

BOARD CHAIRPERSON OFFICER REPORT

It is my privilege to present the Chairperson's Report for the year ending 31st December 2025—a year defined by resilience, disciplined execution, and forward-focused growth.

This year was not about maintaining position; it was about advancing it, across all areas of the organisation. We are proud to have seen tangible progress; strengthening of our operational foundations, expansion of key programs and services, deeper engagement with our community and partners, improved governance, risk, and financial oversight.

Like many of our members 2025 has been a challenging year for Commerce. Unfortunately, as a member-based organisation, Commerce is not immune from an environment marked by economic pressure, workforce challenges, and shifting consumer dynamics.

However, Commerce Ballarat has stood firm in its core role: to advocate, to connect, and to enable growth. We have not only responded to the constant change of the business environment — but most importantly for our members we have collectively led through it.

We have continued to strengthen our voice in local, state and federal policy discussions in key areas. A clear focus on the delivery of targeted programs that support business resilience, with a clear focus to facilitate a stronger, more connected Ballarat economy where businesses don't just survive, but thrive.

We are proud in having strengthened peer-to-peer connections across industries, created platforms for collaboration and knowledge sharing and increased visibility and recognition for member businesses throughout the past year. The results: a more connected, more confident business community.

With a challenging environment the importance of our events program has never been more essential. The ability of the Commerce team to be fluid in the provision of relevant activities and forums to provide guidance, leadership, networking, connections and collaborations has been paramount over the past year. A prime example is the suite of opportunities provided in the digital transformation space.

A further example is the Biznet breakfasts which continue to be an important staple of our annual programs. The growth of this monthly event reinforced the importance of providing regular, informative and current business content to all our regions business sectors, in an environment that facilitates networking and collaboration.

Our advocacy has seen stronger engagement with decision-makers on local and regional infrastructure priorities, elevated Ballarat's voice in workforce and skills planning discussions and promoted small business support measures in response to economic conditions. The Commerce team have regularly enabled practical and actionable outcomes for local businesses.

A key platform during the year has been the enhancement and strengthening of our relationship with the City of Ballarat. Together with other key Ballarat organisations Commerce has supported initiatives heightening Ballarat's investment profile. We have partnered on regional growth and innovation strategies through Ballarat via Now and Into the Future – Enabling Growth 2026 and repeatedly promoted Ballarat as a destination for business and talent.

A continued lense on partnerships and opportunities and the search for diversified revenue streams has seen the expansion of Forage and Feast and the Central Highlands Growers and Producers Hub. With continued importance on sustainability, we will continue to expand government partners, corporate sponsors, industry collaborators and community stakeholders.

An important focus has been our support of local and regional agribusiness. Through the Regional Drought Resilience Planning program which received funding from the Australian Government's Future Drought Fund and the Victorian Government, Commerce was able to facilitate Farmers Day Out. The event provided farmers and partners with keynote speakers, expert panels, workshops and extensive networking focussing on mental health, community, resilience, drought recovery and strengthen business models.

The forage and feast festival during January and February offered a diverse program of events. With an emphasis on connecting with local growers and produces in the Central Highlands region over 130 events where hosted across 6-local government areas.

The signature Federation University Commerce Ballarat Business Excellence Awards again provided a well needed and deserved opportunity for Ballarat and the regions businesses to come together and celebrate. The Awards provide an important and unique occasion, unlike any other Victorian regional city for businesses of all sectors to gather and commemorate (party) a year of challenges and successes.

With Jodie as the Chair, The Victorian Regional Chamber Alliance is at the forefront of the regional issues that confront and shape our State. This group of regional chambers continues to be a collective voice and strong advocate for the key regional issues that challenge our state.

A special thank you and acknowledgement to past Board members Jack Dodd, Lucy Ibrahim, Mathew Dent and Lee Martin for their dedication and input during 2025. The understanding and vision of their individual business sectors provided vital knowledge and contribution to the Board's objectives during 2025.

I would like to acknowledge the commitment and professionalism of my fellow Board members. Their expertise and independence have been instrumental in guiding the organisation through a demanding year.

The Board remains firmly committed to prudent financial management. In 2025, the organisation maintained a stable financial position while continuing to invest in areas that will deliver long-term value.

Important focus areas of the Board for the coming year will be governance, responsible financial management, reinvestment into member services and building further long-term organisational resilience. These objectives will be supported through strong partnerships which have been critical to our success. The Board will have an active role in strengthening our advocacy impact on critical economic issues, expand programs that directly improve business capability, deepen engagement across emerging growth sectors; elevating Ballarat's position as a leading regional business hub.

The unwavering energy and sole focus of our CEO and staff to provide our members with support, promotion and advocacy during 2025 has been outstanding. Collectively their ability to regularly deliver exceptional outcomes with passion and enthusiasm has resulted in incomparable assistance to our members that is the envy of every other chamber in the state. Well done team!

Together, as a business collective Commerce are motivated by building a more dynamic and future-ready Ballarat economy.

We are not slowing down. In business — like in racing — momentum matters.

Thank you to our members, partners, and community for their continued trust, collaboration, and commitment.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Darren Trigg', with several horizontal strokes underneath.

Darren Trigg
Commerce Ballarat Board Chair