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## BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE REPORT

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FOR THE MEETINGS AND EVENTS INDUSTRY



*The  
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Under*





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## INTRO

# Australia at the Forefront of the BUSINESS EVENTS CONVERSATION

**I'VE SAID IT** before and I'll say it again: if I had to move from Sweden and I could pick anywhere in the world, it would be Australia. Specifically, Adelaide.

I have always loved Adelaide. My Adelaide is a city in fast transformation that is evolving from its automotive manufacturing roots, now full of hi-tech skills as it journeys to become a Knowledge Facilitating Hub. It's a rookie on the way up, flying under the radar, using the likes of big data and business events as platforms for its success.

The modern term 'business events' was coined in Australia by Elizabeth Rich, Chief Executive of the Business Events Council of Australia (BECA), who retired from her role at the end of June 2011 after leading the organisation for 17 years. Today, 'business events' is a term used widely by companies and destinations around the world. It remains the quiet overachiever of the Australian tourism industry.

The convention centres in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Adelaide are among the best in the world and they are working tightly together as a group, determined to stay at the top.

This is the Australian approach to life – mateship – and it transcends the business events industry.

Managed by Tourism Australia's specialist unit, Business Events Australia, the Business Events Bid Fund Program (BFP) is designed to increase new international business events for Australia through the offer of financial support at the critical bidding stage. The BFP is intended to deliver conversion in situations where Australia is bidding against international competitors for the right to host the business event. And there are more bid funds like it. Just start searching for them.

If the Australian industry maintains the high quality it's currently delivering across convention centres, convention bureaus and services (like hotels and restaurants), it will thrive. There is a performance philosophy across the country that's incomparable to any other country I have visited during my 40+ years as a journalist. In my experience, nowhere else in the world has better service than the hotels in Australia. When we arrived at quarter to twelve in the evening to an airport hotel in Sydney with plans to leave again early the next morning,

we were met by a friendly smile and warm towels. I have never seen this anywhere else, at a hotel, at nearly midnight.

In any case, our report shows that Australia has a collaborative model and mindset. We have interviewed many of the leading players showing us this mindset. We have sought deep, broad, complex and innovative ideas that continue to develop the world, and thus create many important new business events not only for Australia but also other places in the world. We once again observe how meetings, conferences and congresses are an essential driver for the development of the world. During our stay in Australia, we have learned the importance of associations and their significant work in developing their organisations, members, cities, universities and very often the whole of society.

This business intelligence report is all about knowledge and sharing the knowledge all interviewees contributed. Everyone we talked to both wanted to share their expertise and highlight the power of collaboration.



PHOTO Magnus Malmberg

Swedish-Indonesian **ATTI SOENARSO** has worked as a journalist for over 40 years. She has worked for Scandinavia's largest daily newspaper, was TV4's first travel editor, has written for many Swedish travel magazines and has had several international clients. She has travelled the length and breadth of the world and written about destinations, people and meetings.





Simon Birmingham, Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment PHOTO AUSPIC/DPS

## An Innovative, DIVERSE AND WELCOMING DESTINATION

“**BUSINESS EVENTS** are arguably the quiet overachiever of Australia’s visitor economy, delivering huge benefits to the broader economy,” says Simon Birmingham.

“When you consider that of the \$44 billion that international visitors spent on their travels to Australia in the last 12 months, \$5 billion of this was spent by business events visitors alone. The significance and scale of this sector are obvious. In terms of its relative size, these visitors comprise the second-largest yielding international visitor group for Australia after China and are more valuable in terms of international visitor spending than key individual inbound markets such as the U.K. and the U.S. From large-scale association conferences and meetings to exhibitions and international corporate incentive trips, these events provide a significant boost by filling hotel rooms and restaurants, and driving visitation to key attractions.”

“But not only do these high-value events deliver immediate benefits

for Australia, they also leave a lasting legacy and help to build on our reputation for offering an unbeatable combination of destination appeal, innovation, leading knowledge sectors, and a proven track record in event delivery across a broad spectrum of fields. A great demonstration of this is the SportAccord Summit, a prestigious week-long sporting federation event that Australia hosted for the first time last year. The Summit, which was held on the Gold Coast, involved 1,700 delegates from the world’s leading sporting federations, associations and businesses from more than 80 nations including the highest ever number of International Olympic Committee members. The event has helped raise the country’s profile on the world stage for future sporting events including the exciting prospect of a 2032 Olympics bid for Brisbane and South East Queensland.”

