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Committee for Ballarat calls for employment & skill development in Federal budget

Committee for Ballarat welcomes suggestions that the Federal Government's budget will focus on reducing national unemployment figures.

While applauding the concept, the Committee urges Treasurer Wayne Swan and Regional Development Minister Simon Crean to give priority to employment in regional centres, many of whom have unemployment doubling the national average.

"Ballarat's unemployment rate is closer to 8% than 5% and we currently have projects that require skilled workers with a diverse range of skills," Committee for Ballarat CEO Doug Lloyd said today.

The Ballarat West Employment Zone is expected to generate more than 9,000 jobs in the next ten years. That is the sign of a vibrant regional community. But it presupposes that there will be people with the relevant skills available to take up those positions, and that there is a supportive environment for business growth. These are not currently the case.

"Skills development is crucial to regional areas, the Ballarat region in particular, both for those unable to find work and for disengaged students who are leaving school without good prospects - 18.3% in Ballarat compared to 15.4% in Victoria generally," Doug added.

"And the present pressures on existing businesses, and uncertainty surrounding business growth, are making the prospects of increasing employment opportunities more remote. Ballarat is '*open for business*' and we are looking forward to support from the Federal Government to realise the potential" Dr Lloyd said

"If all of this it is going to work, skills development needs to be paired with industry incentives."

Incentives should include an Industry Innovation Fund aimed at restoring lost employment in a revitalised, innovative manufacturing sector; a functional apprenticeship program; taxation relief for employment and regional business; and incentives to bring highly skilled workers to regional areas.

"We need to ensure that any skill development on offer includes high level skills and meets rural and regional employment needs now and into the future".

"We are calling on the budget measures to be focused on high-level skill development and facilitation for sustainable business growth as well as getting people off welfare. Then regional areas will benefit deeply and contribute strongly to a national employment level of 4.5%".

ENDS

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