

## Funding for Geelong textile skills

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SHAKE-UP: Geelong Fibre Centre chairman Peter Loney and Skills and Workforce Participation Minister Jacinta Allan yesterday.

**Geelong's International Fibre Centre is a key to invigorating Victoria's textile industry. MARTIN WATTERS reports**

GEELONG'S International Fibre Centre is at the centre of a new funding plan the State Governments hopes will reinvigorate Victoria's textile industry.

The Government yesterday announced previously-released funding would be channelled into training through the Waurn Ponds' textile skills and research centre.

Under the plan the Government's past promise of \$8 million would be provided through the International Fibre Centre to local companies to boost their own industry training.

Although yesterday's announcement did not include further funding, fibre centre chairman Peter Loney said the new plan would help breed innovation.

Mr Loney said the plan was the result of an 18-month review of Victoria's industry showing more confidence than previously thought. The chairman said the industry could now shake off a negative attitude of local textile manufacturing.

``We've become used to a fairly depressing view of the fibre industry; it's usually referred to as an industry in decline," he said.

``The (review) has shown significantly improved opportunities for growth over the next five to 10 years and a large number of people in the industry are quite optimistic."

Mr Loney said in recent years Geelong's textile industry had missed opportunities to flourish partly because local users and producers were unaware of the region's full ability.

He said growth now lay in providing materials for new and emerging manufacturing such as car interiors, bulletproof vests and biomedical supplies.

“We've got to be globally competitive and what the report says to us is part of the future in textiles is in exporting intellectual property from what has been developed locally.”

Skills and Workforce Participation Minister Jacinta Allan said the plan was important for Geelong's fibre centre – the only Australian organisation providing funding for textile skills development.

“Innovations in the industry offer the opportunity to break into new markets, with potential for textile applications in industries as diverse as medicine and healthcare, through to defence, mining and agriculture,” she said.

“On top of this, improvements in more traditional parts of the industry are providing Victorian firms with a competitive edge in established areas such as high-quality fashion apparel, wool and carpets.”

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