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DEFENCE INDUSTRY CONFERENCE TO OUTLINE REGION'S BRIGHT FUTURE

The region's peak business organisation, Business Illawarra, will host a major defence industry conference in Wollongong tomorrow (Tuesday), and says that growing the region's defence sector will create thousands of local jobs and accelerate economic growth in the near term.

The conference comes at a time of increased opportunities for industrialised economies like the Illawarra Shoalhaven, which benefits from a highly trained workforce, a world-class University, existing steelmaking and tech industries and close proximity to HMAS Albatross.

At the conference, Business Illawarra will launch a strategy to support the future development of the defence industry within the Illawarra Shoalhaven, which has been undertaken by KPMG and supported by a working group that has involved a wide range of stakeholders from the region; many of whom have been involved in the region's defence industry for some time.

Speaking ahead of the conference, Business Illawarra Executive Director Adam Zarth said that it was a time of huge opportunity in defence industry and critical that the Illawarra Shoalhaven be prepared to fully participate in the national effort to lift sovereign capability.

"The Federal Government is significantly increasing the defence budget over the next ten years, and we are one of the regions that can make a greater contribution to the strategic intent of Defence by expanding our role in the nation's defence industry," said Mr Zarth.

"We are excited to be launching the *Illawarra Shoalhaven 10-year Defence Industry Strategy* at the conference, which will be a blueprint to drive a focused collaboration between all levels of government, industry, peak bodies and the wider community to achieve this."

"When we talk about defence industry development here in our region, we need to be need to emphasise that this is about the growth of high-value, well-paid and long-lasting jobs locally in the short term."

Andrew Huckstepp of Bisalloy, based in Unanderra, is a major existing employer in the defence industry and said that a formalised regional collaboration would be crucial to seizing the current opportunity.

"Bisalloy is proud to supply high-quality armoured steel to our nation's defence industry, and to make that happen we employ a significant number of highly skilled local people, and rely on raw material from BlueScope."

"As a region, I clearly see the opportunity to grow our role in defence but we also need to identify and tackle the challenges we face, and one of those is the need to maintain a local skilled workforce focused on providing best in class products."

"As Bisalloy has shown, there are great opportunities for local people in defence industry jobs – and a growing domestic and international demand for our products. We need to prepare to seize the opportunity by collaborating, leveraging our strengths and investing to address our shortcomings."

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About Business Illawarra

Formerly the Illawarra Business Chamber, *Business Illawarra* is the region's peak business organisation; a not-for-profit advocacy group dedicated to the economic development of the Illawarra.