



**Dr Chris Bourke MLA**  
**MEMBER FOR GINNINDERRA**

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**Talking Craft and Design Event**  
**Thursday 29 September 2011**

I acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land we are meeting on, the Ngunnawal people. I respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this city and this region.

It is very important to acknowledge country.

Firstly - it's about truth telling when so many lies have been told in the past.

Secondly – it is about respect, respect for the traditional owners and, in the case of welcomes to country, respect from the traditional owners.

Thirdly – it's about the future, how Canberrans can learn from their knowledge of how to live in this land of rivers, mountains and plains.

I will begin by thanking CraftACT for inviting me here today to talk about the ACT's business and innovation environment. I am representing the Minister for Economic Development, Andrew Barr, who is unable to attend today due to his prior commitment at the ACT Chief Minister's Export Awards.

His prior commitment however is my gain because I am particularly pleased to be part of today's event. Although my professional background is in health, I am especially fond of visual design and have been actively involved on the Board of the Capital Arts Patrons Organisation in the past. I strongly believe that it is important to be active in areas where your passions lie, and I am delighted to join you here today for *Talking Craft and Design*.

Today's event is part of a wider program of events comprising the ACT Government's Business In Focus Month, which has seen around 50 business support events take place around Canberra during September. Business In Focus Month is an opportunity for the ACT Government to shine the spotlight on the local private sector. It is also a great opportunity for local businesses to discover creative and innovative ways to improve their business.

On David Straker's website "CreatingMinds.org" he boldly states:

*"Business for some is a dirty word and for others is everything. The feeling is mutual, for some in business see creativity as a dirty word, too. But the fact is that business only succeeds by constantly bringing new things that are better than their competitors' offerings to customers who are prepared to pay for this advantage. Business needs creativity even more than artists. And that's saying something."*

I am not going to go quite so far as to agree that business needs creativity MORE than artists do. I think it is difficult to say that artists could need creativity less than any other group of people. But it is certainly an interesting perspective – that business can only succeed by being creative.

This year Business In Focus Month has focused on the theme of Canberra, the Creative City. This theme emphasises the importance of creativity in unlocking the full potential of the local private sector.

But it also makes an important observation about Canberra. This city boasts a diverse and vibrant creative sector, making up about 10 per cent of all ACT businesses - nearly double the national average. However, it is not only the creative sector that leads us to state that Canberra is a creative city.

Creativity is evident across all sectors and business types, and is a defining feature of a wide range of the ACT's business success stories.

So what is it about creativity that makes it so important to business success? And can creative types – craft and design practitioners – equally benefit from working on their business skills?

One of the key features of creativity is that it is, at its essence, a practice of being open to ideas. Many an idea – for a business system, product, or work of art – is lost before it is given the chance to fully form. Creative people are typically willing to acknowledge ideas, and to allow them to sit with other ideas, to enter a discussion with colleagues, friends or mentors.

I see collaboration as a key feature of all creative activity. The ideas that spark creative works of art, and the ideas that spark advances in the business world, are more often than not a combination of an individual spark, and the encouragement or facilitation of a group of people. It is collaboration that sees an idea reach its potential.

There is a great opportunity for collaboration between the arts and business communities in the A.C.T. There is much that the arts, cultural and creative communities can offer to help business thrive, and much that business can offer in return.

We have seen promising developments in this area over recent years. Both the public and private sectors have been active in investing in creativity for the Canberra community.

Public Art is a highly visible example of this investment. It is, by its very nature, the most visible expression of creativity in the community. From art installations in hotel and office foyers, to perhaps more contentious roadside artworks, the ACT has had a dramatic increase in art installations in the public space.

As one example, long-time Craft ACT Accredited Professional Member Robert Foster, an internationally renowned local artist and Principal of Fink & Co., moved dramatically into the public art spotlight with his *Ossolites* in the stunning award winning artwork *The Journey* on the ground floor of the new ActewAGL building on Mort Street. This, to me, is a strikingly impressive example of the corporate world embracing and encouraging public art.

This style of public art installation emphasises the creative thread that underlies the Canberra community. We are indeed a creative lot – whether through works of art or through the establishment of new and

improved business ideas that spark a start-up business or a new product to be developed.

The ACT Government, like governments around the world, is acutely aware that innovative economies hold significant competitive advantage in the global market.

Of course, innovation manifests in many different ways. There are no templates – but if there were, I would argue that Canberra would be a good model for any budding innovative towns or regions.

So what is it then that makes Canberra such an innovative, clever and creative city - or as we like to call it, a knowledge economy?

