



## ACT Government

# 2003-2004 BUDGET

### BUDGET BUILDS CANBERRA'S ECONOMIC FUTURE

The 2003-04 ACT Budget lays the foundation for building Canberra's economic future, Economic Development, Business and Tourism Minister Ted Quinlan said.

"Our Economic White Paper, to be completed before the end of the year, will present a coherent vision and strategy to make the most of the ACT's economic development opportunities," Mr Quinlan said.

"The budget progresses many of the key focuses of the White Paper, such as business attraction, education, growing local businesses smart technologies and tourism.

"For example, we have allocated \$1.3 million over four years to establish a not for profit business attraction organisation, Partners Canberra, which will provide a one-stop-shop for companies and individuals here and overseas to make the investment and relocation decisions.

"Partners Canberra will be a partnership, in which the Government, the private sector and research institutions each provide matching funding. Its charter will be to build our competitive advantage by attracting new businesses, retaining existing ones and facilitating population growth in our economic area."

The Minister said that a new Council of Education Export would receive \$150,000 a year for the next four years for establishing the ACT as a preferred study location for international students. Membership will be drawn from the heads of various education institutions, peak industry bodies and government agencies.

"Export of education and training provides employment for around 4000 in our region, and earns over \$110 million a year in export revenue. We want to build on this important industry," Mr Quinlan said.

The Minister said the budget provides important support to small and micro enterprises, which make up over 96% of all businesses in Canberra.

"A number of small and micro businesses were victims of the January bushfires. The budget provides ongoing funding for the Bushfire Business Assistance Package, \$30,000 for applications expected late in the 2002-03 financial year, and \$189,000 a year for four years for the interest subsidy component of the Bushfire Assistance Package," he said.

"We are also providing \$922,000 over four years to extend our current suite of programs for small and micro businesses, which ultimately will lead to jobs growth in the sector."

The Minister said the funding provides for:

- an online interactive business advisory service, complementing the Canberra Business Advisory Service;

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- an improved online Business Licence Information Service (BLIS), which will reduce the time it takes to comply with red tape.
- enhancements to the Business Acceleration Program, which provides dollar for dollar grants to developing businesses to help them in expansion; and
- the creation of a 'Frustratagram' website which businesses can use to log their views on regulatory issues as a part of the process of reforming regulation.

The Minister said the new funding is in addition to \$256,000 being provided for the Small Business Employment Ready Program in 2003-04, allocated in the last budget. Funding will also continue for other grant programs, such as the Management of High Technology Start-up Program, the Trade Development Program and the Knowledge Fund, which will offer \$3 million in the 2003-04 budget for projects that help build a knowledge-based economy, which will be a key focus of the Economic White Paper.

The budget also continues to support the establishment of the ACT node of the National ICT Centre of Excellence (NICTA), with \$600,000 being provided in 2003-04 from a \$10 million package announced in the last budget.

"Having a node here in Canberra will further position our region as a major originator and developer of ICT technologies, and will significantly increase commercial R&D expenditure, driving company formation and employment," Mr Quinlan said.

The budget continues to support the region's tourism and convention industry, one of the region's most important industries.

"Tourism directly contributes about \$1.1 billion of visitor expenditure to the local economy each year, and supports about 14,000 jobs, while the ACT's convention industry is worth \$334 million a year," Mr Quinlan said.

"In this budget, we are making a \$40 million planning provision in 2004-05 for planning and construction of a new or upgraded convention centre. This is in addition to \$250,000 for further feasibility and design works.

"We are also redirected the \$4 million from the V8 Supercar race to an integrated marketing and promotional program.

"Overall, the 2003-04 budget gives us the foundation for making the most of our economic opportunities and creating new opportunities, in line with the directions of the Economic White Paper," Mr Quinlan concluded.

**Statement ends.**