

New regional forum's aim to create more jobs

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STIMULATING, supporting and promoting innovation in the Eastern Cape to assist with job creation is the key aim of the new Eastern Cape Regional Innovation Forum, launched in Port Elizabeth yesterday.

The forum is made up of various organisations including the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, the Department of Science and Technology and the Automotive Industry Development Centre.

Other stakeholders include the Eastern Cape Development Corporation, the Small Enterprise Development Agency, Rhodes University, the Development Bank of South Africa, Cacadu District Municipality, CSIR and the Nelson Mandela Bay Business Chamber.

Jacqueline Barnett, director of innovation support and technology transfer at NMMU, said the idea for the forum came about

two years ago when the Department of Science and Technology approached the university with a strategy to drive the formation of a body which would support innovation in the province.

"The university recently assisted a local business with getting their technology for longer life roses patented. This has brought employment to 40 unskilled workers," she said.

"For the university it is not about income but about impact. This is the kind of assistance the forum seeks to provide."

Department of Science and Technology deputy director-general Dr Thomas Auf der Heyde said global economic growth increasingly depended on innovation, particularly at a regional level. "In South Africa this should not be any different and specifically stimulating innovation at a regional level must be a priority if we want to generate national wealth for everyone.

"We hope the regional innovation forums will be a catalyst

that can elevate innovation as a key driver for economic development at a regional level and that structures will enhance existing and future endeavours," he said.

Barnett said some of the work of the forum included bridging the gap between research and industry, creating links between key role-players, providing workshops, assisting with access to finance for research and patents, lobbying for an innovation seed fund and publicising success stories.

NMBM Economic Development, Tourism and Agriculture Portfolio chairman, councillor Anne-Marie van Jaarsveld, said the municipality would be actively involved by facilitating and supporting the forum to ensure there was local economic development.

"As a nation we need to work together and give assistance where we can. Our ultimate goal is job creation," she said.