

Media Coverage on the 2009 State of the Region Summit Gold Coast



Gold Coast Mail

Thursday, 22 October 2009

Page: 1 News GEX

Circulation: 61,000

Area of Clip: 550.46 sqcm

Clip ID: 3537340

Region: Qld Regional

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FACING THE FUTURE Summit on state of region

ZOE HANCOCK

GOLD Coast business leaders and decision-makers were urged to think about the future of the Gold Coast at a summit in Surfers Paradise last Thursday.

State of the Region Summit convenor Professor Scott Prasser said last week's Gold Coast inaugural event was part of a series of summits across Queensland that aimed to discuss challenges facing each region.

"It is meant to be an annual review of the economy, environment and social issues for the region," Prof Prasser said.



Discussions about the environment at the State of the Region Summit showed the future did not have to be bleak but may provide opportunities for business.

Interest groups will unite

PROF Prasser said the summit's theme, Connecting the Coast, highlighted the city's geographical spread and different interest groups.

"One thing has to happen – the interest groups of the Coast need to get connected," Prof Prasser said.

He said interest groups would benefit from working together towards a united future.

Challenges facing the region according to Prof Prasser were the consequences of its growing population, developing a diverse economy and managing the environment in the long term.

Prof Prasser said discussions about the environment showed the future did not have to be bleak.

"The environmental challenges

may offer business opportunities so it doesn't have to be all doom and gloom," he said.

"Another focus was the telecommunication challenges for the region and its businesses."

The summit concluded with a discussion about how to market the Gold Coast.

Prof Prasser said the Gold Coast was the sixth largest city in Australia and was also the fastest-growing region.

"We need to work out what the pitch will be for the future and how diversity is going to be sustained," Prof Prasser said.

"The glitz and fun as well as the serious side need to be addressed."

Keynote speakers at the summit included Gold Coast City Council

mayor Ron Clarke, Griffith Vice-Chancellor Ian O'Connor, Queensland Department of Infrastructure and Planning principal demographer Carl Rohlin, St George Bank market economist Amanda Tan and Central Queensland University Emeritus Professor Bob Miles.



David Gratton, Peter Ball and Prof Scott Prasser at the summit.

GOLD Coast businesses will find it difficult to adapt to climate change policies, according to a leading environmental expert.

As climate change becomes a major factor in profitability, Gold Coast companies will need to change their financial planning and business strategies, says Professor Bob Miles, a delegate to the UN Climate Change panel.

“Climate change is not just about a carbon tax and new regulations, it is a new way of doing business that presents new challenges and opportunities,” says Miles.

“Unless the Gold Coast connects to these new global drivers then regional business will suffer and struggle to respond to the changing demands of consumers.”

Miles, also executive director of Central Queensland University’s Institute for Sustainable Regional Development, argues that environmental issues have become a fundamental part of business and are no longer just concerns for ‘greenies’.

“Unless all sectors start to take these environmental drivers seriously and change the way we do business and undertake economic development, there will real impact on the region’s economy, let alone a sustainable environment on the Gold Coast,” he says.

CBD ISSUE A DETRIMENT TO INVESTMENT SAYS PROFESSOR

By Jason Oxenbridge, Editor, Gold Coast Business News, Volume 6.09 Oct 2009



INVESTMENT in the Gold Coast from big capital city business is being stifled because the city does not have a single CBD, according to a Sydney business professor.

Scott Prasser, convenor of the upcoming St George State of the Region Summit on the Gold Coast, says focus groups attended by business leaders have revealed a common complaint regarding the Coast's splintered business districts.

"Business people coming from Sydney often complain that by not having one central business district it's a deterrent to investment," he says.

"They are used to a particular way of operating. The concept of a united Gold Coast community is more of an urban myth than a reality."

Business leaders on the Gold Coast have vigorously defended their city, suggesting southern academics 'get their facts straight'. Compared to capital cities, the Gold Coast does not have large scale traffic congestion, while specialist cluster sectors, or various CBDs, actually foster synergy within industries.

Chair of Business GC John Witheriff, says the appeal of operating a business on the Gold Coast outweighs any negative rhetoric pedalled by business owners in Sydney and Melbourne.

"We don't have the transport of infrastructure to serve a single CBD," says Witheriff, managing partner of the law firm Minter Ellison Gold Coast.

"The Gold Coast historically grew up as a collection of villages. Our view is that CBDs in large cities exist because people have historically needed to communicate by physically mixing together. That is shifting with technology by making it more convenient via conference calls and other forms of communication.

"The business community successfully operates out of a number of different locations. After 20 years based in Southport, we moved the biggest the law firm on the Gold Coast to Varsity Lakes because our staff were sick of sitting in traffic jams."

Witheriff points to the advantages of having specialist CBDs. For eg; Coomera as the marine innovation hub; Robina as the tech and IT centre; Southport for medical and government; Surfers for tourism and Burleigh Heads for surfing industrial and retail.

Murray d'Almeida is the chair of Connecting Southern Gold Coast, an initiative set up to bolster business and to develop a commercial hub south of Burleigh Heads. He is also a board director at Hyperion Asset Management, a national funds manager that successfully operates out of the Gold Coast.

"The trend around the world is for traditional CBDs to decentralise," says d'Almeida.

"LA is a wonderful example with various satellite CBDs and even Sydney has different hubs with North Sydney, Chatswood and the central city. There are cluster developments happening all over the planet and the decisions are often driven by logistics.

"From a future planning point of view, infrastructure is the biggest issue on the Gold Coast. By having various villages you circumvent transport problems by not all travelling to the same place."

