

## IBA Business Briefing 25 November 2008

Speech by Bob Blair

Good morning distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. I am honoured to be here today, and respectfully acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land, Elders past and present, of the Gadigal people of the Eora nation.

As Acting Chairman of Indigenous Business Australia I am pleased to welcome you all to this event.

This event, like the Business Conversation that IBA conducted in WA earlier this year, is about IBA facilitating discussions, building networks, encouraging learning, and supporting the continued development of Indigenous business and Indigenous economic improvement.

IBA isn't running this event to tell you all what you should be doing or thinking. It's about bringing Australia's Indigenous business people and leaders together with experts who can explain the issues we all face.

That way, you will have more knowledge and understanding of these issues and may also be able to look at what opportunities these changed circumstances may bring.

For those of you who don't know me, I am an executive director of the Rockhampton Cultural Experience which operates in the tourism, accommodation and retail sectors. We also run a radio station and are exploring other ways of creating a future for our community.

Like you, I'm worried about what is happening now with the state of the world economy, and what might yet happen in Australia. How will a world economic downturn affect my business? Will tourism dry up? Will China fall into recession, and how would that affect Australia? Or will Australia be insulated from a recession by the strength of the economic boom which has been underway for some years?

These are serious issues and sadly, serious times. Regardless of how well we may look after our own businesses and organisations in the face of a changed economic climate, we need to expect that things may not be as good as they have been in recent years.

If unemployment increases, for example, that may mean that Indigenous people in remote areas may be amongst the first to feel these effects, where there are already limited job and business opportunities. In many cases these people may not have been in the workforce for long, and may now find themselves back on income support, or back in CDEP.

Indigenous businesses which may have taken years to become established, may find it harder to compete, harder to get loans from banks, more difficult to grow and to develop.

Building strong businesses which can withstand the effect of hard economic times is difficult to do, but knowledge about what is going on with the economy can help. It is for that reason that we have invited you all here today.

None of the experts we have invited here today have a crystal ball. IBA certainly can't guarantee that there is any certainty moving forward from where we are today. Global events continue to change and shift around us, and to some extent, we have to be prepared for the unexpected.

There is, however, much collective wisdom assembled here which you will hear from today. The speakers who IBA have brought here are experts from the banking and finance industries, and they will share with you what they know, and what they might be able to reasonably foresee.

With that information, IBA hopes you will be able to look at your own businesses, your own organisations, to help you see yourself what you might need to think about, and plan for. And importantly, where you might be able to see opportunities.

In the afternoon session, we'll be hearing from speakers who will talk about the opportunities that might open up in these difficult economic times. Perhaps there are opportunities that you or your organisations might be able to take advantage of, perhaps not.

Of course, as I stand here I am reminded of the words of a famous economist as engraved on his tombstone. "I am guardedly optimistic about the next world but remain cognisant of the downside risks."

Given the rate of economic change which has been taking place over the last few months, we are stepping into the unknown. Opportunities which seem good now may still carry some risk. We need to be open to opportunities and new ways of doing things, but at the same time, we need to understand the risks that these new opportunities may bring.

Over time, IBA will be looking at other ways, like today's Business Briefing, where we can play an important facilitation role in assisting the dissemination of key information, of bringing Indigenous business people together, and to foster an environment where Indigenous economic progress is supported and encouraged.

Above all, talking and communicating key messages from events like today's helps others, including those who would have liked to attend but could not be here. So I would encourage you to talk with others about what you are experiencing, about how things could work differently, and about how your organisations can respond creatively and actively to the challenges we face, and help to foster the continued growth of Indigenous enterprise and economic strength in Australia.

I thank you for your willingness to attend this event – and I know many of you have travelled a long way to be here, including our friend Richard Jones from Poutama in New Zealand – and I am sure there is much that each of you will be able to take away from today.

I would also like to acknowledge and thank our presenters for giving up their time today, Uncle Greg Simms for welcoming us so warmly, Mark Rider and Bernie Connolly from UBS, Greg Pawson from Westpac, Richard Facioni from Shearwater Capital Group, Darryl Pike, who is well-known for his economic analysis and commentary, and lastly, IBA's own Craig Dalzell and Peter Lynam.

Thank you all again, and I wish all of you the greatest success in these uncertain times.