Australia is known for being perhaps the worldwide frontrunner when it comes to strategic thinking

“Business events are arguably the quiet overachiever of Australia’s tourism industry”

within the business events industry, a reputation supported by the book, *The Power of Conferences* by professors Carmel Foley and Deborah Edwards, at University of Technology Sydney (UTS). The Australian Government is actively supporting the business events sector.

“The global business events industry is highly competitive, and one that is becoming increasingly crowded as more and more destinations vie to secure lucrative events. While we know that Australia is a highly appealing destination among event decision-makers and potential delegates, we face several inevitable barriers created by our relative distance from much of the world and the associated costs with travel here. The Government remains absolutely committed to supporting the industry to overcome these challenges so that we remain one of the most sought-after destinations for events. That is why we established a \$12 million business events bid fund, to provide Australian organisations and destinations with a competitive advantage when bidding to secure international business events. The fund, which is managed by our national tourism marketing agency, Tourism Australia, has been met with overwhelming support

from the industry. After just over 18 months of operation, it has received 136 event applications and helped to secure 33 events for Australia worth more than \$340 million.

“The bid fund is just one element of the work done by Tourism Australia to increase awareness and drive demand for Australia as a business events destination. The agency’s dedicated business events unit, Business Events Australia, offers a range of support to the industry including marketing communications resources, industry partnerships and distribution development programmes. The agency also hosts several significant trade events that promote and grow the sector, including Dreamtime, Australia’s largest business events showcase; and the Greater China Showcase, which connects Chinese agents with Australian business events products. To complement these efforts, the Government has also implemented a range of reforms to address the pressure points and barriers facing the broader tourism industry, including those relating to visas, aviation access, tourism infrastructure, and labour and skills.”

The Foley/Edwards study was the first coordinated, global effort to

measure and document these benefits in ways that can be used to advocate to governments and communities about the vital role played by business events. While finding mostly positive effects from business events, the report also identifies barriers to achieving lasting legacies, such as organisers neglecting to set long-term objectives or to look beyond internal organisational goals. In response, the researchers have developed six ‘golden rules’ for business events gleaned from best practice among the global case studies, which covered scientific conferences, industry congresses and focused gatherings for specific groups such as the tech sector.

These include, as first steps, involving stakeholders such as governments and business in setting legacy objectives, based on agreed industry problems, issues and opportunities.

Overall, the report recommends more significant investment in improved measurement, evaluation and formal reporting of the longer-term contributions of business events beyond the tourism spend, particularly to government stakeholders. Now the future looks bright for Australia because the rest of the business

“That is why we established a \$12 million business events bid fund”

events world is very much looking at the country and what will happen there in the next five to ten years.

“The next few years are set to be exciting ones for the industry with a number of notable international conferences and conventions already confirmed for Australia. One of the most significant of these is the Rotary International Convention, which will be staged in Melbourne in 2023. The four-day event, which was secured with the help of Tourism Australia’s Bid Fund Program, is expected to attract 10,000 international delegates from more than 200 countries, delivering an \$88 million boost to the economy. Importantly, the kinds of visitors that these international events attract are not only high yielding, but they often extend their visit to regional parts of Australia and are more likely to return for a holiday in the future with their families and friends.

“For Australia to retain its edge in the increasingly competitive business events landscape, we need to continue to give decision-makers, event leaders and travellers a reason to come by continuing to improve and develop our tourism offerings, while reminding the world that we are an innovative, diverse and welcoming

destination. Work is underway to develop the Government’s second iteration of its long-term visitor economy strategy, which will build on much of the good work that has already been done across the sector while also driving new policies and initiatives to encourage sustainable growth,” says Simon Birmingham.

*Simon Birmingham is the Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment and Deputy Leader of the Australian Government in the Senate. His earlier political career saw him in positions including Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for the Murray-Darling Basin and the Environment, and Assistant Minister for Education and Training before taking appointment as the Minister for Education and Training. He has a master's degree in Business Administration from the University of Adelaide and has worked for a number of industry bodies, establishing experience in the wine, tourism and hospitality sectors.*





Penny Lion, Executive General Manager, Events, Tourism Australia PHOTO Tourism Australia

## Australia's \$12 Million BID FUND DELIVERS

**BUSINESS EVENTS** are a significant contributor to the Australian visitor economy. International business events visitors spend, on average, twice as much as leisure visitors during their stay. Beyond the economic benefits, business events showcase Australia's capabilities in event delivery and key knowledge sectors, develop trade and investment relationships, and are catalysts for information sharing while providing a platform for international visitors to extend their stay in Australia for leisure purposes, establishing strong connections that can lead to return visitation.