Canberra is home to the ANU, one of the country's highest ranking universities, which enjoys a global reputation for both the quality of its graduates and the excellence of its research. The ACT is also home to two other universities, as well as the Canberra Institute of Technology.

Together these organisations ensure that we have proportionately more knowledge workers than any other region in Australia. We have workers who are leaders in their fields - in the arts, sciences, technology, government administration, business & industry and academia.

Canberra's significant educational industry sector is also well placed to become a national leader in cultural industries, including: media production & design; architecture; graphic & fashion design; and small businesses that are supported by Craft ACT such as Jonathan Basket Studio Glass, Workshop Bilk, and F!nk & Co Design.

The ACT economy continues to perform strongly on the back of these leaders, even in these turbulent times.

The ACT continues to rank as one of the best state economies, with the lowest rate of unemployment.

The ACT Government has a solid platform for encouraging the ongoing prosperity of the local economy. This platform has three strategic themes, which are guiding the Government's approach to achieving this:

- Investing in people to increase the capacity and flexibility of the economy;
- Encouraging innovation to help foster a more creative, competitive and dynamic business sector; and
- Building infrastructure and planning for the future to support and coordinate economic activity.

Canberra's private sector is thriving. While it employs around 50% of the ACT workforce, well behind the 92.5% employed by the private sector in NSW, some other features are quite surprising.

Recent figures show that there are now around 32,000 businesses registered in the ACT. This means that the ACT has a much higher proportion of businesses per person than NSW. This unique situation is viewed as a risk by some, but also presents a unique opportunity.

There is great opportunity to support the private sector, including the creative and cultural industries: to develop the skills and capabilities of the business side of these ventures; to support them to grow; to enhance their own prosperity; to employ more people; and to enhance the city's economic drivers.

To do this, we need to effectively encourage these small businesses to come together with other businesses, with government and with other organisations that exist to support business, to work together and collaborate – so that their ideas might become the best they can be.

The ACT Government is committed to supporting the development of our unique private sector. Work is currently underway on the development of a strategy that will identify the ways that Canberra's small businesses can best be supported by the ACT Government: to gain the courage and skills to expand; and to help provide a buffer to the Public Sector cycles of employment.

The ACT Government offers a range of targeted support for small business, support that is aimed at helping local business operators succeed and grow, which in turn increases the capacity and flexibility of the local economy.

- *Canberra BusinessPoint* is the ACT Government's business mentoring and advisory service, delivered in partnership with the Canberra Business Council and Lighthouse Business Innovation Centre. Canberra BusinessPoint is there to assist Canberra's business community maximise its growth potential, and provides assistance, support, mentoring and guidance services for early stage business intenders as well as established business operators looking to increase their growth potential.
- The *ACT Business Licence Information Service* is a free online service providing a guided search to help businesses find information on the range of ACT and Australian Government controls, guidelines and legislative requirements that apply when operating a business in the ACT.

The ACT Government operates a range of business grant programs, including:

- InnovationConnect - a competitive grant program aimed at helping Canberra's innovative businesses and entrepreneurs progress to investment readiness or commercialisation.
- TradeConnect assists ACT companies access international markets and enhance their international competitiveness through 'step-up' grant funding that facilitates access to a range of professional services and activities.
- The ACT Screen Investment Fund supports the growth and sustainability of the ACT screen industry, which includes film, television and digital media. It provides equity co-investment with the marketplace in creative, original and marketable projects that can demonstrate significant economic, cultural and creative benefits to the ACT.

In addition, in the leadup to Canberra's 2013 Centenary celebrations the ACT Government and CraftACT are running the *Centenary of Canberra Memorabilia Project*. This project is aimed at allowing residents of the Canberra region to design unique, high quality items that recognise and celebrate 100 years of Canberra as Australia's national capital.

The winning designs will be produced and sold as a limited range of memorabilia items for the Centenary. This project aims to:

- celebrate the contribution and history of craft and design in Canberra;
- showcase and provide opportunities for Canberra's craft and design practitioners; and
- encourage new partnerships between these creative industries and manufactures, with a view to increasing the manufacturing capacity of the Canberra region.

And of course, the ACT Government's Business In Focus Month held each September. This program relies heavily on the contribution of various organisations, such as CraftACT, to conceive, implement and host events and activities throughout the month.

Today's conference is an opportunity to network, interact and hear from industry leaders who will share valuable insight into their success, as well as ways to develop the potential of the local creative sector.

I wish you well for a rewarding and successful afternoon of information sharing and congratulate CraftACT for facilitating such an opportunity.