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A MEMBER OF AUSTCHAM GREATER CHINA

4 August 2026

Dear Members,

This week closes AustCham's series on the HKSAR Government's First Five-Year Plan. Over the past several weeks I have covered the innovation agenda, the economic and financial chapters, the Northern Metropolis, and the talent and livelihood foundation. The two remaining parts of the consultation document, regional co-operation and the integrated development of culture, sports, tourism, green living and urban resilience, are sometimes treated as the Plan's softer chapters. I think that undersells them. For international business, they go to the two qualities that will decide whether everything else in the Plan succeeds: Hong Kong's connectivity and Hong Kong's liveability.

The regional co-operation chapter is the one Australian business should read first. The Greater Bay Area framing is familiar by now, but the detail has matured. The Plan separates integration into three tracks: hard connectivity in infrastructure, soft connectivity in rules and standards, and a third it calls "connectivity of hearts", the people-to-people dimension. The middle track carries the most commercial weight. Alignment of rules, mutual market access and the flow of capital and data are what turn geographic proximity into operating advantage. Qianhai is explicitly positioned to widen Mainland market access for Hong Kong's professional services firms, and Nansha as a gateway for maritime, technology, education, and talent exchange. For Australian legal, financial, education and advisory firms, these are specific opportunities, not just broad statements of intent.

Beyond the GBA, the Plan positions Hong Kong as a functional platform for the Belt and Road and commits the city to expanding its network across ASEAN, the Middle East and Central Asia while consolidating traditional markets. The phrase "super connector" has been around for years. "Super value-adder" is the more telling one. The ambition is not merely to sit astride flows but to sit inside them, structuring, financing, insuring, and advising. That is the layer of the economy where Australian firms in Hong Kong already operate, and the Plan is effectively committing the government to deepening it.

Two Australian examples from July show what this looks like in practice. Professor Martin Green of UNSW Sydney, a pioneer of modern solar technology, received China's highest honour for international scientific cooperation, recognising four decades of research partnership that helped build the global photovoltaic industry. UNSW is also a longstanding corporate member of this Chamber. Cell designs developed in Sydney now underpin an industry in which China produces more than 80 per cent of the world's solar panels. That is value adding across borders in its purest form: Australian research, scaled through Chinese industry, with genuinely global benefit. In the same month, a delegation of First Nations Australian business and technology leaders visited Hong Kong under the Australian Government's First Nations Fellowship. Different scale, same principle. The connectivity the Plan describes is not abstract. It is built one institution, one partnership and one delegation at a time. For Australian organisations, the question is whether their place in those networks happens by accident or by design.

The green chapter deserves the same reading I gave maritime and aviation earlier in this series: less about environmental ambition, more about competitive positioning. Carbon neutrality before 2050, phasing out coal in daily electricity generation, waste to energy and a "Zero Waste Bay Area" are framed as economic programme as much as environmental policy. The clearest commercial signal is in new energy, where the Plan backs sustainable aviation fuel and hydrogen development and proposes Hong Kong as a demonstration platform for green hydrogen technologies. Australian strengths in hydrogen, clean energy research and sustainable fuels line up directly with that agenda. Members in those sectors should read it as a demand signal.

Culture, sports and tourism are easier to underestimate, and I would have underestimated them myself before reading the livelihood chapters closely. The mega events economy, from Kai Tak Sports Park to the "M" Mark programme and the conventions and exhibitions calendar, is presented as economic infrastructure, and rightly so. But its deeper function is the one I wrote about in the Northern Metropolis' Blue and Green circle, and again last week: a city competing for global talent has to offer a life, not just a market. Events, culture, the harbourfront and the country parks are what the retention strategy looks like on the ground.

The resilience section is short and mostly technical, covering flood control, slope safety, cybersecurity, and emergency response. But its placement in the Plan is the point. Businesses making long-term regional commitments now weigh continuity of operations alongside cost and market access. A government that treats resilience as a core planning discipline is speaking directly to that calculation.

If there is a single thread running through this series, it is that the Plan is more candid and more coherent than many expected, and that its authors understand the test is delivery rather than design. The public consultation remains open until 14 August, and the Chamber's submission will be stronger for your practical, experience-based input.

Thank you for following the series. Hong Kong has set out what it intends to build. The more interesting question is what it becomes, and our members will help answer it.

Warm regards,
Mary Simpson, AustCham Hong Kong Chief Executive