



23 November 2018

Committee Secretariat
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Committee Secretariat

Inquiry into Austrade's role in attracting investment in Australia

Cairns Regional Council welcomes the Joint Standing Committee on Trade and Investment Growth undertaking an inquiry into the role that the Australian Trade and Investment Commission (Austrade) has in attracting investment to Australian businesses and how they can also help those businesses to attract investment themselves.

Cairns Regional Council (Council) takes a direct role in and a proactive approach to investment attraction. Council understands the importance of foreign direct investment as it helps to stimulate economic growth, supports business and industry development, creates local jobs and drives innovation. Council will continue to work cooperatively and in partnership with both the Queensland Government and the Australian Government when delivering investment attraction initiatives.

Cairns Regional Council's Corporate Plan 2017-2022 and Economic Development Strategy 2018-2022 sets out the vision and includes a range of strategies and actions aimed at attracting investment. Council leads and supports out-bound investment missions as well as hosts investors and in-bound delegations. Council also directly supports investment through the provision of:

- Investment incentives;
- "Fast Tracked" development applications;
- Pre-lodgement enquiry services;
- An infrastructure charges incentives program; and
- A flexible planning scheme.

Council is proud of our track record of success in attracting investment over many decades and will continue to dedicate resources and develop relationships and invest in local capacity building focused on investment attraction.

How Austrade might better help Australian businesses to attract investment.

As a Local Government, we have a deep understanding and knowledge of our local business community, economic conditions and competitive advantages. Through this knowledge and understanding, the opportunity exists to develop a whole-of-government approach in relation to investment attraction.

Local Government should be a key partner in investment attraction delivery. However, more often than not, each level of government is deploying the whole-of-government approach in a horizontal manner and thus focused on delivering their own responsibilities and objectives. What is required is the vertical integration of a whole-of-government approach. This would necessitate all three levels of government working together when formulating investment policy, strategies and in delivery.

The importance of having a coordinated and cooperative whole-of-government approach to investment attraction cannot be underestimated. Recognising that Local Government is a key partner in government and not just another stakeholder sends a strong message of support and coordination to potential investors.

Recommendations:

1. Develop and commit to a regular program of planned in market visits in regional Australia for Senior Trade and Investment Commissioners, Consul Generals and Investment Specialists, partnering with Local Government, to gain further market intelligence on current opportunities and market conditions and meet key stakeholders. Visits have been occurring on a sporadic basis;
2. Expand the current Trade Start program or create Investment Specialist roles (within Australia) to be based in key regional cities with identified opportunities, including Cairns, to leverage and promote the region's competitive advantages as well as provide opportunity for direct engagement via Austrade's international network of offices and investment specialists to facilitate information sharing, awareness and promotion of opportunities.

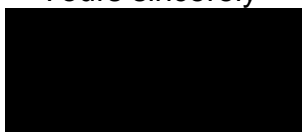
Currently there are inadequate resources deployed to support investment across the Cairns region (an area the size of Victoria) through the Trade Start Program. This is an opportunity missed to deliver on the Federal Government's investment agenda as many of Austrade's priority sectors align with the region's strengths and a number of Austrade's key markets are directly accessible through the Cairns International Airport.

3. Continue to provide in-market support for planning and delivery of Local Government out-bound investment missions, including arranging introductions to key stakeholders, facilitating in-market support services (e.g. interpreter services) and background research etc. in the planning and lead up to missions .
4. Formalise a meaningful whole of Government approach to Investment Attraction with Local Government providing input into policy development and delivery.

5. Provide the opportunity for Local Government officers to have the same opportunities for professional development in the areas of investment attraction that will complement current initiatives, align objectives and priorities as well as enhance the ability to deliver investment outcomes.
6. Consider short term placement exchanges (one to four weeks) between Austrade and Local Government that align to existing priorities and markets.

Should you have any further enquiries or require additional information, please do not hesitate to contact myself on the above phone number.

Yours sincerely



Angelo Finocchiaro
Program Leader Economic Development