



**AUSTRALIA PAPUA NEW
GUINEA BUSINESS COUNCIL**



24th AUSTRALIA PAPUA NEW GUINEA BUSINESS FORUM

Cairns Convention Centre, Cairns, 4 to 6 May 2008

The 24th Australia Papua New Guinea Business Forum was held in Cairns from 4-6 May 2008 with the theme "Australia and Papua New Guinea: Business Partnership for Growth". The 2nd Australia Papua New Guinea Business Expo was held in conjunction with the Forum.

More than 250 delegates, partners and exhibitors attended the Forum which was addressed by the Hon Duncan Kerr MP, Australian Parliamentary Secretary for Pacific Islands Affairs, and from Papua New Guinea the Hon Sam Abal MP, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Immigration, the Hon Gabriel Kapris MP, Minister for Commerce and Industry, the Hon Dame Carol Kidu MP, Minister for Minister for Community Development, the Hon William Duma, Minister for Petroleum and Energy, the Hon Ano Pala MP, Vice-Minister for Mining, and the Hon Mike Reynolds AM MP, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Queensland and range of expert presenters who addressed issues in Papua New Guinea including economy, trade, infrastructure, small medium business development, tourism, agriculture, education, health, women in business, the business regulator environment, and resources.

The Forum expressed its pleasure at the improved bilateral political relationship which, when added to the continuing vibrant business relationship, means the relationship is moving again in an overall very positive direction. It noted and endorsed the commitment of governments to the "Strongim Gavman" program, and looks forward to the program being rolled out with its positive impact on human resources and technical expertise in key Papua New Guinea government agencies.

It noted and endorsed the Councils' securing of governments' agreement at the Australia Papua New Guinea Ministerial Forum in Madang that a bilateral officials and business meeting would be held at least twice annually to deepen policy dialogue between government and business and enhance business participation in the Ministerial Forum. The Councils plan that the first such meeting will be held within the next four months.

The Forum agreed that the Councils should maintain and deepen their engagement with governments on the development of the small and medium size enterprises which are the engine of the economic and employment growth which will alleviate poverty. Measures which could be taken to assist SME development include reducing the costs and processes necessary to incorporate a business, developing mentoring programs, and strengthening bodies and groups which assist SMEs including the Small Business Development Corporation as well as appropriate existing formal and informal SME support programs. Particular measures should be devised to assist women in business in both the formal and informal sectors, especially in empowering aspiring women entrepreneurs in direct impact programs.

The Forum reaffirmed the importance of efficient world class infrastructure to economic development and growth, endorsed the principle of competition as a key element in achieving efficiency in national infrastructure operations, and encouraged the Government of Papua New Guinea to further explore options for public private partnerships for national infrastructure development and operation, including in areas such as education and health. Councils agreed to work with government in identifying possible infrastructure public private sector partnerships.

The Forum noted the importance of improving leadership and entrepreneurial skills in Papua New Guinea, and urged governments to support programs which supported such skills development.

It endorsed the need to improve productivity in the agriculture sector, and urged an increase in efforts to identify alternative paths to develop new export markets in agricultural and horticultural products, and to take steps to assist the growth of production aimed at these markets.

The Forum noted that technical and vocational education and training which had been in a state of constant review since 1993 needs urgent decisive action to implement effective education and training programs. This will help ensure that the skills shortages in the labour market in Papua New Guinea are addressed and that students exiting the education system are appropriately skilled to secure employment.

Participants in the tourism sector discussion group identified key issues for growth of the tourism industry as development and maintenance of Papua New Guinea's aviation infrastructure and facilities and airways services including navigational aids, and improved tourism infrastructure and facilities. It noted the measures planned by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) aimed at addressing some of these issues, including possible PPPs with regional tourism operators. The Forum called on the TPA to engage in improved consultation with all tourism stakeholders and business.

The Forum noted the need for government and business to maintain a continual focus and vigilance in programs aimed at managing and combating the spread of the HIV/AIDS virus, endorsed the work of the Papua New Guinea Business Coalition Against HIV/AIDS (BAHA), and encouraged businesses to develop plans and strategies in their workplaces using guidance from BAHA.

The Forum endorsed recommendations from the World Bank Report on Doing Business 2008 that NOW is the time to action reform to remove a wide range of impediments to business.

The Forum noted that negotiations between the Government of Papua New Guinea and the proposed gas project principals are nearing completion, and looks forward to the early conclusion of negotiations to enable commencement of the projects.

CAIRNS
6 May 2008