Extract from Hansard

Wednesday, 19th February 2025

NATIONAL SMALL-TOWN REINVENTION CONFERENCE

The Hon. A. PICCOLO (Light) (15:39): I wish to advise the house that Kapunda has been successful in its bid to host the 2025 National Small-Town Reinvention Conference in September this year. The conference is organised by the Bank of Ideas, which is led by Peter Kenyon and is designed to bring together local government, community leaders, entrepreneurs and innovators to share ideas and strategies for breathing new energy, ideas and innovation into small towns committed to thriving futures.

Australia has 1,614 country townships with populations of under 5,000 people, including 1,088 townships with fewer than 1,000 people. Despite over 80 per cent of these small towns facing stagnation or decline, they continue to serve as crucial hubs for agriculture, mining and tourism, supporting a population of 1.13 million people and making their reinvention of national importance.

This conference aims to inspire and empower communities to take charge of their own destinies and create sustainable thriving futures. This year's conference, as I mentioned, will be held in Kapunda from 22 to 25 September. The announcement was made recently in Kapunda by Mr Peter Kenyon, the director of the Bank of Ideas. A number of organisers and key stakeholders were briefed on opportunities the conference offers the local region and particularly the local businesses in the region.

The theme for the 2025 conference is 'Prosperity through connection, collaboration and community'. The event will shine a spotlight on our community, showcasing our rich history and our commitment to innovation and growth. It is a fantastic opportunity for us to learn from others based on their experiences and also to share our successes across the state.

I would emphasise that this is actually a national conference and all small towns and community organisations around Australia are most welcome to present at this conference, as are people from

South Australia and particularly people in the Mid North region. As I said, the conference will bring together from across Australia some of the brightest minds and some of the most passionate individuals dedicated to the future of our small towns.

It is an opportunity for all of us—and hopefully some members of this chamber and the upper house will also attend—to gain new insights, build valuable connections and explore innovative and sustainable solutions to the challenges we face. The goal of the conference is to help small rural communities build prosperous futures by building on their strengths, harnessing the resilience of their communities and collaborating with like-minded neighbouring communities.

The inaugural National Small-Town Reinvention Conference was held in Pickering Brook, a small rural community in the Perth Hills in WA in 2024. The founder and director of the Bank of Ideas, Mr Peter Kenyon, has over 30 years' experience in promoting growth and prosperity in communities through social innovation. Last year's event attracted 120 participants from 60 small towns across Australia. Attendees left inspired and equipped with practical tools and strategies to apply to their own rural communities.

It is very important also to emphasise that it is not a case of just getting people to replicate what they learn at the conference, it is about inspiring people's ideas to see what they can do to identify assets in their communities and how to build on those assets to help those communities prosper.

Mr Kenyon said that it was certainly a unique experience of sharing and learning from the amazing creativity that is occurring right across small-town Australia as rural communities instigate initiatives to respond to demographic and business decline. He goes on to say that the need for such an annual experience that highlights small-town innovation was a common theme of participant feedback. He said he was excited that the event will occur in South Australia this year, especially in a region with a long history of innovation and community building passion.

This year's event promises to build on that success, offering even more opportunities for learning and collaboration. For more information, people should visit bankofideas.com.au. If they go to that site they will actually learn about the Bank of Ideas, last year's conference and will also get an idea of this year's event. I commend that conference to everybody here.

TIME EXPIRED