

ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

Boosting dynamism: What Australia can learn from other nations (2024) © CEDA 2024 ISBN: 0 85801 360 6 This is the second paper in CEDA's series on the importance of dynamic capabilities for Australian businesses.

It focuses on the role governments can play in educating businesses about dynamic capabilities, in line with the Federal Government's ambition of building a more productive, dynamic and resilient economy.

It presents two case studies of highly successful overseas government programs – one in New Zealand and one in Singapore – that Australia could learn from.



Melissa Wilson Senior Economist, CEDA

Melissa Wilson is a Senior Economist, based in South Australia, at the Committee for Economic Development of Australia (CEDA). She leads CEDA's research on business dynamism and productivity, and was the lead author of the report 'Dynamic Capabilities: How Australian firms can survive and thrive in uncertain times'. Melissa has over a decade of experience as an economist at the Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA), where she worked in a broad variety of areas including the RBA's business liaison program, overseas economies, international relations, labour markets, domestic markets, financial stability and public education.

Boosting dynamism:

What Australia can learn from other nations

Building dynamic capabilities within Australian businesses could be a practical and effective way to boost our productivity growth.

Trend productivity growth rates have been declining for decades and average productivity growth over the decade to 2020 was the slowest in 60 years.



This comes against a backdrop of major technological, climate and demographic change.



Dynamic capabilities can help boost productivity growth







Research has found firms that can sense and seize opportunities, transforming their business when renewal is needed, are more resilient, productive and profitable.



Overseas government programs

When dynamic capabilities programs were implemented in New Zealand and Singapore, participating firms expanded into new businesses, products and markets, adopted improved ways of working, and increased collaboration and transformation.

What's the role of government?

Embedding dynamic management capabilities education in existing programs would be a quick and cost-effective way of commencing dynamic capabilities education in Australia.

At the federal level, dynamic capabilities could form a key pillar of the new Industry Growth Program.



At the state level, governments should also look to embed dynamic capabilities education within their existing suite of business support programs.





Australia's productivity problem is becoming more critical

Productivity growth is the key driver of increasing living standards. Over the past 30 years, labour productivity has contributed around 70 per cent of the growth in Australia's real gross national income.¹

Yet trend productivity growth rates have been declining for decades, and more recently labour productivity has fallen to 2019 levels.² This is happening against a backdrop of major technological, climate and demographic change.

Creating a "more dynamic, competitive and resilient economy" is at the top of the Federal Government's productivity agenda.³

At the same time, CEDA members have identified falling productivity as one of the most critical challenges to achieving sustainable long-term prosperity for all Australians.

But the reasons for our weak productivity – particularly over past three years – are not well understood and have left many economists puzzled.

It's likely caused by a range of factors, including a hangover from the COVID-19 pandemic and the shift to a more services-based economy. Looking ahead, climate change, heightened global tensions and population ageing are all likely to weigh on productivity growth in coming years.

This means we will need to pull many levers to boost Australia's productivity. The hunt is on for practical ways to achieve this.

Dynamic capabilities can help to boost productivity growth

As CEDA has previously argued, building dynamic capabilities within Australian businesses could be a practical and effective way to boost productivity growth.

Recent CEDA research in conjunction with the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) found that when the COVID-19 pandemic struck, the most dynamic firms innovated quickly, setting them up to be significantly more productive and profitable as the pandemic wore on.⁴ This is consistent with a broader body of evidence connecting dynamic capabilities with improved productivity and performance outcomes, especially in highly competitive environments.⁵

66

When the COVID-19 pandemic struck, the most dynamic firms innovated quickly, setting them up to be significantly more productive and profitable as the pandemic wore on.

Our research also found that almost all businesses have plenty of room to improve their dynamic capabilities. But this is challenging, because firms are generally too tied up with "business as usual" to lift their eyes and focus on longer-term objectives of building capabilities and comparative advantage.⁶

Our findings have resonated with CEDA members across the country, who tell us they are among the key challenges they grapple with every day.

But dynamic capabilities is a relatively new field of research and there is still much to learn. So what can we learn from other countries that are further down this path?

BOX 1

What are dynamic capabilities?

