

Internet boost for Northern Rivers small businesses More than 300 Northern Rivers small businesses will benefit from a share of \$14 million in Rudd Government funding to help them go online or upgrade their internet presence.

The funding is being provided from the Rudd Government's \$10 million Small Business Online program which has been boosted by another \$4 million to extend it to more tourism small business operators.

Member for Page Janelle Saffin said the Northern Rivers Business Enterprise Development Agency would receive \$156,000 to help small businesses – especially tourism operators – make the most of the internet.

Across the nation, 95 per cent of small businesses are connected to the internet, yet only 57 per cent have a website.

The funding will help small businesses take full advantage of the National Broadband Network (NBN) by helping them install and upgrade websites, Ms Saffin said.

Small Business Minister Craig Emerson and Tourism Minister Martin Ferguson announced that grants ranging from \$50,000 to \$700,000 had been offered to 47 small business support groups including industry associations across the nation.

The groups will use the grants to help small businesses develop the skills to go online or upgrade their existing internet operations so they can better engage in e-business to reduce costs and improve market opportunities.

Dr Emerson said the NBN would provide fresh opportunities for small businesses to lower their costs and extend their market reach.

"The NBN will be a powerful tool for small business and helping 50,000 small businesses go online or improve their online presence will ensure they are ready for these exciting opportunities," he said.

Mr Ferguson said he was pleased many small tourism operators would receive support.

"In the 21st century, tourists want to know a lot about the quality of the accommodation on offer before committing to travelling to a particular location and giving them a virtual tour online will help improve the attractiveness of tourist destinations," Mr Ferguson said.

"The business support groups being funded will be specifically targeting the tourism industry, in line with the Government's announcement of the National Long-Term Tourism Strategy."

A list of successful applicants and more information on the Small Business Online program can be found at www.ausindustry.gov.au

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