

# SNAPSHOT OF ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

JANUARY - MARCH 2015



AUSTRALIAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY

## ABOUT ACCI

The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry is the voice of Australian business, representing businesses of all sizes and industries from across the country. It combines the brand strength of the global chambers of commerce movement with the skills of Australia's specialist industry associations. The ACCI network represents more than 300,000 businesses, which in total employ over 4 million people.

## EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND TRAINING



ACCI and the NSW Business Chamber co-hosted the first public address by Senator the Hon Simon Birmingham in his role as Assistant Minister for Education and Training. The event attracted over 130 business leaders.

- The Employment, Education and Training Committee and **Higher Education Working Group** met Senator Birmingham and guests from the Department of Immigration to discuss **skilled migration reform** in March.
- Submissions were made on **national training packages**, one on the process for their development and the other on their content, with extensive consultation with Senator Birmingham. Members were briefed by teleconference and email.
- ACCI's **Higher Education submission** gained attention via an opinion piece in the Australian Financial Review in March. Jenny Lambert, ACCI's Director of Employment, Education and Training, explained the continued need for higher education reform despite the Senate's rejection of the Government's proposal.

“ *The uncapped demand-driven system has made higher education accessible to students from all economic backgrounds. But the increased cost to the government is impossible to sustain, in the current budget environment and in the future.* ”

- Jenny Lambert,  
Australian Financial Review, March 20

- In partnership with Campbell Page, ACCI now provides a free recruitment service to employers in the ACCI Member Network that bridges the gap between industry and employment services. **Georgia Hiscock** commenced as ACCI's Employment and Partnerships Manager and is connecting with all ACCI members.
- ACCI made a submission to and attended a consultation on the **review of skilled migration**. The Government's response to the **Integrity review of the 457 visas** was welcomed by ACCI and its members.
- Kate Carnell and Jenny Lambert met with ministers Eric Abetz, Luke Hartsuyker and Scott Morrison, and shadow minister Kate Ellis, to discuss the **work for the dole** and **childcare** positions in our pre-budget submission.

## WORKPLACE RELATIONS

- ACCI's advocacy contributed to the Federal Government's decision to change deficiencies in the **workplace gender equality reporting** requirements. Kate Carnell will serve on a working group charged with suggesting further improvements.
- ACCI represented members at the **National Workplace Relations Consultative Council** meeting in February and the **Fair Work Commission Anti-Bullying** forum in March.
- Kate Carnell participated in a **National Press Club debate** on workplace relations with ACTU President Ged Kearney. A debate on the **ABC's 7.30** followed.



Photo: Mark Graham

- John Osborn appeared on **Channel 7's Sunrise** alongside ACTU National Secretary Dave Oliver to explain the danger of union proposals to create a **national portable leave scheme and extend it to casual employees**.
- ACCI appeared before the Senate committee inquiring into the **Fair Work Amendment (Bargaining Processes) Bill 2014** in March.
- ACCI sought to intervene in **Federal Court proceedings** regarding the liability to **pay annual leave loading on termination of employment** and backed a **Federal Court appeal** on the entitlement to **accrue annual leave while receiving workers' compensation payments**.
- ACCI represented members at hearings regarding union applications for **accident pay** in the **four-yearly review of modern awards**.
- ACCI worked to secure more workable timetables and processes for the next wave of **Common Issue Proceedings** in the **four-yearly review of modern awards** (domestic violence and family-friendly work arrangements, penalty rates, public holidays, part-time and casual employees).
- ACCI filed a submission to the **Productivity Commission Inquiry into the Workplace Relations Framework** in March.



“ *Youth unemployment continues to grow and we've got lots of small to medium businesses that really want to employ, but find it too difficult under the current system.* ”

- Kate Carnell, ABC 7.30, March 18

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## ECONOMICS AND INDUSTRY POLICY

- ACCI hosted internationally renowned economist and former Reagan and Thatcher advisor **Dr Arthur Laffer**, to advance the case for pro-growth tax reform. Dr Laffer met with political leaders in Canberra and corporate leaders in Sydney. He also spoke at events hosted by the Sydney Institute and the Institute of Public Affairs. In his meetings and many media appearances, Dr Laffer explained how reducing tax rates can stimulate economic growth and even increase tax revenue.

“If you tax people that work, and you pay people that don't, don't be surprised to see a lot of people not working.” - Dr Arthur Laffer, *Australian Financial Review*, March 18



Kate Carnell, Dr Arthur Laffer and John Osborn met with Assistant Treasurer Josh Frydenberg for a brief at his Parliament House office to discuss stimulating economic growth through tax reform and lowering tax rates.

- ACCI released its **2015 Red Tape Survey**, highlighting the impact that unnecessary regulation is having on business productivity. Nearly half of respondents reported that the impact of regulation had prevented them from making changes to grow their business, more than one in four respondents said they spent 11 hours a week or more on compliance, and almost one in two put the annual cost of compliance at beyond \$10,000.
- On March 18, the government held its first **Red Tape Repeal Day** for 2015. ACCI partnered with the Canberra Business Chamber and the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet to provide a breakfast briefing by **the Hon Christian Porter MP**, Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, to Canberra businesses and ACCI members.