The dynamic capabilities framework aims to explain how firms can survive and thrive in a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (or VUCA) environment. Firms with stronger dynamic capabilities are more forward-looking and strategic, concerned with "doing the right things" rather than "doing things right", and focused on effectiveness and innovation to sustain competitive advantage.

Firms with stronger dynamic capabilities are more resilient, productive and profitable, enabling them to support more innovative cultures. They can:



Sense opportunities, threats and customer needs



Seize opportunities to satisfy customers, shape markets and capture value



Transform themselves when renewal is needed

This cycle of sensing, seizing and transforming is essential for ongoing viability and success in a constantly changing and evolving world. Firms with stronger dynamic capabilities are more resilient, productive and profitable, enabling more innovation.

The concept was inspired by business leaders in Silicon Valley, and echoes the culture of innovation and entrepreneurship that is core to the economy of Israel.

66

There is an opportunity for governments to fill this gap, with relatively little cost and potentially a large payoff.

Governments have a role to play

Educating business leaders about dynamic capabilities would not only help their own organisations, but could also help to build capabilities within the wider business ecosystem.

Training leaders has ripple effects. They are critical for setting firm strategy, structure and processes, which are all crucial for providing an environment in which dynamic capabilities are developed and maintained.⁷ They also have broad reach and influence across the business sector more broadly. However, they are unlikely to build these capabilities without support.

Businesses often lack insight into their own management capabilities, which typically fall into the category of "unknown unknowns". It often takes some sort of shock to get capability building and forward thinking onto their agenda ahead of the daily tasks, routines and pressures of running a business.

Even if firms are aware and are motivated to become more dynamic, they don't necessarily know how to do so. Dynamic capabilities are not typically taught in business schools.¹⁰ Many firms, particularly smaller ones, also lack the resources to hire expensive professional consultants.

There is an opportunity for governments to fill this gap, with relatively little cost and potentially a large payoff. There is already a range of government programs with significant resources and reach into the business sector. Governments can provide expertise and training at a cost that small businesses, in particular, would be unable to afford on their own.

Embedding dynamic capabilities into existing government advisory programs would be a low-cost way to trial similar training methods to those that have worked overseas with Australian businesses, and to evaluate the results.

This is consistent with recent research from the Federal Government's innovation advisory board – Industry Innovation and Science Australia (IISA) – which emphasised that small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are the engine of innovation in most economies and recommended policy actions to "build businesses with the management experience, capacity and capability for innovation".¹¹

International programs provide a template

To gain a better understanding of what can be done to help Australian businesses to develop dynamic capabilities, we examined two overseas programs – one run by the New Zealand government that was specifically built using the dynamic capabilities framework, and one run by the Singapore government that has many parallels to dynamic capabilities.

Case Study 1: New Zealand's Dynamic Capabilities pilot program

In 2021, the New Zealand government piloted a program aimed at developing the dynamic capabilities of domestic businesses. The program was borne out of the NZ Productivity Commission's Frontier Firms inquiry, which found that:

- Businesses, with support from government, will need to deploy dynamic capabilities to identify areas of competitive advantage in export markets and drive innovation that will push out the productivity frontier; and
- High-quality management and governance are important determinants of firm productivity. Evidence suggests that many New Zealand firms lack the leadership capabilities needed to lift their productivity.¹²

The program was run by Callaghan Innovation, the NZ Government's innovation agency, designed in conjunction with international experts, and delivered by a local consulting firm. It was delivered to a cohort of 24 senior leaders from 12 high-potential firms, with 10 firms completing the program.

Over a few months, the executives participated in three full-day workshops, three one-on-one coaching sessions and a series of cohort sessions. The sessions were structured around the routines, practices and principles of each of the key elements of the dynamic capabilities framework – that is, sensing, seizing and transforming.¹³

The pilot program showed strong results. All participants said it met or exceeded their expectations, and the overall Net Promoter Score was 45 (on a scale of -100 to +100, with a positive score indicating more promoters than detractors). An evaluation of its impact six months after completion found that, as a result of the program:



92 per cent of firms embedded beneficial new ways of working



75 per cent of firms reported a change in innovation routines



70 per cent firms reported specific positive outcomes (e.g., new partnerships)



Two-thirds of firms changed their management routines and decision making.¹⁵

While the program focused on developing dynamic capabilities at the firm level, it was also expected to have spillover effects to the broader economy.

