

MEDIA RELEASE

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North-West research project gains national attention

A North-West Coast project officer's innovative new research into how leisure activities can drive regional development has gained national attention.

Clayton Hawkins, Project Officer with the Institute for Regional Development, will speak at the national Sustainable Economic Growth for Regional Australia (SEGRA) Conference being held in Albury, New South Wales from August 18 -20.

Mr Hawkins' talk, *Building Regional Competitive Advantage and Liveability through Leisure*, is based on his current PhD research into how leisure activities can be used as a competitive advantage in regional development.

"Whether going for a bike ride, picnicking in the park or watching a game of local football, leisure plays such an important part in people's lives and how they interact with their communities," he said.

"My research is looking at how communities can harness and develop leisure activities to help promote their region, using the Cradle Coast as an example.

"Leisure could be seen as a significant way that regional areas can compete against the magnetism of big cities."

The three-day national conference is designed as a major forum for discussion of ideas and issues surrounding sustainable economic growth in regional Australia.

The forum will host delegates and speakers from local, state and federal government, community groups, industry, universities and regional bodies.

"Leisure has never really been seen as a significant driver in regional development," Mr Hawkins said.

"This is a great opportunity to get people starting to think of leisure as an asset that can be used for competitive advantage."

Mr Hawkins began his PhD research earlier this year, looking at how leisure activities can contribute to the profile and performance of a region, using the Cradle Coast as a case study.

Based at the UTAS Cradle Coast campus, his research will explore the relationship between leisure activities and social capital – a theory relating to the development of social networks and how they influence and stimulate business activity.

The research will be conducted over the next four years, with Mr Hawkins analysing ABS census data of the region and undertaking major surveys on how social resources of a community, developed through leisure activities, are established and utilised.

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