

## SEGRA Conference

### Unleashing Your **Mojo**: Coffs Harbour Style

#### Speech Notes for GM

Good morning to you all.

My name is Steve McGrath and I'm the General Manager of Coffs Harbour City Council.

This morning I'm going to be speaking to you about - Unleashing Your **Mojo**: Coffs Harbour Style.

But first, I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land that we are meeting on today - the Gumbaynggirr nation. I would also like to acknowledge their Elders past and present and also those attending today's event.

I'd also like to acknowledge the speakers that you will be hearing from during the conference.

A number of them – I'm glad to say - are no strangers to Coffs Harbour and, in fact, they have worked with various sectors of the local community to help formulate many of the ideas that have led to us all being here today.

As you are already aware, SEGRA 2013 is focusing on the dual issues of accessing global opportunities in regional Australia and the local engagement of communities as a strategy to drive regional economic development.

We're talking about building regions that are passionate, driven and ready to fight for their regional vision.

In Coffs Harbour, we call it 'Unleashing your **Mojo**'.

And I'm extremely pleased to be able to say that our community has already harnessed that same enthusiasm, zeal and spirit into a regional Economic Development Strategy that we are confident is

going to see Coffs Harbour realise its ambition to become **The Premier Regional City of the Mid North Coast.**

In fact, it's the reason you're all here.

When the SEGRA steering committee saw our draft Economic Development Strategy, they were so taken with the language – the dynamic, take-no-prisoners language of phrases like 'Unleashing your **Mojo**' - they decided it was the perfect location to host this year's conference.

But before we get into the 'hows' and 'whys' of our Strategy, I'd like to share with you a little of the journey the City has been on to get to where we are today.

The first European to remark on this area was no less a figure than Captain James Cook who, on 15 May 1770, named the island string running along the coast, the 'Solitary Islands'.

It was home then, and still is, to the Gumbaynggirr people.

Coffs Harbour was not named as a location until around 1847 when Captain John Korff and his ship took shelter from a storm off the southern headland of Coffs Harbour.

Like many of our modern-day visitors, he was impressed with what he saw and he stayed for four days.

The area subsequently became known as 'Korffs Harbour', but a mistake in a government notice some years later saw the name of our City changed to Coffs.

Europeans first came to Coffs attracted by the cedar timber which became known as 'Red Gold'.

As a result, Coffs Harbour's earliest origins were as a port exporting this very valuable commodity and - as I hope you know or will discover during this conference - you can still see the original Jetty down at the harbour.

The Jetty and the surrounding area has always been – and remains - a tremendous asset to our city and the work we're currently

undergoing to put the harbour back into Coffs Harbour is a vital part of our economic strategy.

But back to the story.

Real gold was actually discovered in the Orara Valley in 1881 when two brothers stumbled onto the first nugget while searching for stray bullocks.

The resulting gold rush saw a number of small townships spring up which we're proud to say still retain much of their original character.

It may surprise you to learn that mining actually continued around Coffs Harbour until the 1960s.

Even today, I gather a few 'prospectors' can still be found searching for that elusive mother lode.

As I mentioned, in the early years cedar, gold and general agricultural produce were the foundations of the area's economy, but settlers found that bananas grew well in our climate and they tasted sweeter than many varieties grown elsewhere.

Thus the banana industry rapidly became the backbone of Coffs Harbour's economy.

It reached its peak in the late 1960s at a time when our city's very own Big Banana really began to put us on the map.

Bananas also brought to the Coffs area a whole new population of Indian migrants with banana-growing expertise from Queensland who could trace their original roots back to the Punjab.

These were the ancestors of Woolgoolga's now substantial Sikh population which today is the largest Sikh community in Australia.

Today, Coffs Harbour is home to people from more than 50 nations.

That mix has, just like the rest of Australia, produced a community with a wide diversity of backgrounds that have enhanced our local culture.

In more recent years, Coffs Harbour has similarly diversified its economy.

In agriculture, bananas have given way to blueberries and we can boast to being home to Australia's largest blueberry enterprise – OzBerries.

And while agriculture as a sector has shrunk, other industries have grown.

