SUPPORT FOR START-UPS IN REGIONAL NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: 2pi software

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Position: Director

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To whom it concerns,

Congratulations on this initiative...I believe it is very worthwhile.

As a director of a startup operating in the Bega Valley, a large shire with a very small population base (approx 33K), our team have faced many many challenges to gain momentum. Things don't happen as quickly as in metro, but with the right attitude and determination, I am strongly of the view that regional startups can survive and thrive.

Towards the end of this email, I will provide a potted history of my individual involvement in promoting tech and startups in the region, and some recent collaborations that have accelerated the process considerably.

But first, to directly answer the terms of reference, and I will be very concise (startups are as time-poor as any hard-working group) :-

a. The effectiveness of state government policies and programs aimed at supporting start-ups in regional areas.

+ These are only really starting to be felt
+ The paperwork and effort required is a bit daunting (although Megan Cleary at Regional Development has done some great things)...and dissuades one from applying
+ Although there are issues of public trust...startups would like to be given small amounts of seed money quicker with less onerous reporting burdens...to at least fund proof of concepts
+ The hackneyed old line...'Government people just don't get us'...it is two worlds colliding...and I am not sure how it can be addressed :-)

b. Possible new initiatives and reforms to reduce barriers and capitalise on the advantages associated with regional start-ups.

+ As above, although there are issues of public trust...startups would like to be given small amounts of seed money quicker with less onerous reporting burdens...to at least fund proof of concepts
+ Direct sponsorship of grass-roots activities - hackathons, code nights, startup camps, game dev jams, innovation weeks
+ Pay a trustable startup person (perhaps someone 'between startups') with credibility to perhaps manage fund distribution rather than a government representative (wonderful person though they may be - and we have some fantastic people in the area)

c. Policies and programs in other jurisdictions.

+ CBRIN in Canberra is a huge success...possibly the best in the country...could we recreate this in Bega. Please note a Bega Team is applying for the Fed Gov incubator support programme with matched NSW State funding

d. Any other related matters.

+ Yes...with very little institutional assistance...Bega Valley has done very well and punched hugely above it's weight. We are a template for other regions. We hope to get government aid in the future, but we have shown the way to do it in 'grassroots-style'.

Here is a history of our efforts :-

Together with my business partner Carsten Eckelmann, we run a professional software engineering company, 2pi Software (www.2pisoftware.com) in Bega offering services to local, regional and national organisations. Our team have created the first globally-targetted software solution ever built in the Bega Valley - Cosine CRM (cosinecrm.com.au) and also provide a range of integration, workflow, and web/mobile app related software services. We take a holistic view to our presence in the Valley and are seeding a number of initiatives to promote IT, and Digital Technology as a great career path for local people who may be interested in this field.

We are chasing a bit of a dream - **1000 tech sector jobs in our region by 2030**...we started in 2010...and have made some good progress, but we are keen to speed things up.

To build a tech sector, we started by creating a tech community - IntoIT Sapphire Coast (www.intoitsapphirecoast.com), a **not-for-profit group auspiced by Lighthouse Innovation (Canberra)**. This worked very well and successes which followed include a vibrant Google Group forum, social gatherings, tech demos, entrepreneurial events (most notably StartUp Camps). We have over 100 members, and are growing.

Subsequently, to make sure that people considering moving to the area had more of what they liked about living in metro...we opened a Digital Co-Working Space called 'CoWS Near The Coast' (visit www.cowsnearthecoast.com.au). This provided a huge boost...and secured national media coverage - Anthill (read here), StartUpSmart (read here and here) as well as lots of articles in our own Bega District News.

We were particularly honoured in February 2015 to have been visited by NSW Governor David Hurley who was very encouraging of the initiatives underway (newspaper article here).

In May 2016 we held **Regional Innovation Week in the Bega Valley** (begainnovation.com.au) a programme featuring 10 events celebrating a number of aspects of creativity, technology and entrepreneurship. These included a technology managers forum, a hackathon, a Grand Launch day where 10 startups opened for business, a Questacon exhibition and an Engineering Day. It was very successful and we had a large volume of media coverage and reporting - http://intoitsapphirecoast.com/media-and-blogs/.

Innovation Week additionally featured our flagship event, **the SeaChange StartUp Camp**, an event we have held annually for 6 years. The 2015 event (details here) featured no less a luminary than former treasury head, Ken Henry.

Coding was also a big part of Innovation week, and we have an established history of running **hackathons** going back to November 2014. For these we have often worked in conjunction with similar groups in Wollongong and Canberra. More on this here and here and a great report in our local newspaper gave our 2015 Tri-hack event a great write up - visit here.

Following our hacking success, we have now instituted a **monthly coding night** on the first Thursday of every month at CoWS Near The Coast, and every third Thursday at Bermagui Library

Building on our coding community, we held our biggest event ever, **Gamer Dev Jam** in Sept 2016 (visit gamerdevjam.com.au) - a multi-skill gathering aimed at creative people collaborating to build functioning computer games. As well as coders, the event attracted budding story writers, musicians, graphic artists, gamers and entrepreneurs of all ages. To the delight of all attending, Stephanie 'Hex' Bendixsen from ABC TV programs Good Game and Good Game Spawn Point was our VIP guest who worked tirelessly to inspire all the participants and provided game reviews at the end of proceedings.

Reports, radio audio, Youtube footage and newspaper articles about the incredible Gamer Dev Jam weekend can be obtained here - http://intoitsapphirecoast.com/jam-media-and-blog-posts/

We are also working with others in the community to promote participation in **STEM** learning, particularly amongst young people, both within and outside the school curriculum. We actively take

part in National Science week and have been instrumental in organising demonstration of scientific applications of **drones/quadcopters, robotics-building workshops, synthesiser-making, 3D printing, virtual reality and coding**.

We are forming a close association with a number of schools in the region with a view to pooling our efforts to ensure the students, younger and older, are fully informed about careers in ICT and the digital economy and are offered a wide range of technology skill development opportunities to facilitate this.

The community was privileged to participate in **Regional Pitchfest** in April this year with some incredible ideas coming from younger and older locals alike….article in Bega newspaper here - http://www.begadistrictnews.com.au/story/4632519/valley-of-innovation-its-all-about-sharing-ideas-to-get-things-going/

In August 2017 we hope to launch a monthly **StartUp Club** which meets at lunch-hour on the first Friday of every month to encourage members of the community to pitch their ideas to a collection of entrepreneurs, funders, enthusiasts and technologists. Great fun..and hopefully this will grow our StartUp base.

And there has been a recent wonderful initiative in Eden, a battling town hit by economic hardship in recent times, a recent grant has been received to boost creative career options for local youth through the creation of the **Eden Game Development Centre** (refer article here - http://www.merimbulanewsweekly.com.au/story/4638356/creating-tech-jobs-i-want-to-help-disadvantaged-kids. The centre is set to open in October this year and it will focus on building 3D modelling skills within the community and fostering entrepreneurial pathways for kids eager to build dynamic game development startups that can potentially tap into a global marketplace.

Lastly, together with other startup leaders, I am involved in the Bega Valley Innovation Taskforce which combines the efforts of some startups in the region with the University of Wollongong (Bega Campus) and Bega Valley Shire Council, to prepare a bif for the Federal Incubator Support programme. We hope to submit this in about 2 weeks from now.

Thank you again...all of my points above, please take in a positive light...my intent is only to assist and improve the outcomes for startups in regional areas, and the jobs that are so badly needed so our kids don't have to leave by default - I would like them to have a choice.

Thank you,

Liam

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Liam O'Duibhir, Director
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http://2pisoftware.com