

National Small Business Summit Success

Red tape once again became the topic of interest at the National Small Business Summit held in Sydney last month.

The Summit, hosted by the Council of Small Business Organisations of Australia showed once again that small business was swamped in procedures to cater for Government regulations whether it be direct Government to business dealings or business to business.

The Prime Minister John Howard opened the Summit on Monday evening the 16th May at a dinner held at the Darling Harbour Convention and Exhibition Centre. During the evening Sydney radio commentator Alan Jones A.O. was awarded the 2005 Small Business Champion award by the Prime Minister for his work in highlighting the competition and red tape issues facing small business.

Tuesday the 17th started with a light discussion between the Minister for Small Business Fran Bailey and Shadow Minister Tony Burke over breakfast. Issues raised were those that they agreed on, cementing the future for small business in these areas.

Sessions during the day covered vital issues such as cash flow for small business, opportunities and threats to small business in the market place, new technologies and the implications for small business and the proposed industrial relations reform, the benefits or otherwise of a centralised system.

Competition has been a major concern to small business especially as larger business get bigger and bigger, telecommunications, construction, grocery and many other sectors are finding the power of large businesses is over riding opportunities that may have once been there. Powerless against economies of scale, small business still has a need for more protection in regard to predatory pricing and premises leasing conditions for example.

New technologies are always coming in to play and at first they are expensive, only larger companies can afford them, giving them the edge until the technology become cheaper a few years on. Plus there is still a hesitance by some small business operators to embrace the new ways of doing business; once again education in the workplace is the answer.

The Government has a number of proposals for a new industrial relations system in front of it currently, and the summit saw four main requirements of small business highlighted: open access to the system, flexibility as to cater for the 1.2 million unique small business in the country, simplicity so that the system is easy to understand and cheap enough to access. The new system must not be exclusive to the bigger cities.

Small business is vital to the Nations future as highlighted by the Chair of COSBOA Mr. Bob Stanton in his address to the summit, Monday evening. This was confirmed by the guest list: The Prime Minister John Howard, The Opposition Leader Kim

Beasley, Fran Bailey - The Federal Minister of Small Business & Tourism, Tony Burke - The Federal Shadow Minister of Small Business, Senator Andrew Murray - Democrats Spokesperson for Workplace Relations, Graeme Samuel - Chairman of the ACCC, Michael Pascoe - Media Personality, Stephen Smith - Shadow Minister for Industry, Infrastructure & Industrial Relations, Sharan Burrow - President of the ACTU, Crazy John's founder & CEO, John Ilhan, Alan Jones 2GB and Senator Ron Boswell - Leader of the Nationals in the Senate.

As CEO of COSBOA I took the opportunity in my after lunch address to highlight the importance of up skilling the 1.2 million small business owners and managers in business management and compliance, we feel the Government has a mutual obligation to assist small business owners in business practises, in return for the compliance obligations they have place upon them. GST, staff income tax collection, superannuation collection, distribution and form lodgement plus a plethora of licences and ABS information collection and more, all adds up to a small business acting as an agent for Government, and it costs.

The summit was once again a great success providing a real avenue for vital messages to be delivered to the Government. We now look for to the results.

Tony Steven

CEO

Council of Small Business Organisations of Australia Ltd. (COSBOA)