

We lost the fight for a casino, but for a while the city was the talking point of the corporate world, and there are some who say we should use this to our advantage in the future.

Mildura's bold bid for events, conventions

By ALAN ERSKINE

THE Mildura Jewell Casino proposal, now a dead issue, could still be a more-than-useful marketing tool for Sunraysia tourism, according to Mildura Rural City Councilor Mark Eckel.

He said the Jewell was for a long time the talking point at many corporate gatherings, not just around Victoria, but around Australia and internationally, and the Mildura region should use this to its advantage.

"We need to do the ground work now for future opportunities, and get the message out that Mildura is fair dinkum about business events and conventions," he said.

"We need to capitalise on the positives that arose from the casino issue, especially with the huge potential we have, centred on the riverfront development plan.

Cr Eckel, the city's spokesperson on tourism, is a firm believer that there is still huge

potential to attract corporate Australia to Mildura for conferences, and with the casino issue still in the minds of many people, we should "strike while the iron is hot."

He said conferencing was virtually a neglected market until council accepted the challenge about two years ago... and included in future plans is the development of a convention centre.

Another important step for the promotion of the region as a potential destination for conventions and business events will come in February, when council hosts a visit by 10 professional conference and business event organisers.

Julie Jewell from council's business events unit has been working for several months to put the trip together, in conjunction with Melbourne Convention and Visitors Bureau.

The bureau's manager for event contracts, Victoria Pope, was in Mildura this week for a whirlwind two-day tour of



district attractions, and to update her knowledge of Mildura and its conference/business events infrastructure and services. Julie, her Mildura guide, said she was looking forward to hosting Victoria and the group for the familiarisation tour in two weeks. Victoria will meet and greet the 10 Conference/Business Event organisers in



• ON A MISSION: Victoria Pope, LEFT, Julie Jewell, ABOVE, have Mildura's convention future at heart.

Melbourne before they fly to Mildura.

Cr Eckel said the preliminary visit by Ms Pope had gone off extremely well, and he praised the behind-the-scenes work of Julie and sponsors who have worked hard to put the familiarisation

"These are the people - hosted buyers - who make the decisions on behalf of their company on where to come for conferences and business events," he said. "We are confident that we can show them we have the right combination of facilities and attractions to generate business for the region."

Among the key sponsors, apart from council, are Qantas, who will fly the visitors to Mildura, and the Quality Hotel Mildura Grand, which will supply the accommodation. Included among the visitors are three international professional conference organisers.

Cr Eckel said familiarisation of this type were an important part of marketing Mildura as a conferencing and business events destination, and working with the Melbourne Convention and Visitor Bureau was always a valuable experience.

Mildura will get a further chance to promote the region when Julie puts the district and its attractions on show

at the 19th Asia-Pacific Incentives and Meetings Expo (AIME) in Melbourne on February 15 and 16.

The Melbourne Convention and Visitors Bureau established AIME in 1993 to generate International Conventions, meetings, exhibitions and incentive travel for Australia. It has since grown into the premier expo for the business events industry in the Southern Hemisphere.

The two-day event showcases the best Victorian, Australian, Asia-Pacific and international destinations, products and services, and provides a host of professional, education and networking opportunities.

Mildura will be among 850 exhibitors from more than 50 countries at the expo, along with 500 international and domestic hosted buyers, including the ones coming to Mildura. The expo will feature 3500 trade visitors and up to 70 media delegates, representing worldwide publications.