



stanthorpe & granite belt chamber of commerce

President's Report – Annual General Meeting

12 November 2025

Introduction

It is with great pride that I present the President's Report for the Stanthorpe and Granite Belt Chamber of Commerce, reflecting on an inspiring and rewarding 14 months as President. It has been a privilege to work alongside such a strong, resourceful, and committed team of committee members who continue to drive progress for business and community across our region.

Membership Sub-committee

Led by Vice President Christine Hood (Jamworks), the Membership Subcommittee has achieved remarkable growth, with membership increasing from 88 to 117 members. The committee also introduced a new tiered membership structure, enhancing accessibility for emerging businesses and expanding the range of benefits available to members, supported by key partners including Heritage Bank, Medibank, and Business Chamber Queensland. The subcommittee delivered a series of business development workshops in late 2024 and early 2025, focusing on business planning, finance, budgeting, and digital transformation, with support from the Queensland Government and Southern Downs Regional Council.

Events Sub-committee

Under the leadership of Trudy Turner (Country Style Fashions), the Events Subcommittee has revitalised Chamber activities with a balance of legacy and new events. Highlights included the Granite Belt Bush Christmas Market (December 2024) and the relaunch of the Business Excellence Awards in partnership with Granite Belt Wine & Tourism (November 2024). A series of networking events have also been held throughout 2025.

Following member feedback, event formats have been reimagined to include business breakfasts, lunches, and networking evenings, providing valuable opportunities for learning, connection, and business showcasing.

Economic Development & Advocacy Sub-committee

Led by Vice President Ken Waldron (Rockpool Park), this subcommittee has focused on several key initiatives:

1. relaunching the 'Why Leave Town' Gift Card Program, introducing digital gift cards, while expanding load-up locations such as Anna's Candles (Glen Aplin),
2. representing the Chamber on the Stanthorpe Community Reference Group, where the group are strengthening their focus on the future of water security for our region, and

3. With funding support from SDRC, the Chamber developed the Granite Belt Investment Portfolio with consultant Sam Noon from SJN Consulting. This initiative will be an important tool to attract investment in our region to grow businesses where we have gaps and increased demand.
4. The subcommittee is also partnering with GBSAN, GBWT, and SDRC to support a new Nature-Based Tourism strategy built on sustainable principles. The strategy will highlight the natural assets in our region, identify opportunities for new tourism products to support operators and a focus on skilled guides.

Strategic Partnerships Sub-committee

This subcommittee, led by the President, has strengthened collaboration with key regional and industry bodies including Granite Belt Wine & Tourism, the Granite Belt Growers Association, neighbouring Chambers in Warwick and Tenterfield, GBSAN, and the Southern Downs Regional Council. These partnerships have driven cooperative advocacy on issues such as unlicensed short-term accommodation, submissions to Council's Draft Planning Scheme, and engagement with the Angry Bulls Trail Project in Tenterfield.

The Chamber has also deepened engagement with Queensland Government departments (DSD and DTET) and local Members James Lister MP and David Littleproud MP.

Ongoing Initiatives & Projects

1. **Website** - The Chamber reinstated and improved its website creating the opportunity for analytics, with further enhancements to occur in 2025-26,
2. **Digital marketing** – with funding support the Chamber has engaged Zoik and Stonefox Media to re-invigorate our communication and engagement approaches through social media, email notifications and enhancements to our website.
3. **Strategic Plan** – Earlier this year the Chamber refreshed its Strategic Plan giving greater focus on current business and economic development opportunities,
4. **Constitution** - under Ken Waldron's leadership, the Chamber has reviewed and established a new Constitution that is now aligned with contemporary legislation and guidelines
5. **Budget / Cash Flow** – over the last 12 months, Chamber has strengthened its financial management through budget reviews and cash flow planning. The future will include a focus on the establishment of a soon-to-be launched Sponsorship Prospectus and grant writing initiatives.
6. **Big Thermometer Project** - The Chamber reconnected with dedicated volunteer Mick Spiller to continue the promotion and production of plaques on the path to the Big Thermometer. Further discussions are happening about possible additional landscaping around the Big Thermometer.
7. **Qld College of Wine Tourism** - The Chamber also played a pivotal role in the transition of the Queensland College of Wine Tourism. Following a near closure of the facility, intervention by local member James Lister and the Crisafulli government enabled continuity of services and the Chamber facilitated with cross-industry representatives to develop a future business model that was accepted by the state

government. This has led to the establishment of NFP company The Caves Road Precinct Ltd, which now operates the facility under the new brand Varias.

8. **Advocacy and Learning** - The President attended the Small Business Friendlies Conference (Brisbane, May 2025) and the Re-Imagining Regional Australia Conference (Canberra, September 2025), gaining valuable insights and networks to inform future Chamber projects. This was self-funded and not funded by the Chamber.

Emerging Opportunities

The Chamber in conjunction with other group and network leaders across the region, has been invited to participate in the Ready Communities Initiative led by Dr Chad Renando and Prof Kerry Grace, exploring social, economic, and environmental resilience in regional communities—culminating in a planned Social Impact conference in 2026. This initiative will bring social, economic and environmental benefits for the region if implemented in the coming year.

Acknowledgements

We extend heartfelt thanks to departing committee members: Lewis Perkins, Kate Livesley, Justin Kuskie, and Meagan McLoughlin for their dedication and service. Thanks also to our key partners: Southern Downs Regional Council, Bendigo Bank, and Business Chamber Queensland for their continued support.

A special thanks to Nicci Goulter who stepped in as Secretary when we most needed one, fulfilling an immense responsibility and who is leaving that role but staying on the Committee.

The past 14 months have been a time of growth, collaboration, and renewed purpose for the Chamber. I thank all committee members, members, and partners for their continued commitment to building a thriving, connected, and resilient business community across the Granite Belt. I look forward to welcoming our new committee as we continue this important work together.

Michelle Feenan

President

Stanthorpe & Granite Belt Chamber of Commerce