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MEDIA RELEASE

Wheatbelt Businesses Develop Jobs Position Paper

Western Australia's Wheatbelt is busy, with rural businesses busy trying to meet demand for their goods and services. The work Wheatbelt businesses have put into innovating, diversifying and positioning themselves for growth has positioned them well in the local, state, national and international markets.

"Whilst Wheatbelt businesses are working harder and longer to complete work they are currently facing the very difficult situation of continuously knocking work back because of a critical shortage of staff" said Amanda Walker, Chair of the Wheatbelt Business Network.

Bruce Turton of Rural Traffic Services in Corrigin explains the problem, "People want to use us because we're a local traffic management company, but we just can't get enough staff to satisfy demand. Since December 2020 we've missed out on projects totalling \$2.5 million, if not more. There's not a single day that goes by that doesn't see me turning work down."

"Prior to Covid-19 we had backpackers and transient people coming over from the east on a 12 month to three year working holiday around Australia. Some would stay a month but some people really liked what we had to offer and they'd stay for six or 12 months. But we're not getting these people anymore. We're now relying on locals and we just don't have enough of them."

The Wheatbelt Business Network together with its members has recently launched its Wheatbelt Jobs Positioning Paper in an effort to spark more conversation, planning and solutions to real employment issues in the region.

"Wheatbelt business owners are not the kind of people that rest on their laurels, they have found the time to come up with a range of positive recommendations that will help alleviate the current staff shortages. Many of these policy recommendations have no cost whatsoever, simply requiring governments to make positive policy changes that support those who live within the 99.78% of Australia that is non-metropolitan.¹" said Caroline Robinson, founder and CEO of the WBN.

Western Australia is currently facing a great opportunity to grow its economic strength and diversity (and to accept additional taxation revenue into government coffers).

Unfortunately, policy makers demonstrate a lack of awareness of the fact that non-metropolitan Australia contributes 40 percent of Australia's national economic output and employs one third of the nation's workforce.

The non-metropolitan economy also has an important smoothing out role, with Australia's non-metropolitan economy demonstrating greater stability than Australia's metropolitan economy.²

“Wheatbelt businesses are now actually leading the charge in moving the state’s economy out of the Covid-19 economy, and need governments that work to support them, rather than hinder growth” said Caroline

While there has been much talk from governments about the importance of growing the economy after Covid-19, now is the time for urgent policy action.

The Wheatbelt Business Network urges the Western Australian State Government and the Federal Government to take immediate policy action on recommendations outlined in the Position Paper.

1 R. Lesslie & J. Mewett, 2013. Land use and management: The Australian context (Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences Research Report 13.1). Canberra, ACT. Taken from agriculture.gov.au/abares/publications.

2 Talking Point: The Economic Contribution of Regions to Australia’s Prosperity, PricewaterhouseCoopers Geospatial Economic Modelling, IMF World Economic Outlook database, Reserve Bank of Australia as published by Regional Australia Institute, Barton ACT 2600.

Contact:

Caroline Robinson

Wheatbelt Business Network

eo@wheatbeltbusinessnetwork.com.au

0403225900