Traditionally, Tourism Australia has supported the business events industry with activities spanning brand and content marketing, events, educational visit programmes, trade engagement opportunities and media programmes. While there have always been many ways the Australian industry can work with Tourism Australia, in 2018, the industry received another significant boost with the launch of the Business Events Bid Fund Program (BFP).

The BFP is designed to increase new international business events for Australia through the offer of financial support at the critical bidding stage. It is intended to deliver conversion in situations where Australia is bidding against international

competitors for the right to host a business event.

"The Bid Fund Program is doing incredibly well. It's been a game-changer for the Australian industry because it's really helped drive conversion and visitation, as intended. The world of business events is very competitive and if you take into consideration Australia's time, distance and cost barriers, we needed to provide an offer to make it easier to choose Australia," says Penny Lion, Executive General Manager, Events, Tourism Australia. "Guaranteeing funding support early in the destination selection process does just that."

**When is support offered?** The programme offers financial support at the bidding stage for international corporate incentive trips, exhibitions, association conferences and congresses, which goes towards covering costs associated with the delivery of an event within Australia.

Penny Lion says the fund has been vital in attracting long-term business out of the U.S., U.K. and the rest of Europe, particularly in the association space.

She explains the money can be used to contribute towards expenditures, like booking convention centres and hotels, lowering the cost base of events and freeing up international clients and delegates to invest in

travel, which has commonly been a deterrent for prospective business, due to Australia's distance from key markets.

To qualify for the fund, events must have a minimum of 400 delegates for association events and 700 guests for incentive events.

"We've done a lot of homework on this, and we think our criteria are reasonable asks. Each region around Australia has different objectives and offerings when they are bidding for an international business event. We've taken all of that into consideration and know from the results to date, that the BFP provides a good return on investment across the nation.

"The Australian business events sector has been extremely engaged with the fund since its launch. For me, it is gratifying to see industry convert more business for Australia. It's been especially effective in regions where that extra nudge of support from the bid fund helps them secure business that previously may have been just out of their reach."

### Key to increasing global ranking

The Association of Australian Convention Bureaux (AACB) Chief Executive Officer, Andrew Hiebl said the events industry must use the fund to help reverse Australia's recent decline in global ranking and market share, having dropped out of the top



## “It’s been a game-changer”

ten in the *International Congress and Convention Association’s* (ICCA) annual country rankings.

“Like many other countries, Australia has been calling out for a national bid fund for many years. It’s a powerful tool to have when we’re collaborating to pitch for a piece of business. The entire Australian industry applauded it,” says Andrew Hiebl.

“What’s great is that the fund is accessible nationwide and with convention centres in every one of our capital cities, our hotel infrastructure developing, and access to Australia now boasting direct flights from London and easy access from Asia, the Bid Fund Program is that extra ingredient that can help confirm an event. It’s the icing on the cake,” says Andrew Hiebl.

**How does it work?** All applications must be for future events and support through the bid fund is determined through a strategic assessment process.

The mandatory criteria against which submissions are assessed ensure the fund supports events which align with the Australian Government’s Trade and Investment Priority Sectors and Tourism Australia’s

business events strategy. Criteria also preference support for bids which have the potential to attract large numbers of international visitors to Australia and which are likely to deliver significant economic value to Australia.

“For association events, Australia has another significant advantage. With many international associations looking to expand their delegate base from across Asia, our proximity to Asia means Australia is an appealing destination to tap into that growing region and all it offers. The Bid Fund Program makes the business case for choosing Australia even more compelling, particularly for northern hemisphere decision makers who want to leverage our proximity to Asia,” says Penny Lion.

The Bid Fund has seen significant return on investment in its first 18 months and Penny Lion points out that it is Australia’s holistic offering which is behind the success of the fund.

“The Bid Fund is the perfect complement to our existing strategic, considered and collaborative approach which includes our marketing and distribution activities and our key partnerships. And, of course, all of this is also ultimately underpinned

by the Australian industry’s ability to deliver exceptional, creative, objective-achieving event experiences time and again,” says Penny Lion.

