

Bright days

LUKE GRIFFITHS



UPBEAT: Whyalla Hose and Fittings' Jarrod Starkey.

WHYALLA mayor Lyn Breuer, above, says the Upper Spencer Gulf town has emerged from one of its darkest periods with a renewed sense of optimism and confidence.

Almost 18 months after Arrium went into administration, she says three companies are now eyeing off a move

to the regional centre. WHYALLA business and community leaders say there has been a small uptick in spending, as a trio of companies eye a move to the town.

Mayor Lyn Breuer told *The Advertiser* that council has had discussions with at least three companies about establishing operations in Whyalla.

The discussions come as economic activity in the regional hub improves following British industrial group GFG Alliance's purchase of the town's steelworks and nearby mines out of administration.

"These (companies) are not engineering, steelmaking, contracting type industries that we've traditionally had in the past, these are completely different," she said.

After being plagued by uncertainty for well over a year, Whyalla has seen a series of positive announcements.

Upon taking control in September, GFG outlined plans for a large increase in the capacity of the steelworks and associated port.

ZEN Energy, which GFG bought a majority stake in soon after its Arrium purchase, has committed to a range of energy projects, including 200MW of solar at the steelworks and nearby council land.

Adani has also outlined plans for a \$200 million, 140MW solar project.

"Morale has certainly lifted, we're much more confident about our future. We feel like we've turned the corner," Ms Breuer said.

"It was a terrible situation last year, I didn't think we were going to come out of it, but we're now very, very happy and confident."

Like Ms Breuer, local Chamber of Commerce president Ron Hay said there had been a "gradual incline" in expenditure. However, people were still awaiting the outcome of GFG's 100-day operational review, which is expected around Christmas.

"We need to understand what's happening with that, but no doubt, there's some strong positives," he said.

"We also know we need to diversify, and the Chamber is looking into other opportunities, including defence."

Public sector services, transport and logistics, and tourism are also on the radar.

GFG's Michael Morley, who is playing a key role in the review, said he expected work on "numerous exciting initiatives" in Whyalla to continue over a number of years.

"There are certainly challenges ahead, but we're confident in our ability to address these in order to create a sustainable, long-term future for our Australian business."

General manager of Whyalla Hose and Fittings, Jarrod Starkey, said people are "a bit more buoyant", but everyone was keen to know what comes of the 100-day review.

"Up to 90 per cent of our work came from Arrium, but we're trying to diversify, into defence in particular," he said.

Whyalla Hose and Fittings was owed more than \$500,000 when Arrium went under. It has so far been repaid 10c in the dollar, with another 5c expected over the next two years.