Ultimately, developing dynamic capabilities at the firm level is expected to boost productivity and research & development spending at the national level. This is because educating business leaders about dynamic capabilities not only boosts the capabilities of their own organisations, it also establishes a network of like-minded, senior business leaders who can influence capabilities in their wider business ecosystems.¹⁶

Unfortunately the program has not been run again. Lack of understanding among business leaders of the benefits of dynamic capabilities has been a key challenge in attracting businesses to join the program, as has the clutter of existing business advisory programs in New Zealand.¹⁷

While the program was small, it showed potential and there could be an opportunity to apply the lessons learnt in New Zealand by trialling a similar program in Australia.



Case Study 2: Singapore's Scale-Up SG program

Some government-supported business advisory services, while not built around the dynamic-capabilities framework specifically, do have similar elements. The Singapore government's Scale-Up SG program is a good example of this.

Scale-Up SG is Enterprise Singapore's flagship program and has been running since 2019. It hand-picks small local companies that have been identified as having high growth potential and ambitious, committed leadership teams across a range of industries.

It aims to assist these firms to build the capabilities and networks needed to grow, particularly in international markets. Like the New Zealand program, the Singaporean program emphasises the limitations of Singapore's relatively small domestic market, and the importance of local firms expanding into global markets for long-run growth and success. Ultimately, the program aims to drive innovation and productivity gains that will contribute to the national economy and create good jobs for local workers.

While many overseas governments offer business accelerator programs, Scale-Up SG has strong parallels with the dynamic-capabilities framework. In particular, it emphasises that firms must navigate the uncertainty of a fast-paced, highly competitive environment, and grapple with ways to unlock growth amid ongoing disruption from new competitors and technologies.

The program emphasises that innovation and new business building are critical for firms' long-run growth and success – focusing on efficiency and savings is not enough. It encourages Singaporean business leaders to be bold and take smart risks.

Scale-Up SG encourages participants to sense opportunities through an in-depth customer identification module and competitor analysis, which participants use to develop strategies for expansion into target markets. It helps participants to seize opportunities through piloting new products, diversifying into new markets and creating an ecosystem where businesses can rapidly identify opportunities for partnerships and collaboration. The program aims to accelerate transformation and growth of firms by building a sustainable pathway to scale and build new businesses.

Each wave of the Scale-Up SG program runs for 12 to 18 months. Enterprise Singapore partners with a suite of management consulting firms to deliver the program, as well as two top-tier international business schools (Stanford Graduate School of Business and The Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania), who deliver a formal education component akin to a mini-MBA. Similar partnerships with international providers and/or local business schools could also be an option to explore in Australia.

Participating firms are also supported by partnerships and a community of leaders and mentors, creating a network for peer learning, support and advice. Participants have noted how the program establishes mutual trust across businesses much faster than otherwise, making it much easier to establish partnerships and collaborate. The program aims to foster a growing community of likeminded global enterprises, providing support and inspiration to others.

The program reports strong results. An impact analysis of the first three cohorts found that the program had roughly tripled the growth ambition of participants, created around 500 "good" jobs, and supported participating companies to enter more than 30 overseas markets.²⁰

Of the 49 companies that had participated in the program at the time of evaluation:



85 per cent had launched new businesses or products



57 per cent had entered new markets



87 per cent had embarked on digital transformation projects



75 per cent had discussed collaboration with



32 per cent had embarked on mergers and acquisitions or joint peers in the program ventures as a means of expansion

As more businesses complete the program, we can continue to monitor outcomes and learn from their experiences.

The role of education

The international case studies above demonstrate the potential benefits of government-provided dynamiccapabilities education. They offer a template that Australia could adopt as a practical step towards boosting productivity and innovation.

Such education should be embedded in existing government programs, however, rather than creating new ones. In Australia, as overseas, state and federal governments already offer many business-advisory services, which businesses often struggle to navigate. As such, creating yet another new program would likely be counterproductive. Instead, incorporating dynamic capabilities into existing programs would be the quickest and easiest way for governments to start educating businesses about these capabilities.

As with all government services, good evaluation is critical. Taxpayers need to know they are getting value for money. Evaluation of any dynamic capabilities education is especially important, given this is an emerging area of research and there is still much to learn. Rigorous evaluation of any efforts to boost dynamic capabilities would also greatly improve our understanding of the links between dynamic capabilities, firm performance and productivity growth.





