

Media Release

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AgriFood Skills Australia leads new jobs push in Queensland

AgriFood Skills Australia will host its second Jobs Summit tomorrow (Friday 6 November) in Emerald, the hub of Queensland's Central Highlands and an area with a regional population of more than 30,000 people, but a total of 200,000 across the larger Fitzroy region.

A series of massive new projects planned in and around the Central Highlands, costing \$110 billion over the next five to 10 years, are expected to generate in excess of 20,000 jobs mainly in construction work.

Proposed projects include three new coal mines and a power station on the western side of the Central Highlands, expansion of existing coal mines in the region, new and expanded port facilities in the Gladstone area and LNG pipelines and port facilities. These giant projects are expected to create a powerful pressure for workers, which will have an impact across the entire region.

The Central Highlands Jobs Summit has already attracted widespread local interest and around 80 industry and community representatives are expected to attend the region's first summit to find ways of attracting skilled workers to the area. They represent a cross section of the area's major industry sectors: cattle, agriculture, mining, transport and civil construction. Also attending are local, state and federal government agencies, regional jobs centres, employment groups and vocational training and education providers.

AgriFood CEO Arthur Blewitt, said he was seeking to inject a fresh energy and new thinking into Queensland's Central Highlands region in what has become a major national effort to promote jobs in regional areas across Australia in collaboration with local industry and regional bodies. AgriFood would continue to provide logistical support for the Queensland jobs push in the medium term.

"The aim of the summit in Emerald is to identify and address the challenges of attracting, developing and retaining a skilled workforce in the Central Highlands Region," Mr Blewitt said.

"There is strong competition for jobs in the region as the Central Highlands mining, agricultural, transport and building industries lead the recovery from the economic downturn. But we are aware that new approaches are needed to ensure a sustainable approach to attracting, skilling and retaining the workforce.

"This is now a priority for us as the nation recovers from the global economic crisis and as regional areas like the Central Highlands seek to provide jobs and increase the workforce. Having the right skills is a high priority of course, but what is even more important is being able to attract workers

and their families to come and live in regional areas.

Mr Blewitt said some of the questions being addressed in Emerald would focus on how businesses - big and small - would be able to attract new workers and identify opportunities to up-skill existing workers.

"The Summit aims to build collaborative partnerships between local employers, regional education, training and employment organisations and all levels of government to address these important issues," Mr Blewitt said.

"The Emerald Summit follows the AgriFood Regional Jobs Summit held in Narrabri NSW in July and the National AgriFood Conference in Sydney in September 2009.

"Delegates at the national conference appreciated AgriFood Skills Australia's whole-of-region approach to skills and workforce development. There are significant challenges facing the Central Highlands and that is why this regional Summit is being held in Emerald."

This is among several initiatives by AgriFood Skills Australia that are generating widespread interest and support across large regional and rural areas of Australia. Regional Australia is a source of the bulk of jobs and enterprises for the agrifood industry, which employs around 900,000 people nationwide and generates \$208 billion a year to the national economy. Agrifood includes rural industries, food production (including wine), meat, seafood and racing.

The Central Highlands has a resident population of nearly 30,000 with extensive vocational education and training facilities and schools that are ready to support the skills development to create a strongly motivated workforce.

LOCATION: Mayfair Ridge Tavern
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