In 2011/12, the Gross Regional Product for Coffs Harbour was estimated at \$3.1 billion.

Coffs Harbour experienced strong annual growth in real GRP of 6.4% that same year, which was significantly higher than the 2.4% growth rate for New South Wales.

With regard to industry, the largest contributions were made by the Health Care and Social Assistance sector, Financial and Insurance Services, Education and Training, Retail Trade and Manufacturing sectors.

Manufacturing is a significant economic player with local engineering and electrical engineering companies supplying global markets.

Health and education are key community capacity-builders, as well as key economic generators, and we have worked closely with the health and education sectors to help grow these vitally important areas.

We were also in one of the earliest roll-out areas for the national broadband network.

Again, I'll have to pause here and say that it was collaborative, community efforts that saw this region picked as an early roll-out site.

We had the vision and we have the passion to get noticed.

We had companies here that were already using the opportunities and advantages of working in an interconnected, online world.

And these companies have become frontline champions and partners in our digital strategy – Switched On Coffs.

As a City, we have achieved much, but we are acutely aware – in these post-Global Financial Crisis days – that the reliable methods to grow a regional economy in a country like Australia are no longer the only options.

The resources boom and downturn has also brought this home.

In recent years, we've witnessed the tide of the resources boom sweep the continent.

But as it recedes, it's also clear that no new manufacturing enterprises have been left on the shore and we're also seeing the deaths of some – like the car industry - that have been the foundations on which whole cities and communities have existed in the past.

Yes, we want to continue to do what we can to build on our existing strengths.

To continue to attract new, inward investment, to see how we can best support existing businesses and industry and also grow community participation and commitment.

But surely now – with GFC hindsight - the economic Holy Grail is not about relying on the benefits that filter down from a healthy national or global economy, but it's more about finding ways to forge a sustainable regional economy using the strengths, ideas, talents and vision of your own community.

In one word – localisation.

These are our challenges.

Our Economic Development Strategy has identified that – post GFC - these challenges are particularly significant for the industries of

retail, wholesale trade, finance and insurance, rental and real estate trade.

There are, however, opportunities to address these challenges, attract new investment and facilitate jobs growth with focused socio-economic development initiatives.

Coffs Harbour has a strong base to sustain economic growth.

We have a strong and diverse business and industry sector, there is the quality of the natural environment, our regional airport, the International Marina, the health campus, a range of schools, a University and Education campus, growing research facilities and lifestyle opportunities.

All these are key assets and opportunities that are likely to significantly influence future growth trends.

In our Economic Strategy we are clear that it's vital that Coffs Harbour continually look for ways to encourage business development, generate employment opportunities, embrace new technology opportunities, adapt to change, encourage lifelong learning and knowledge generation and encourage community involvement in activities that see the community express their love for our City.

But the guts of any strategy is in **how** to put the theory into practice.

A huge range of 'actions' have been developed by the community, for the community.

These have been categorised into seven strategic themes.

**Invest Coffs** - is about promoting Coffs Harbour as an ideal investment, development, business and new resident destination.

**Smart and Connected** - sets out how to connect our community to each other, our families and the world. To see businesses enjoying growth through new markets, our children enjoying expanded education opportunities and our health services being delivered into our homes by e-health.

**Welcoming Spaces** - is all about creating spaces that are safe, comfortable and encourage interaction between people of all ages and our diverse groups.

**Planning for Growth** - encompasses improved transport, logistics, distribution and the availability of health, industrial and commercial lands.

**Knowledge Building** - promotes the health and education sectors, encourages research and development and builds partnerships.

**Local is Best** - encourages a strong, sustainable, resilient, culturally and economically-diverse local economy.

But the key to success, we believe, is **'Love Our City'**.

Through **Love Our City**, we will strive to unleash the love we feel for Coffs Harbour and our special places in it and to increase the overall happiness, joyfulness and economic and social wellbeing of our community.

This is where the 'Unleashing our **Mojo**' - that has brought you all here - really had its genesis.

Recent research by experts in the field has established that there is a significant relationship between local economic growth and feelings of passion and loyalty among community residents.