66

Embedding dynamic capabilities training within the advisory component of the IGP would align with the program's goal of scaling innovative and competitive businesses, to "support economic growth, productivity and job creation for all Australians."

Dynamic capabilities are a natural fit for the new Industry Growth Program

The new \$392.4 million Industry Growth Program (IGP) was launched by the Federal Department of Industry, Science and Resources in November 2023.²¹ The IGP will provide advice and grants to innovative SMEs undertaking commercialisation and/or growth programs under the same seven priority areas as the National Reconstruction Fund: value-add in resources, value-add in agriculture, forestry and fisheries, transport, medical science, renewables and low-emission technologies, defence capabilities and enabling capabilities.²²

Embedding dynamic capabilities training within the advisory component of the IGP would align with the program's goal of scaling innovative and competitive businesses, to "support economic growth, productivity and job creation for all Australians".²³

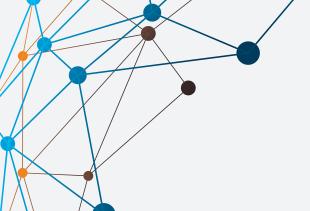
The IGP "aims to be a high-impact, cost-effective way to back Australian ideas and build capability", supporting businesses in key priority areas to transform, grow and become more competitive in international markets.²⁴ It is aiming to build Australia's industrial resilience, boost innovation and improve business performance and outcomes.²⁵ This aligns closely with the dynamic-capabilities framework.

States could also foster dynamic capabilities

One limitation of the IGP is its narrow focus on firms that will ultimately grow into candidates for investment by the \$15 billion National Reconstruction Fund, which is focused on investing in high-tech manufacturing projects within its seven priority areas.

Including dynamic-capabilities education in the IGP would thus fail to reach large parts of the business sector. It would therefore also be useful to embed these capabilities in additional programs with broader reach, including at the state level.

Recent research by UTS identified 33 business-support programs offered by state governments.²⁶ Their services tend to be more static and oriented to the short-term, rather than long-term and dynamic.²⁷ Embedding dynamic-capabilities education in some of these programs, particularly those targeted at scaling SMEs or boosting productivity and innovation, would be an effective way to build these capabilities in more businesses. This could be done in partnership with local universities, especially those with existing expertise in executive education or industry collaboration.



KEY LESSONS



BOOSTING DYNAMIC CAPABILITIES COULD IMPROVE INNOVATION AND PRODUCTIVITY GROWTH

Dynamic capabilities is an emerging area of research, but the evidence so far suggests that firms with stronger dynamic capabilities are more productive, innovative and profitable, increasing their ability to survive and thrive in uncertain environments. Boosting the dynamic capabilities of Australian businesses could therefore be a practical way to improve innovation and productivity growth.



OVERSEAS CASE STUDIES SHOW PROMISING RESULTS

Overseas government programs designed to boost the dynamic capabilities of local businesses, while limited, have so far been highly successful. Our case studies from New Zealand and Singapore found that firms participating in these programs went on to expand into new businesses, products and markets, adopt new and improved ways of working, and increase collaboration and transformation.



TRIALLING EDUCATION PROGRAMS WOULD IMPROVE OUR UNDERSTANDING OF DYNAMIC CAPABILITIES

Trialling dynamic capabilities education in Australia would enable us to test and evaluate a similar approach. It would also provide a valuable opportunity to improve our understanding of the links between dynamic capabilities, firm performance and productivity growth.



STATE AND FEDERAL GOVERNMENTS COULD EMBED DYNAMIC CAPABILITIES EDUCATION IN EXISTING PROGRAMS

Embedding dynamic management-capabilities education in existing programs would be a quick and cost-effective way of starting dynamic-capabilities education in Australia. At the federal level, it could form a key pillar of the new Industry Growth Program. At the state level, governments should also look to embed this education within their existing business-support programs.



Conclusion

Australia has a long and enviable history of economic prosperity and high living standards, but our productivity growth is at historically weak levels. We must boost productivity, innovation and resilience, even amid increasing global uncertainty, to ensure this success continues.

