



📷 Kylie Smith tries her hand at sewing a Tambo Teddy. Picture supplied.

Two western Queensland manufacturers have joined forces to strengthen each other's business.

The sewers that have been busy making Tambo Teddies are now working with colourful vinyl as well, thanks to a collaboration between the handcrafted sheepskin bear business and Gidgee Smith Bags based at Morven.

Tambo Teddies co-founder Alison Shaw said that with the retail market slowing, they had been casting around for other ways of keeping their staff based in Toowoomba busy.

"Our sewers are all set up so we thought we'd look at contract work, and we approached Kylie at Gidgee Smith Bags," she said. "It turns out she's having the same issue as we did with finding sewers in western Queensland, so she's now working with our sewers."

Tambo Teddies set up a regional sewing hub in Toowoomba in 2019 when it became apparent that they weren't able to source enough sewers locally in Tambo, [providing employment opportunities](#) for newly arrived refugees in the process.

Kylie Smith's line of 120 PVC products are currently produced from her base at Morven, where she has two sewers employed.



What you get when you put Gidgee Smith bags with Tambo Teddies

"We can keep up with online orders and corporate work, but we can't do more than what we're doing now," she said.

"We thought we might be able to move into the wholesale market if we can produce more bags.

"We'd never been interested in selling overseas, but we're really interested in helping both Tambo Teddies and ourselves in keeping our longevity, so it's a win-win."

Ms Smith said she understood perfectly that the Teddy sewers were a big asset to that business, having two herself.

She estimated it took \$30,000 and two years to get them to the stage where they were really productive.

"It will still cost to train them down there, but it takes the pressure off," she said.

The machines used are straight sewers rather than the curved interlockers used to sew teddies, and Ms Smith has installed one while a second was bought by the Tambo Teddies business.

"Our staff have got great skills, they're picking up the bag sewing well," Ms Shaw said.



📷 Kylie Smith watches while Tambo Teddies sewers make up one of her bags. Picture supplied.

Two of them are learning to do Gidgee Smith work, and Ms Shaw said they probably wouldn't need to look anywhere else for work at this stage, although she wasn't ruling out employing more staff if the need was there.

Ms Smith expects the initiative will double her output.

She estimated that the business would put \$40,000 worth of postage through the Morven post office this year.

"This is a huge opportunity for two little companies," she said.

"Alison and I are both woolclassers by trade, funnily enough.

"I guess we're both good at meeting a challenge, good problem solvers."

Ms Shaw said she was really happy to have founded such a partnership, both promoting handmade Australian products.