHQ for your support and passion for this initiative.

### **Development**

Commerce Ballarat subsidises and sources external funding to allow us to offer development opportunities, either free for members or at a nominal charge. This year this has included our Mentoring Program, Industry Chats (for Hospitality, Tourism, Growers & Producers), Business Assistance Program, business wellbeing services, Reimagining Retail workshop, Annual Marketing Roadmap session and more.

### **Business Day Out**

In May 2024 attendees came from across Regional Victoria to participate in Business Day Out. They were inspired by Nik and Harry Robinson, co-founders of Good Citizens Eyewear, Fiori Giovanni and her captivating story of bravery, courage, and strength as she forged her own path and defied her own destiny, and Taylor Nugent, Senior Economist within the Global Markets Research team at the National Australia Bank. Additionally, attendees enjoyed a dynamic 45-minute ThinkTank session where your insights into the business environment were invaluable. 12 Secondary Schools including 300+ staff and students will also have the opportunity to hear Nik and Harry Robinson's story. The day concluded with an exciting new networking session hosted by Itinerant Spirits. Thank you to our 2024 Session Sponsors: CountPro, NAB and nbn Local and Event Sponsors: Simplex Insurance Solutions, Itinerant Spirits, Radio Ballarat, The WIN Network, Ballarat Times News Group, Sovereign Press, Stoke Design Co., the Western Bulldogs, The Goods Shed, Ai Group and the support of the City of Ballarat.

### **Industry & Education Partnership Bus Tour**

In March, we hosted our annual Education & Industry Tour in partnership with Highlands LLEN and the Education Department. Principals and career advisors from Ballarat and surrounding areas were invited to tour local industry to gain a greater understanding and connection to the incredibly diverse career paths available for students in a variety of sectors. This year's participants enjoyed a tour of Freightner Group, The Ballarat Turf Club, McEvoy Mitchell Racing and Henry Dwyer Racing, the over lunch they heard an economic update followed by a panel discussion, focusing on Future skill shortages, local spend and major projects. This was facilitated by Stuart Benjamin, Chair RDA Grampians, who was joined by Sarah Henderson- RDV, Chris Smith- Repeat Plastics, Bill Mundy- Gippsland Skies, Darren Gray- Federation TAFE. Thank you to our panellists, our hosts and the participating schools, and to Highlands LLEN, Workforce Australia and Ballarat Tech School for your support of the initiative.

### **Business Mentoring Program**

A program for members offering one on one mentoring and group workshops. This program offers mentoring to new businesses and or those that are looking for growth or change. In 2025 we welcomed ten businesses to the program and look forward to following their successes. Thank you to the mentors who volunteer to assist.

### **Victorian Regional Chamber Alliance**

In 2024/25 we continued to facilitate VRCA. Mission - To be recognised as the collective voice for regional Chambers of Commerce and Business Associations. Vision - A prosperous regional Victoria; vibrant, healthy, heard and connected. Currently there are 27 members and this continues to expand. The VRCA has advocated on behalf of regional Victoria on topics including: Liquor licensing delays, Mental Health support in the regions, the critical importance of local Chambers, and the local emergency services levy.

### **Ballarat Tradie Network**

The Ballarat Tradie Network was launched in 2024 to provide a support, networking and development space for our construction and trade sector. Our first event for was drive-thru breakfast in February, supporting 21TwentyOnes and Ballarat Mens Mental Health, with 100+ attendees. The network allows trades to connect with one another and support services available to them. Thank you to sponsors: National Tiles & Solomon Flooring, Radio Ballarat, Hip Pocket Workwear & Safety, Haymes Paint and North Ballarat Sport Club.

### **Central Highlands Drought Resilience**

Commerce Ballarat is the chosen manager of this fund in 2025, we look forward to working with Councils, business groups, and many others to ensure we get maximum value out of every dollar. These funds will also allow us to continue to assist and strengthen businesses, farmers and community across the Central Highlands

### **Advocacy**

Commerce Ballarat represents our members and the wider business community on a wide range of issues to all levels of government.

Additional representation on behalf of our members Includes:

- Victorian Regional Chamber Alliance
- Ballarat City Business Leaders Meeting

- Ballarat Heritage Advisory Committee
- Central Highlands Water Customer Advisory Panel
- Central Highlands Regional Drought Resilience Plan Implementation Group
- Ballarat Liquor Accord
- Workforce Australia Local Jobs Program Taskforce

Our goal is simple and genuine, we want to help and that comes at a cost. In my sixteen years in this chair, we have never posted a loss like we are in 2025, but our organisation has been committed to doing whatever was necessary to support our business community through the past five years. 2024 was a year marked for investment into the future, unfortunately like most Chambers around the state we also saw reduced sponsorship and Government funding opportunities.

We are proud that we have not reduced our services because we know its tough out there and many of you are worn out with the fight, we want you to know we think you are AMAZING and our city, our region is so fortunate to have a business community that cares, collaborates and celebrates any and all successes that come our way.

I would like to acknowledge the Board for their generosity of time and commitment, a special thank you to Anne Alexander, Ewen Fletcher and Matt Dent for their years of service. A big welcome to the new Exec team in Chair Darren Trigg, Dep Chair Neville Ivey, Treasurer Brent Irvin, Secretary/HR Fiona Murphy, the team and I are excited to work under their leadership.

What can I say about my team, I say we are so fortunate that we seem to attract incredible young people who don't just want a job they want to make a difference! Zoe and Michelle who have been with us for ten years in 2025 to our newbies Michaela, Dylan and Darcie, they are passionate, they love their city, and I would be lost without them.

Thanks for your support, we are always here to help or listen.

Jodie Gillett  
Chief Executive Officer  
Commerce Ballarat

b2b Business to Ballarat, always try and buy local.