Boosting the dynamic capabilities of Australian businesses could be a practical step towards achieving the Federal Government's ambition of building a more productive, dynamic and resilient economy.

International experience shows that governments can provide dynamic-capabilities education for businesses that produces strong results. This presents an opportunity to test a similar approach in Australia.

Embedding dynamic capabilities in the existing services offered by state and federal governments could be a quick and cost-effective way to start boosting the capabilities of Australian businesses. Ultimately, if this proves successful, it could help to stimulate innovation and drive productivity growth.

Australia's productivity problem is clear. Now is the time to pursue all solutions at our disposal.

12 BOOSTING DYNAMISM

References

- 1 'Intergenerational Report 2023' (Commonwealth of Australia, August 2023).
- 2 'Australian National Accounts: National Income, Expenditure and Product' (Australian Bureau of Statistics, September 2023), https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/economy/national-accounts/australian-national-accounts-national-income-expenditure-and-product/sep-2023.
- 3 'Productivity Commission Statement of Expectations' (The Treasury, November 2023), https://treasury.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-11/pc_statement_of_expectations.pdf.
- 4 Melissa Wilson et al., 'Dynamic Capabilities: How Australian Firms Can Survive and Thrive in Uncertain Times' (Committee for Economic Development of Australia, June 2023), https://cedakenticomedia.blob.core. windows.net/cedamediacontainer/kentico/media/attachments/ceda-dynamic-capabilities-report.pdf.
- 5 Examples include Barbara Kump et al., 'Toward a Dynamic Capabilities Scale: Measuring Organizational Sensing, Seizing, and Transforming Capacities', *Industrial and Corporate Change*, October 2019, https://doi.org/10.1093/icc/dty054; and Ralf Wilden et al., 'Dynamic Capabilities and Performance: Strategy, Structure and Environment', *Long Range Planning* 46, no. 1–2 (February 2013): 72–96, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lrp.2012.12.001.
- 6 Wilson et al., 'Dynamic Capabilities: How Australian Firms Can Survive and Thrive in Uncertain Times'.
- 7 Quinetta Roberson, Oscar Holmes, and Jamie L. Perry, 'Transforming Research on Diversity and Firm Performance: A Dynamic Capabilities Perspective', *Academy of Management Annals* 11, no. 1 (January 2017): 189–216, https://doi.org/10.5465/annals.2014.0019.
- 8 R. Green et al., 'Management Matters in Australia: Just How Productive Are We?', Report (Department of Industry, Innovation, Science and Research, January 2009), https://opus.lib.uts.edu.au/handle/10453/16834.
- 9 Teece, David, 'Productivity in a Changing World Seminar Series: Conversation with Professor David Teece: Recent Developments in the Dynamic Capabilities Approach and Their Implications for Public Management and Private Sector Innovation' (Online event, New Zealand, 25 October 2023), https://www.treasury.govt.nz/news-and-events/our-events/productivity-changing-world-seminar-series-recent-developments-dynamic-capabilities-approach-implications-public-private-innovation.
- 10 Kieran Brown and Teece, David, 'New Zealand Frontier Firms: A Capabilities-Based Perspective', *BRG Institute for the NZ Productivity Commission*, August 2020.
- 11 'Barriers to Collaboration and Commercialisation' (Canberra: Office of Industry Innovation and Science Australia, 2023), https://www.industry.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-11/barriers-to-collaboration-and-commercialisation-iisa.pdf.
- 12 'New Zealand Firms: Reaching for the Frontier. Final Report' (New Zealand Productivity Commission, April 2021), https://www.productivity.govt.nz/assets/Documents/Final-report-Frontier-firms.pdf.
- 13 'Dynamic Capabilities', IMS Projects, accessed 20 December 2023, https://go.ims-projects.co.nz/dc-apply.
- 14 'Frontier Firms Follow-on Review: Detailed Observations' (New Zealand Productivity Commission, May 2023), https://www.productivity.govt.nz/assets/Inquiries/follow-on-review-frontier-firms/Frontier-firms-follow-on-review-detailed-observations.pdf.
- 15 'Frontier Firms Follow-on Review: Detailed Observations'; Kim Nugent, 'Guest Article Dynamic Capabilities: Developing Strategic Innovation Capability', *HERA* (blog), 18 July 2023, https://www.hera.org.nz/dynamic-capability/.
- 16 Nugent, 'Guest Article Dynamic Capabilities'.
- 17 'Frontier Firms Follow-on Review: Detailed Observations'.
- 18 'Scale-Up', Enterprise Singapore, accessed 20 December 2023, https://www.enterprisesg.gov.sg/grow-your-business/boost-capabilities/growth-and-transformation/scale-up.
- 19 'Scale-up SG Impact Report' (Enterprise Singapore, August 2022), https://www.enterprisesg.gov.sg/-/media/esg/files/non-financial-assistance/for-companies/growth-partnership-programme/scale-up-sg/scale-up-sg-impact-report.pdf.
- 20 'Scale-up SG Impact Report'.

