



Workforce and Education a Priority for Upper Spencer Gulf

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Following the release of their five priorities for the Upper Spencer Gulf, the Mayors of Whyalla, Port Pirie and Port Augusta are pushing for a commitment from candidates seeking to be elected as the next member for Grey to work with the region to develop a skilled migration and decentralisation programme tailored to meet the specific needs of the Upper Spencer Gulf.

Chair of Spencer Gulf Cities, Port Pirie Mayor Leon Stephens said the region is experiencing rapid growth in energy, mining and manufacturing and will require a substantial construction workforce in coming years.

"It's a good problem to have, but the reality is we just don't have enough people locally to fill those jobs."

"The region already has existing shortages in a whole range of professions including medical, allied health, aged care, education, engineering and technical services. The looming construction boom is only going to add to these shortages and place more strain on existing services."

"We will have to rely on bringing new people and new services into the region - but we are really keen to minimise fly-in-fly-out workers. Ultimately, we want to encourage people to move here and make the Upper Spencer Gulf home."

"One size fits all policy rarely works – we will need to tailor a whole range of solutions to meet our local workforce needs".

"We want to work with the next Federal Government on a skilled migration and decentralisation policy that works specifically for the Upper Spencer Gulf and is tailored to meet our needs. This includes not only attracting skills for the private sector, but making public sector job opportunities more available locally as well."

Port Augusta Mayor Brett Benbow notes that migration is only part of the region's long-term workforce solution, with the Mayors also focussing on expanding higher education options in the Upper Spencer Gulf.

"We absolutely must also grow our own local skills", says Mayor Benbow. "The levels of higher education in the Upper Spencer Gulf are pretty stark."

"The last census showed that only 8% of Upper Spencer Gulf residents hold bachelor level or higher degree qualifications, compared to the national average of 22%."

"What's even worse, is that only 4% of Upper Spencer Gulf residents are currently undertaking university study, compared to the national average of 16%."

"Something clearly needs to change."

"We are extremely thankful to the current Government for supporting our Upper Spencer Gulf Regional Study Hub, but we need an ongoing commitment from whoever forms Government in May to additional Commonwealth supported university places and operational funding for our Uni Hub to enable students to stay, study and work locally."

Whyalla Mayor Clare McLaughlin says the region needs to make the most of the 'once in a generation' economic transformation."

"It is a very exciting time for the Upper Spencer Gulf, but to make sure our communities come out of this transition stronger, more resilient and more economically diverse, we really need a strong partnership with Government to help us deliver on our priorities."

"We will be relying heavily on whoever becomes our local representative in the next Parliament to help us champion these issues."

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