As Peter Kageyama says - When we **Love our City**, as when we love another person, we will go to extraordinary lengths for them. When we have an emotional connection to our place, we are less likely to leave it and far more likely to champion and defend it in the face of criticism. We fight for it.

Coffs Harbour's Economic Development Strategy essentially asks the fundamental questions on how we can 'feel the love for Coffs Harbour' and puts together the ways to 'Unleash our **Mojo**'.

To give you an idea of what we're proposing in our strategy, I'd like to share the main actions that we've listed for **'Love Our City'** with you.

For a start, we plan to unleash, encourage and support the **'Mojo'** of those in the City who want to **do something** by identifying, connecting and supporting those 'do-ers' to reach their goals.

A good example of how this works was the way we assisted a local resident and business-woman who wanted to create a new weekend market to showcase local producers, musicians and artists, and also showcase one of our great community spaces.

We worked with her, using her vision, to bring to the community a whole new market experience at the Jetty Foreshores.

The new market example also encompasses another one of our actions - Make Coffs a **'we can do it'** community and council.

By helping or removing barriers that constrain creativity, innovation and inspiration, we can help make projects and programs 'as red-tape free' as possible.

We also want to encourage and promote local artistic and cultural expression.

This we can do by using the resources of our Creative Industry Network to ensure new developments, or the revitalisation of spaces or buildings, is done with good design and includes public art where possible.

For example, we recently officially opened a \$250,000 upgrade to the access to our most popular beach – Park Beach.

We didn't just put in place some really useful new additions such as beach showers, a bubbler, a wash-down area and a Lifesaver surveillance platform.

We also made it all accessible for people with disabilities.

But, perhaps most importantly, we added value and 'love' by including a great new sculpture and signature seating created by a local artist.

If you get the chance – please go and have a look.

But to return to this brief look at the actions in our strategy, a key aspect of our **'Love Our City'** push is to identify and celebrate what makes our city loveable and what makes us happy.

We'll be running 'Love Notes to the City' and 'Love our Campus' campaigns to make the idea front and centre of people's thinking.

At the same time, Council as an organisation will be engaging as many residents as possible in community decision-making and activities.

Plus we plan to continue to encourage festivals and events that celebrate what we love about the City as a whole, or a particular special place within it.

It's always important to build on your assets.

We're lucky enough to have some very picturesque villages and townships with unique and fascinating histories, couple with connected and vibrant communities.

We already have in place a number of village marketing plans to help these places work up and benefit from their special characters.

And continuing the theme of building on your assets.

The Coffs Coast is already a very well-known and respected destination for very high-profile sporting events.

Many of you will know that we've just recently hosted the Australian leg of the World Rally Championships for the second time.

We had teams and supporters from 23 countries here for the event and it was broadcast to a global audience of more than 50 million.

Making those types of events as inclusive and accessible to as many people as possible is vital in fostering a love of our city.

Similarly – and equally – we need to foster local cultural and community building opportunities.

For example - in a few, very short years – we have created a number of hugely popular cultural events that have truly brought our community together – the Harmony Day Multicultural Festival, the Japanese Festival of Children’s Day, the Coast Out Festival and NAIDOC Week.

Each attracts thousands of visitors each year and they have all done an enormous amount to knit our very diverse community together.

We also want to be in a position in the future to be able to boast numerous entertainment venues, providing a full calendar of events in entertainment and cultural performances.

Again, this needs us to work together as a community to encourage entertainment venues and cultural facilities to provide the City with a calendar of events: one that crosses all genres and appeals to all ages.

Now, I’ve just given you a snapshot of just some of the actions we’ve included in just one section of our Economic Development Strategy.

I haven’t gone into it all, but I hope that while you’re here, you’ll take the opportunity to look in detail at the strategy that brought you to Coffs Harbour for this conference in the first place.

I shall just end by saying that I hope you find the inspiration to unleash the **Mojo** in your own communities.

And while you’re here, feel free to give it a go.

You're in Coffs Harbour – it's the best time and place to unleash your inner **Mojo!**

Thank you.