

7 April 2020

The Hon. Tim Pallis
Treasurer of Victoria
Level 4/1 Treasury Place
East Melbourne
Victoria 3002

Dear Treasurer,

Re: Support for regional Chambers of Commerce to provide support at a local level.

I am writing to advocate for financial support for regional Chambers of Commerce to provide assistance at a local level to small businesses and medium enterprises. I represent Ballarat and have been liaising with Geelong, Bendigo and Wodonga to ascertain what support our local businesses and employers need and require. It is clear that we know our communities and business operators best and are in the strongest position to deliver targeted support services and advice to assist in keeping our local economies afloat.

It has been announced by the Premiers office that funding will be allocated with the advice of the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Australian Industry Group. This is a concern for regional areas because these organisations are predominantly based in the metropolitan area and have limited knowledge or focus on regional Victoria.

Regional Chambers of Commerce are placed to

- a) get the Government the best bang for their buck and
- b) have the best understanding of our business communities.

Please see below a sample of the range of services and opportunities that is already being delivered:

Commerce Ballarat

- [Business Resource Page](#) available on our website, the City of Ballarat is using this page as a link and Moorabool, Pyrenees, Golden Plains, Hepburn, Ararat and Central Goldfields are distributing our information and opportunities.
- Over the past 10 days we have quickly established new ways of delivering content, with everything provided free of charge and available to all.
- Webinars so far 'Facing Adversity: Building resilience when times are tough', 'How to manage the risks for your business in an effective and efficient manner during challenging times?' and 'Facing Adversity: Helping Your Team during Uncertainty and Change'.

- Facebook Live Q & A's that have been provided to cover the topics of; Employee Wellbeing, COVID-19 Stimulus Package, ATO packages and Workplace Relations.
- Commerce Ballarat's social media pages and newsletters have provided mediums for our businesses to use to promote their ever-changing services.
- A Facebook group has been established via Commerce Ballarat called '[Ballarat Resource Connect](#), the Business, Resource and Sharing Initiative...' This is a support group for Ballarat businesses and people during the Coronavirus crisis. The idea of this group is to provide a platform for business to connect resources that are in demand with resources that are available. We have already seen a great take up in this platform and intend on taking the next steps to create a website for this initiative. Since going live on March 18, the group has over 210 members and 18 posts.

Geelong Chamber of Commerce

The Geelong Chamber of Commerce has been very active over the last week or two informing businesses on the range of stimulus', relief, working remotely and options for managing staff and negotiating with staff.

- Last Thursday we hosted our first seminar with over 150 registrations talking more broadly on the way's businesses could counter and survive this disruption
- This Thursday's webinar will be hospitality focused and will include a panel of local providers who are innovating and tackling the challenge head on.
- We are considering virtual events and have considerably improved our content for members
- We are also promoting members as much as we can and considering ways for non-members to access more of our resources.
- We have made a customer service call to over 150 of our members directly to offer support and better understand their individual circumstances and we will ring all 1000 members by sometime in April.

Be.Bendigo

- Established key business working group with City of Greater Bendigo, Bendigo Health, Victoria Police, Bendigo Food share and a couple of other key businesses. (Joint approach to addressing support for business and health)
- Publishing as much relevant information as possible to business community via socials as possible – media releases, support packages, health advice.
- Sharing information on how some businesses have changed their model to adapt to difficult time – we requested businesses contact us on any changes or support they can give other businesses.
- Working with key landlords to look for rent deferral or support for business.
- Working with Bendigo health to support Health care workers by offering access to meals, accommodation etc. through Bendigo Businesses. Online option.
- Be.Bendigo will be significantly impacted due to loss of revenue sources and inability to deliver key programs.

Business Wodonga

Current:

- Free on-line webinars dealing with the crisis e.g. How to set up for working from home (using members services to deliver).

- Working with other organisations to support businesses.
- Conduit for information. We aim to bring accurate information from many sources into one location e.g. special edition newsletters see attached which goes to over 2,200 people.

Planning:

- Facebook page for members to have an open channel to other members, to be able to provide opening times, special offers and other benefits
- Promoting member offers more broadly on Facebook, website and newsletter
- Short grabs by member expert for a local perspective on how to access the stimulus package / get through this crisis e.g. an accountant showing three urgent actions to take now, ATO on the what the tax-free cashflow boost means and how to attract it
- Continue providing clear, accurate information e.g. the Special edition Newsletter
- Links and fact sheets on maintaining mental health during these times
- Looking at how we may access funding sources for small businesses to help us survive
- Free online training e.g. how to sell online
- Closed Zoom discussion groups e.g. those who have closed: How to prepare for re-opening or upskilling and training options – staying connected

With our revenue raising activities seriously curtailed and businesses needing to reduce spending drastically in 2020 the continuation of all our services will be challenging.

With additional support during this time from the State Government for regional chambers of commerce, we will be able to continue our targeted local support services at the current level, as well as increase the support and promotion on offer. I hope that you can assist us and businesses across regional Victoria.

Yours sincerely,



Jodie Gillett
Chief Executive Officer
Commerce Ballarat



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BE.BENDIGO

