

Mackay leads recovery as regions get on with the job again

DARYL PASSMORE

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"We've had a sensational turnaround, starting in mid-2016," Mayor Greg Williamson said.

After struggling with the impact of the mining downturn, more than 10,000 jobs have been added during the past year. Regional trend

analysis by Conus Consultancy Services shows jobs in Mackay have grown 2½ times faster than Queensland as a whole.

Unemployment has fallen to 3.9 per cent – well below the state average of 6 per cent and under the 4 per cent level regarded as full employment.

"The vibe is fantastic," Cr Williamson said. "Business confidence is high, the positivity is back in town."

Cr Williamson said with the

international spot price for coal at about \$190 a tonne, Mackay's resources industry support sector – the country's biggest – was back in full swing.

"So much so that there are 500 positions we can't find people for," he said. "That all trickles down to small businesses."

Jade Vaughan, 19, (pictured), who has been working at popular cafe Our Kitchen for the past year, is one of

thousands of young locals taking advantage of the upswing in the local economy. "I have noticed a real increase in business here since around May of this year," she said.

Return of the good times is attracting people back to town.

"We had hundreds and hundreds of houses empty after the downturn but real estate agents say the vacancy rate is now about 3 per cent," Cr Williamson said.

That has stimulated the development and building industry. Construction accounted for a third of new jobs.

The Gold Coast is also booming, driven largely by the build-up to the Commonwealth Games in April, gaining 18,500 jobs in 12 months.

Employment on the Sunshine Coast is up 11,500 over the year – 6400 in construction – pushing the unemployment rate down to 4.8 per cent.



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Mackay waitress Jade Vaughan, 19, works at Our Kitchen cafe and has never had a problem getting a job in Mackay. Picture: Lachie Millard

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