



Townsville Chamber MEDIA Release

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POSSIBLE SKILL SHORTAGES

The Townsville Chamber has been red-flagging possible skill shortages in North Queensland. As the local economy is transitioning into an era of transformation, several infrastructure projects will be requiring similar skills.

Projects such as the North Queensland Stadium, Mater Health Services North Queensland expansion, the redevelopment of the Cowboys League Club, the Port expansion, solar farms at Ross River, the Burdekin, Rollingstone and at the Sun Metals refinery, and the ramping up of mining projects in the Galilea Basin will all require similar skills.

“We already know the demands for civil engineers, riggers, electricians, crane drivers and IT specialists exceeds what we have available locally right now” says Townsville Chamber Board Member Michael Kopittke.

“We can also predict that those currently in lower skilled jobs will look to move up to trade jobs, and we will end up with a shortage of baristas, store attendees and taxi drivers. It happened in Mackay in 2014-15 and it can happen here too. We are already experiencing a shortage of hairdressers.”

“There is a limited pool of skilled workers up North and, for 18 months, we have been saying to government this will happen.” says Mr Kopittke.

Last week, the Chamber held a round table discussion with the Minister Assisting the Premier on North Queensland, Coralee O’Rourke MP, Federal MP Cathy O’Toole, and senior representatives from TAFE Queensland North and Tec-NQ, aimed at identifying skill shortages in the immediate and medium term.

The discussion centered on coordinating actions between the North’s trade institutions, two levels of government, and businesses.

TAFE Queensland North Region General Manager, Joanne Pyne said TAFE Queensland is focused on improving regional prosperity and development.

“TAFE Queensland recognises the important contribution that local businesses make to our region’s economy,” Ms Pyne said.

“For over 130 years, TAFE Queensland has been working collaboratively with industry to ensure that our programs provide students with relevant, hands-on training and work-ready skills.”

“Skilled workers add value to business operations and TAFE Queensland is committed to identifying and providing the right training for future skill needs,” Ms Pyne said.

Tec-NQ’s senior school program develops employability skills in Year 11 and 12 students through its school curriculum and industry training. The program features extensive work placement which has been extremely successful in facilitating school to work transitions.

“We have good support from our employer networks” says Jo Hoskins, Manager for Stakeholder Engagement. “What we need now are apprenticeship opportunities so students can continue their training post-graduation.”

Although Tec-NQ currently facilitates two thirds of the school-based apprenticeships in the region, only half of the graduating students are currently signed up.

The Chamber’s message to businesses is to get ready. “Work with us, TAFE and Tec-NQ to prepare our young people for these opportunities” says Mr Kopittke.

Townsville has two trade institutions, two universities, a younger than state average population and a pipeline of work for the next two to three years.

Townsville, the Burdekin, Hinchinbrook and Charters Towers workers and businesses also stand to benefit from the knock-on effects of projects in Mackay and in Cairns.

“Young people need to have work experience during their schooling and employers need to have confidence the young people they employ are work ready” says Mr Kopittke. “We can only do this if we work together.”

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