Property Council Gold Coast chair Peter Trathen, believes the city will inevitably end up with two dominant commercial zones.

"I think Southport will become the CBD and Robina the second hub, it's difficult to see any other solution. The Gold Coast won't lend itself to the future in trying to centralise. I would hope and expect investment over the next decade, but it will be in niche sectors. I doubt that we will be able to compete in a broad sense with the corporate market in capital cities."

But Professor Prasser believes one of the major contributing factors driving the need for change is how population growth is impacting on the linear city nature and limited intra-regional public transport.

"The planning and infrastructure limitations of the Gold Coast have long been exasperated by in-fighting between particular interest groups for their slice of the future. Key decision makers from business, community and government need to come together and be willing to put aside their personal agendas in order to create good policy, leading to visionary planning and positive community outcomes," he says.

Most would agree that the city of the Gold Coast punches above its weight and has held its own in a volatile market. With recovery now occurring in key sectors of tourism and property development and SMEs powering the engine room of the economy, the city is growing up fast and cementing itself as a serious national business hub.

"It's a city unlike any other in Australia," concludes Trathen.

THE Gold Coast's growing pains go under the microscope tomorrow at major summit between business, government and community groups.

The one-day summit, an initiative of the city council and Griffith University, will hear the latest demographic, economic and environmental trends for the tourism strip.

“This is the first of an annual update of how this region is travelling economically, environmentally and as a community,” said summit convenor Professor Scott Prasser.

Among the speakers at the event, to be held in Surfers Paradise, will be Emeritus Professor Bob Miles, who will speak on sustainable tourism.

There also will be a public transport update and debate from Anna Carroll of GC Rapid Transit and a presentation from Gold Coast

Property Council chairman, and light rail proponent Peter Trathen.

Mr Trathen will focus on the critical issues to deliver a ‘credible’ public transport solution for the city.

“There are myriad converging interests with regard to public transport,” said Mr Trathen. “The future for the Gold Coast, without

an efficient public transport system underpinning the growth is bleak.”

Prof Prasser said the **state of the region** summit, which is being backed by St George Bank, was aimed at key regional decision makers.

“(These events) have been very successful in other regions, not just in highlighting key issues, but seeking to develop solutions, and new ideas for the future,” he said.

Caption: Light rail supporter Peter Trathen

Illus: Photo

Section: BUSINESS

ABC Gold & Tweed Coasts Gold Coast

Mornings : 12 October 2009 09:42AM

Compere: Briony Petch

Petch talks to Professor Scott Prasser from the Australian Catholic University about the sense of community on the Gold Coast and business leaders thinking that the concept of a 'united Gold Coast' is more a myth than reality. Prasser notes that he conducted a workshop with business leaders and that they thought the Gold Coast had 'no real centre' and a 'lack of connectiveness' between different groups and government. He states that the Gold Coast Council is trying very hard to address the issue and that it is important that the business community comes together and 'speaks with one voice' so govt understands, further remarks that he would like to see a regular consultation process so that the community can have their say. Prasser states that he is convening the State of the Region summit this week and that it will discuss the economics, environment and social nature of the coast region.

Interviewee

Scott Prasser, Professor, Australian Catholic University



No need for CBD

INVESTMENT in the Gold Coast from big capital city business is being stifled because the city does not have a single CBD, according to a Sydney business professor.

Professor of public policy at Australian Catholic University Scott Passer says business focus groups have revealed a common complaint regarding the Coast's splintered business districts.

"Business people coming from Sydney often complain that by not having one central business district it's a deterrent to investment. They are used to a particular way of operating. The concept of a united Gold Coast community is more of an urban myth than a reality," he says.

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Chair of Business GC John Witherit, says the appeal of operating a business on the Gold Coast outweighs any negative rhetoric peddled by business owners in Sydney and Melbourne.

"We can't have the transport or infrastructure to serve a single CBD," says Witherit, managing partner of the law firm Minter Ellison Gold Coast.

"The Gold Coast historically grew up as a collection of villages. Our view is that CBDs in large cities exist because people have historically needed to communicate by physically mixing together. That is shifting with technology by making it more convenient via conference calls and other forms of communication.

"The business community successfully operates out of a number of different locations. After 20 years based in Southport, we moved the biggest law firm on the Gold Coast to Varsity Lakes because our staff were sick of sitting in traffic jams."

Witherit points to the advantages of having specialist CBDs, eg: Coomera as the marine innovation hub; Robina as the tech and IT centre; Southport for medical and government; Surfers for tourism and Burleigh Heads for surfing industrial and retail.

"The trend around the world is for traditional CBDs to decentralise," says Murray Almeida, chair of Connecting Southern Gold Coast and a director at Hyperon Asset Management.

"From a future planning point of view, infrastructure is the biggest issue on the Gold Coast. By having various villages you circumvent transport problems by not all travelling to the same place."

Property Council Gold Coast chair Peter Tristram, believes the city will inevitably end up with two dominant commercial zones - a Southport CBD and Robina as a second hub.

"The Gold Coast won't lend itself to the future in trying to centralise. I would hope and expect investment over the next decade, but it will be in niche sectors. I doubt that we will be able to compete in a broad sense with the corporate market in capital cities," he says.

But Passer believes population growth is impacting on the linear city nature and limited intra-regional public transport.

"The planning and infrastructure limitations of the Gold Coast have long been exacerbated by in-fighting between particular interest groups. Key decision makers need to come together and be willing to put aside their personal agendas in order to create good policy, leading to visionary planning and positive community outcomes," he