Kate Carnell, the Hon Christian Porter MP and Chris Faulks, Canberra Business Chamber CEO



ACCI supported the launch of reforms to strengthen protections for small business against unfair contracts with the Hon Tony Abbott MP and Minister for Small Business the Hon Bruce Billson MP in Ringwood, Victoria

- ACCI welcomed **Ali Rahman as Senior Manager of Industry Policy**. Ali is a graduate of the London School of Economics and has extensive legal and economic experience in the regulatory sector.
- ACCI continued its quarterly economic surveys:
  - The Business Expectations Survey** found the expected performance of the Australian economy over the coming year has fallen for the third consecutive quarter.
  - The Survey of Investor Confidence** found businesses had a tough Christmas period and are downbeat about prospects for the Australian economy for the year ahead.
  - The Small Business Survey** found Australia's small businesses are bracing themselves for a tough 2015 and are feeling more pessimistic about the outlook than their large-business counterparts.
  - The ACCI-Westpac Survey of Industrial Trends** found that Australia's manufacturing sector is in a state of cautious optimism, with manufacturers expecting the general business situation in the next six months to be better than the previous half-year.

“The reputable ACCI survey revealed that business confidence has dropped for the third consecutive quarter.” - Andrew Main, *The Australian*, February 2

## TRADE AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

- ICC Australia hosted ICC Court President **John Beechey**. Mr Beechey spoke about investor-state dispute settlement at an event in Sydney hosted by Herbert Smith Freehills. He was also in discussion with Jim Spigelman at a public event sponsored by King Wood & Mallesons.



- Representatives from ACCI's Trade and International Affairs Unit visited our Indonesian counterparts at KADIN to discuss the **Indian Ocean Rim Association business events** planned for later in 2015.



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- ACCI released its **2015 Trade Survey**, finding Australian businesses are keen to engage in international trade but feel constrained by compliance burdens, red tape and a lack of knowledge about free trade agreements.

“*The results suggest that businesses are generally either not aware of the trade support available, it does not address their needs, or the prospective gain is not worth the effort in utilising the service.*  
- 2015 ACCI Trade Survey,  
Sydney Morning Herald, March 27”

- The \$23 million proposal for an **Australian Trade Centre (ATC)** has been completed. ACCI is now approaching government and industry for financial support. The ATC will bring together Australian trade expertise across disciplines to provide a forum for non-partisan thought leadership, robust analysis and debate.
- ACCI has secured \$600,000 from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade for a project to foster **women's empowerment in the Indian Ocean Rim**.
- ACCI is in early-stage negotiations with the Federal Government to provide trade promotion services.
- Bryan Clark, Director Trade and International Affairs appeared on ABC 7.30 in relation to the **Trans-Pacific Partnership** negotiations.



“*You will see benefits to consumers because things will be lower cost than they might be before. And the regulations which apply across the various marketplaces will be much more harmonised and easier to navigate.*  
- Bryan Clark, ABC 7.30, March 17”

## SUBMISSIONS

- The ACCI submission to **Productivity Commission Inquiry into the Workplace Relations Framework** included 14 recommendations to protect those in employment and help jobseekers become more competitive in the labour market. It does this by recommending a simple, flexible safety net, reformed penalty rates, balanced regulation and agreements that work for both employers and employees.

“*Under the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry proposal, employers and employees would be able to negotiate over key entitlements that are currently included in awards — including penalty rates — in a bid to inject greater flexibility into the safety net and reduce complexity for small-business owners.*  
- The Australian, March 19”

- Opposed union **accident pay applications** in the four-yearly review of modern awards, focussing on matters of broad principle relating to the modern awards objective, modern workers' compensation schemes and their relationship with accident make-up pay.
- Supported the **Fair Work Amendment (Bargaining Processes) Bill 2014** in a submission to Senate inquiry. The Bill increase the rigour for the process of obtaining protected action ballot orders.

- Welcomed the potential for red tape reduction in response to the ATO's **Single Touch Payroll** discussion paper but emphasised the need to recognise the diversity of cash-flow situations faced by employers and cautioned against premature implementation of a mandated system.
- Lodged a submission to the **ACCI Annual Wage Review 2014-15**, calling for the Fair Work Commission to take a cautious and restrained approach to combat rising unemployment, with an increase of no more than \$5.70 a week.
- Lodged the **2015 ACCI Pre-Budget Submission**, explaining the need to avoid rising debt, higher unemployment and declining living standards. The 2015-16 budget is a critical chance to cut government spending, secure tax reform and enable reinvestment in infrastructure. It should deliver no new taxes and ease the high personal tax burden that stifles incentives to work and to start small businesses.
- Released ACCI's response to the **Intergenerational Report**, arguing Australia has no room for complacency if we are to maintain our standard of living and that all political, business and community leaders must contribute to breaking the reform gridlock.
- Lodged a submission to the **Productivity Commission Inquiry into Business Set-up, Transfer and Closure**, focusing on how crowd-sourced funding will assist SMEs that otherwise struggle to obtain finance.

