

# Adelaide's south ready to attract jobs of the future

CRAIG COOK

DON'T forget the south – that is the battle cry of business leaders and local politicians as the region looks to capitalise on the \$90 billion national shipbuilding program.

Northern Adelaide and Port Adelaide will be clear winners from the Federal Government's decision to build the nation's future submarine fleet and nine frigates at the Osborne shipyards.

But southern councils and business owners say the region is ripe to reap its own share of the defence projects.

Stretching from Anzac Hwy to Aldinga, about a quarter of the state's population call southern Adelaide home.

The region also has more than 50,000 businesses, driving a local economy worth \$12 billion a year.

But unemployment in the area is higher than most regions of Adelaide, and there has been a significant loss of manufacturing jobs in the past decade.

That has resulted in more than half of the south's working population finding jobs outside the region, while more than 90 per cent of southern businesses employ less than five people each.

Anthony Kittel, chief executive and founder of RE-DARC Electronics at Lonsdale, which employs about 200 workers, said he was tired of "doom and gloom forecasts".

"It's exciting times," said Mr Kittel, who has recently overseen a major expansion of his business.

"I'm sure this area will pick up plenty of work from de-



**JOBS DRIVE:** Nikki Govan wants to attract companies to the south. Picture: BIANCA DE MARCHI

fence projects coming to Adelaide, and particularly in the supply chain."

Mr Kittel said the "greatest untapped advantage" for the south was the former Port Stanvac oil refinery site, a 234 ha parcel of coastal land, owned by ExxonMobil, capable of being developed for both new industries and world-class residential living.

And he said the recent loss of the automotive industry in SA meant there was no shortage of available high-skilled manufacturing workers.

"We've been expanding and, particularly with our increasing defence component, the quality of applicants has been excellent," Mr Kittel said.

"We might have been in trouble without all those skills already here, but they are here at the highest level."

Adelaide's south has ben-

efited from improved transport routes, such as the duplication of the Southern Expressway, while world-class tourism attractions, such as McLaren Vale, make it a desirable place to live and visit.

But community leaders say more is needed to ensure the region is not left behind.

Marion Mayor Kris Hanna said road upgrades at Darling-ton and the \$175 million Oaklands Crossing project would greatly improve north-south traffic flows, making the region more attractive to businesses and residents.

"We're working with the Southern Adelaide Economic Development Board to deliver a comprehensive plan to market the region, and attract investment and jobs," Mr Hanna said.

"We promote the Tonsley precinct, which is a cluster of

education facilities and hi-tech, high-value businesses."

Marion Council is also considering working with a private developer to build an international-standard hotel at the Marion Cultural Centre site in Oaklands Park.

Employment opportunities in the Marion district have been steadily improving, with its March quarter unemployment rate of 5.85 per the lowest in five years.

About 47,000 people are employed in the district, which has an overall population of about 90,000.

Onkaparinga Council has a population of 170,000, including a high percentage of families with children and elderly residents.

While Onkaparinga had a higher unemployment rate of 8.23 per cent in the March quarter, the rate was down on

a recent high of 9.48 per cent during the December quarter of 2015.

Onkaparinga Council chief executive Mark Dowd said the large size of the council area, which is predicted to increase by another 45,000 residents in the next 20 years, was an advantage when it came to attracting business.

He said the council had developed a new business brand to "drive the message that our city is the best, easiest and most affordable place to do business in South Australia".

The council also runs a business partner program that provides support to about 600 companies.

"We've worked with Marion Council to reinvigorate the Southern Adelaide Economic Development Board, to continue advocating on behalf of southern Adelaide," Mr Dowd said.

The recent business trend in Onkaparinga was towards small-scale manufacturing and technology, such as 3D printing and robotics.

The chairwoman of the Southern Adelaide Economic Development Board, Nikki Govan, said her organisation was working with governments, businesses and the community to "create new opportunities and to drive future jobs growth".

"A robust plan was developed and it is now bearing results," the owner of the popular Star of Greece restaurant at Port Willunga said.

"We are focused on projects and programs that bring the state's brightest minds and innovative organisations together, positioning the south as a 'smart region'."