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National Skills Week August 27 – September 2

# Taking her shot!

By Lauren Green

JACQUELINE Belcher has made history. The 25-year-old metal fabrication welder from Taree is the first full-time female tradesperson employed at United Group Limited (UGL) Rail Taree. She was also the first female apprentice for UGL Rail Taree and the first qualified female trades student in Engineering fabrication at Taree TAFE. "I've always had an interest in metalwork, woodwork and automotive," said Jacqueline. She studied metalwork and woodwork from the age of 14 while a student at Chatham High School and said they were her favourite subjects. But the path to employment wasn't easy. Jacqueline was knocked back for an apprenticeship with UGL Rail on a couple of occasions but rather than be discouraged, it gave her even more determination to succeed. In 2008 she decided to improve her chances by working at UGL Rail as a labour hire, and completing a welding module from the Certificate II TAFE course. UGL Rail national human resources manager freight build, David Paff said Jacqueline was consistent and persistent in her objective to gain employment at UGL Rail and her initial training at TAFE and on-the-job experience was the "catalyst to giving her a shot." Jacqueline started her apprenticeship in 2009, which included completion of a Certificate III Engineering Fabrication and



**Making trade history: Jacqueline Belcher is in her element in the workshop.**

Trade (with six months taken off in recognition of her previous learning) at TAFE and three years job experience. She impressed during her apprenticeship and in July was put

on full-time. Jacqueline is part of a team producing fuel tanks for locomotives, with her responsibilities consisting of marking out, safety checks and lots of welding.

UGL Rail Taree manufactures the underframes and platforms for freight locomotives, and a component of that is the fuel tanks. "The undertank is a substan-

tially massive structure with a lot of detailed welding," Mr Paff said. "It's a very high quality process you need to follow."

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