“*The regulatory framework for business set-up and expansion needs a radical overhaul to foster a business friendly regulatory environment.*  
- ACCI submission, The Australian, March 2”

- ACCI provided a submission to the **Senate Economics References Committee on Infrastructure Provision and Financing** offering eight recommendations that would allow for greater private sector participation in financing, construction, operation and maintenance of public infrastructure.
- In February ACCI made a submission to the **Senate inquiry into private training providers**. ACCI expressed concerns about the quality of some providers but explained the benefits of a contestable system.
- ACCI provided a submission on the **Higher Education and Research Reform Bill 2014** at the end of February.
- ACCI filed a submission to the **Review of the Export Development Grants Scheme**.
- ACCI provided a submission to the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee's **Inquiry into the Commonwealth's Treaty Making Process**.

## CERTIFICATES OF ORIGIN

- The **Joint Accreditation System of Australia and New Zealand (JAS-ANZ)** 18 month compliance audit was satisfied. Full support provided to Chamber of Commerce and Industry Western Australia for the final Government audit in April. Member chamber accreditation is likely to be protected for another 18 month cycle on this basis.
- Full rollout of **Korea-Australia Trade Agreement (KAFTA) Certificates of Origin** to member chambers, with substantial uptake by chamber member clients.
- ACCI approved as part of the **International Chamber of Commerce Certificate of Origin Accreditation Chain**, which is a component of several global initiatives to standardise trade documentation.
- ACCI is approved as holding the last remaining spot on the **International Chamber of Commerce Certificate of Origin Accreditation Committee**, allowing ACCI to help steer the global certification standard.

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## MEDIA, MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS

- ACCI partnered with Google to help small businesses get the most out of the internet. The partnership involves events in Frankston, Dubbo, Launceston, Sunshine Coast and Subiaco.
- ACCI produced the autumn edition of **Commerce & Industry** magazine. Stories covered the benefits of recent Free Trade Agreements (FTAs), member initiatives to help businesses make the most of FTAs, and the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to boost productivity.
- ACCI is constructing a **new website** with better infrastructure to communicate with members, produce events and manage relationships.
- Delivered the March General Council Meeting and Dinner, with both events hosted by the NSW Business Chamber. At the General Council Dinner at the Opera Point Marquee, **Bob Carr** addressed business leaders and ACCI Members.
- The General Council Meeting took place at the NSW Business Chamber Office. **Richard Gibbs**, Global Head of Economics at the Macquarie Group, provided the council with an Economic and Investment overview, **Dr Martin Parkinson**, former Treasury Secretary, provided his views on the Tax White Paper and **Terry Moran**, Former Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, and President of the Institute of Public Administration Australia (IPAA), turned the General Council's attention to the Federation white paper looking at how to stop overlap and duplication between the Commonwealth and the states.
- ACCI is **re-invigorating its social media channels**. Our social media accounts (@ACCIBizVoice on Twitter, 2Big2Ignore on Facebook and Kate Carnell on LinkedIn) are attracting sizable increases in followers amid increased activity.
- In January former Fairfax journalist Ari Sharp started as ACCI's senior media manager, responsible for shaping our messages on public policy matters.
- Media officers from across the ACCI member network have been invited to join the **Communications Working Party**, which is being revitalised so we can better communicate our agenda. The CWP will help media officers coordinate their efforts, share information and learn from each other's experiences.
- ACCI worked with New South Wales Business Chamber to execute a campaign using the Easter public holidays to highlight the impact **excessive penalty rates** are having on businesses, staff and customers. The campaign encouraged businesses to put up posters explaining the issues to their customers, and also spread the message via social media and mainstream media. Extensive coverage of the issue was achieved in the Daily Telegraph, Herald Sun, ABC, Smart Company and other outlets.
- On workplace relations, the ACCI has been vocal in advancing the case for greater flexibility in order to make it easier for businesses to hire some of the nearly 800,000 Australians looking for work. We received prominent coverage marking the release of our submission to the **Productivity Commission**, our submission to the **Annual Wage Review**, the **South Australian** retail employment template and the **Easter penalty rates campaign**.



## PRODUCTIVITY EDUCATION AND TRAINING (PET) FUND

- A **review of the fund** has been undertaken to improve synergy with other ACCI activities, to support workplace policy objectives and to maximise outcomes.
- A new milestones and deliverables plan for PET was submitted to the Department of Employment in January, and discussions have been taking place. **The plan focuses on a "dialogue" with businesses, both through ACCI and directly, on how workplaces will be managed and regulated in the future.** The dialogue will include events, workshops, a revamped website, social media and a mobile app. Significant funding has been sought to provide content for the dialogue and to assist in the development of workplace policy. The funding requires the key focus to be business improvement.



**Bob Carr** addressing business leaders and ACCI members at the March General Council Dinner.

### STATE AND TERRITORY MEMBERS



### NATIONAL INDUSTRY ASSOCIATIONS



- Oil Industry Industrial Association - Australian International Airlines Operations Group