- 21 '\$392 Million Industry Growth Program Open for Business', Ministers for the Department of Industry, Science and Resources, 27 November 2023, https://www.minister.industry.gov.au/ministers/husic/media-releases/392-million-industry-growth-program-open-business.
- 'Industry Growth Program Information Guide' (Department of Industry, Science and Resources, August 2023), https://business.gov.au/-/media/grants-and-programs/industry-growth-program/industry-growth-program---information-guide-pdf.pdf?sc_lang=en&hash=56FC8CAB047EE22FBAC6F2B97IB42F07.
- 23 'Industry Growth Program Information Guide'.
- 24 'Industry Growth Program Consultation Paper' (Department of Industry, Science and Resources, 2023), https://storage.googleapis.com/converlens-au-industry/industry/p/prj267a0cld6a2eeffeaflla/public_assets/igp-consultation-paper.pdf.
- 25 'Industry Growth Program Consultation Paper'.
- 26 Renu Agarwal et al., 'A Scoping Project to Assess and Evaluate Active Australian Government-Supported Business Management Advisory Services', A report prepared by UTS for the Industry Growth Division, Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources (Canberra, 2021).
- 27 Agarwal et al.

14 BOOSTING DYNAMISM



CEDA – the Committee for Economic Development of Australia

Level 3, 271 Spring Street, Melbourne 3000 Australia

Telephone: +61 1800 161 236

Email: info@ceda.com.au

Web: ceda.com.au

Across all of its work, CEDA's purpose is to shape economic and social development for the greater good. Persons who rely upon the material published do so at their own risk.

About CEDA

CEDA is Australia's leading member-driven think tank. Our purpose is to achieve sustainable long-term prosperity for all Australians.

Our trusted independence, and a deep and broad membership base that extends across all sectors, states and territories, enables us to bring diverse perspectives and insights to guide and advance policy debate and development in the national interest.

We aim to influence future economic, social and environmental outcomes by:

- Promoting public discussion of the challenges and opportunities facing Australia;
- Enabling members to shape future outcomes through policy and their own actions;
- Partnering and collaborating to tackle emerging opportunities and entrenched challenges; and
- Advocating for policy change based on our independent research insights.

Our work is overseen by our independent Board of Directors and our research is guided and approved by an independent Research and Policy Committee whose members are leading economists, researchers and policy experts.



National

Level 3 271 Spring Street Melbourne 3000 Australia **GPO Box 2117** Melbourne VIC 3001 Telephone +61 1800 161 236 Email info@ceda.com.au

New South Wales and the ACT

Suite 3219 Level 32, 200 George Street Sydney NSW 2000 GPO Box 2100 Sydney NSW 2001 Telephone +61 1800 161 236 Email info@ceda.com.au

Queensland

Level 4 232 Adelaide Street Brisbane QLD 4000 GPO Box 2900 Brisbane QLD 4001 Telephone +61 1800 161 236 Email info@ceda.com.au

South Australia and the **Northern Territory**

Level 2 33 King William Street Adelaide SA 5000 Telephone +61 1800 161 236 Email info@ceda.com.au

Victoria and Tasmania

Level 3 271 Spring Street Melbourne 3000 Australia GPO Box 2117 Melbourne VIC 3001 Telephone +61 1800 161 236 Email info@ceda.com.au

Western Australia

Level 4 220 St Georges Terrace Perth WA 6000 PO Box 5631 St Georges Tce Perth WA 6831 Telephone +61 1800 161 236 Email info@ceda.com.au

