

# We DO still make things

THE GEELONG MANUFACTURING COUNCIL IS SUPPORTING ITS MEMBERS TO MAKE A VITAL CONTRIBUTION TO THE REGIONAL ECONOMY



*Geelong's oldest manufacturer, Backwell IXL, has invested heavily in Industry 4.0 and modernised its approach to foundry operations. Left: Ivan Bereza and IXL Backwell boss Bernard Brussow. Photos: Alison Wynd*

MANUFACTURING remains a key driver of the Geelong economy despite a public perception to the contrary following the shadow cast by the demise of the city's traditional manufacturing giants.

The industry still represents 20 per cent of the regional economy and employs 19 per cent of local jobs.

As the region develops more advanced manufacturing capability, the role of the Geelong Manufacturing Council remains as crucial as ever.

The Geelong Manufacturing Council has been active since 1998, providing business improvement programs and platforms since 2007.

A member-based, not-for-profit organisation, the GMC promotes regional manufacturing and assists members in

achieving business growth by providing programs, events and pathways to funding, innovation, collaboration, networking and skills development.

Chief executive officer David Peart says despite the changing landscape, manufacturing continues to play a major role in Geelong.

According to 2016 Australian Bureau of Statistics figures, manufacturing drives 20 per cent of the regional economy, employing 19 per cent of local jobs directly and 40 per cent of jobs in total.

It creates more than \$1 billion in turnover across 500 companies, of which more than 100 are exporting their products. It collectively employs 10,800 people and creates \$10.6 billion of activity in our region each year.

"These statistics indicate how relevant manufacturing still is in Geelong, and it continues to grow as we access more innovation, smarter technologies and higher value-add products," he says.

"Geelong has always been a resilient city and this can be illustrated by the GMC members' ability to adapt to change," Mr Peart says.

"Despite the downturn in automotive, these businesses had the right mindset and skills to weather the transition.

"Companies such as Backwell IXL, with a long-term-view of business, actively support growing skills in their business. So do our other automotive transition success stories such as North Geelong engineering firm Austeng and MHG Glass (formerly Pilkingtons).

"These businesses have been part of the GMC from day one and are a great testimonial to focusing on skills development in innovation and operational leadership excellence."

Mr Peart says Geelong's major manufacturing employers and GMC members are VIVA Energy Australia, Ford Australia (R&D precinct), and Deakin University, with Carbon Revolution set to become another major regional employer. Large traditional textile industry employers include Godfrey Hirst (carpets), and Huyck Wangner (textile manufacturing supply chain).

Food manufacturing is also booming. "Farm Foods, Organic Dairy Farmers, Schulz Organics, Bulla Dairy (Ice Cream) and Little Creatures, along with a growing

list of micro-breweries, artisan food producers and distillers are showing strong results in their respective markets. Boundary Bend Olives is the largest Australian olive oil producer and local winemakers supplying to national retailers are also reporting growth.”

Mr Peart believes Geelong’s engineering capacity is also showing good results, thanks to a large amount of activity in government and private enterprise infrastructure projects, school construction and regional urban development.

“With the expansion of Avalon Airport into international flights, and a large freight and commercial precinct development underway, we see a positive future trend for manufacturers in our region,” Mr Peart says.

“Our dominance in advanced manufacturing in carbon fibre technology and access to ongoing collaboration with Deakin and CSIRO as advanced fibre specialists will pave the way for a new advanced fibre industry to emerge in our region.”

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In April 2018, following workshops conducted by internationally acclaimed manufacturing expert, Professor Goran Roos for the GMC, 10 founding organisations came together to formalise the Advanced Fibre Cluster Geelong entity.

The aim of the cluster is to improve the competitiveness and enhance long-term productivity of the advanced fibre and carbon composites industry.

Advanced Fibre Cluster Geelong members are Austeng, CSIRO Waurin Ponds, Geelong Manufacturing Council, Industrial Control Technologies, Sykes Racing, Carbon Revolution, Carbon Nexus

Deakin University, 3D Ortotech, Quickstep and the City of Greater Geelong.

“The growth in this industry is set to increase the overall level of economic activity in our region, creating more advanced manufacturing jobs and diversify the regional employment base,” Mr Peart says.

“The Advanced Fibre Cluster is a logical consequence of success already visible through Carbon Revolution and Carbon Nexus. The advanced fibre industry (of which carbon fibre is an important part), therefore has the potential to be the next powerhouse industry for Geelong – just as wool once was.”

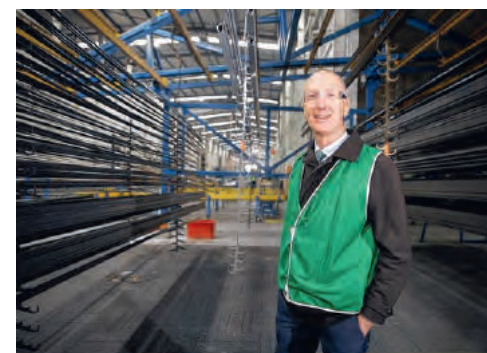
Research shows clusters can help businesses to grow, increase competitiveness, collaboration and skill levels, reduces costs, foster innovation and increase investment and employment.

“The project aims to co-ordinate the growth of the advanced fibre industry and the participating organisations by creating synergies, shared resources and exchanges of new business opportunities.”

“By working together, member organisations will participate in collaborative tendering or project opportunities, taking advantage of group purchasing opportunities and equipment sharing synergies to share the cost of expensive equipment.”

Attracting more members is an ongoing focus for the GMC so it can better leverage its success and have a strong positive influence on economic growth in the region.

“We continue to work closely with our major sponsors VIVA Energy, Deakin University, The Gordon and Ford Australia,



Top: Stewart Price at Organic Dairy Farmers. Left: GMC chief executive David Peart. Right: Southern Star Windows general manager Ken Best.

who support us by providing access to innovation, industrial collaboration and skills programs,” Mr Peart says.

GMC members are being assisted by government programs and GMC programs that provide skills in operational innovation, leadership and collaboration.

This includes programs such as the Leadership for Manufacturing Excellence, the Regional Industry Collaboration Fund and access to government funding through the Entrepreneurs Program.

“The region is showing strong and sustained growth in advanced manufacturing. Our programs align well with this growth trend, allowing small to medium manufacturers access to our programs and become better equipped to grow and prosper. This leads to further economic growth in our region,” Mr Peart says.

The Leadership for Manufacturing Excellence program, which has been running since 2011, is a cost-effective program particularly for small and medium

manufacturers which often don’t have access to development opportunities and leading experts locally.

“The program was set up to develop the current and future leaders of Geelong’s manufacturing businesses, to lead their organisations through challenging economic conditions for a more successful sustainable future and improved competitive advantage,” he says.

Each year, a group of between 22 to 30 participants from 11 to 15 local businesses participate in a series of workshops aimed at providing relevant skills in lean operations, problem solving, innovative thinking and business culture. Each participant is asked to identify and implement an improvement project.

“To date these projects have provided direct benefits to participating businesses of more than \$10 million per year, typically around \$300,000 per company, through reduced operational costs, added product lines and improved customer service,” Mr Peart says.



Farm Foods boss Nick Kerr. Right: Boomaroo Nurseries managing director Eric Jacometti.