*Penny Lion joined Tourism Australia in 2010 as Head of Business Events and became Executive General Manager, Events, in August 2016. Her experience in the events sector encompasses strategy, marketing, sales, operations, and stakeholder management and spans more than 20 years working on trade, consumer and corporate events.*

*Andrew Hiebl managed convention bureaux in the regional destinations of Albury Wodonga and the Great Ocean Road, as well as chairing Business Events Victoria for three years. After securing “Hall of Fame” status for Business Events Geelong at the national Meetings & Events Industry Awards in 2012, Andrew took on the role of CEO for the Association of Australian Convention Bureaux (AACB) and an associated board position with the Business Events Council of Australia.*

# BIG LANDSCAPES INSPIRE BIG THINKING



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Juliet Alabaster, General Manager of Business and Major Events, Brisbane Marketing PHOTO: Brisbane Marketing

## Brisbane's Perfect Climate FOR BUSINESS EVENTS

**BRISBANE**, Australia's third-largest capital city, has experienced a huge influx of new tourism infrastructure, including hotel supply, with more to come in the way of a second airport runway and international cruise ship terminal opening this year.

Brisbane Marketing is Brisbane's economic development board and houses the city's convention bureau. Backed by Brisbane City Council, Brisbane Marketing's mission is to identify and deliver the highest impact economic growth initiatives that will create employment opportunities and raise the living standards for the people of Brisbane.

Brisbane Marketing's focus is to ensure the right strategies are in place to leverage this growth and build the city's profile as a leading destination for business events.

"Financial year 2018–2019 was a record year for Brisbane Marketing in the economic value of business event bids secured with partners, including

the Brisbane Convention & Exhibition Centre," says Juliet Alabaster, General Manager of Business and Major Events at Brisbane Marketing.

"Over the same period, our city hosted more than 940 business events worth \$351 million in economic value. This generated almost 580,000 delegate days, a 44 per cent increase in delegate days year-on-year. We're focused on keeping this momentum by building upon our strategies to attract conferences and by raising our profile in the incentive space.

"Since hosting Tourism Australia's international incentive showcase Dreamtime in late 2017, we've ramped up our incentive offering and see this as a significant opportunity to create economic impact for Brisbane.

"In 2019, we welcomed our largest ever incentive groups from China, and in July this year will welcome 4,500 travel industry representatives for Flight Centre Travel Group's

“Brisbane has twice been named Australia’s Most Sustainable City”

Global Gathering incentive event. We anticipate securing more incentive business as we continue to promote Brisbane as a place that offers the best of Australia in one perfect location.”

Brisbane, which has twice been named Australia’s Most Sustainable City (2014 & 2016), became the 50th city to join the *Global Destination Sustainability Index* (GDS-Index) in 2019 and ranked within the top 25.

Brisbane Marketing sees the GDS Index as an important step in growing its reputation as a destination serious about its sustainability offering and about reaching its goal of earning a Top 50 *International Congress and Convention Association* (ICCA) ranking for hosting association meetings.

Many of Brisbane’s venues are active in sustainability, including the globally acclaimed Brisbane Convention & Exhibition Centre, which has won numerous awards for its approach to sustainability and waste reduction. The Centre’s Environmental and Sustainability Policy is backed by its Earthcheck Gold Standard Certification and commitments to recycling, achieving a positive social impact and minimising energy, waste and water consumption. An example is its organic waste dehydrator which reduces 200 kg of food waste by

85 per cent to produce a dry, nutrient-rich biomass which is used in the city’s parklands.

“Sustainability is critical to Brisbane’s global reputation, and the city’s environmental performance is backed by Brisbane City Council’s *Brisbane. Clean, Green, Sustainable 2017–2031 vision*,” says Juliet Alabaster.

Brisbane City Council is Australia’s largest carbon neutral organisation and was the first Australian city to release a Clean Air Strategy.

“Our city is also the most biodiverse city in Australia, with 35 per cent natural habitat cover, on track to grow this to 40 per cent by 2031. We are also a clean and green city, with almost 2,100 parks.”

Brisbane boasts a mix of global headquartered companies, home-grown businesses, and internationally recognised knowledge precincts and research centres.

“Brisbane’s businesses, knowledge precincts, research institutions and universities have a clear role in developing our businesses events sector because we are more successful in attracting conferences when we can demonstrate local expertise.”

“Our city is home to some of the world’s most talented people and

ground-breaking research, so it makes sense to drive collaborations across institutions and industry sectors to build our business events industry, develop our knowledge economy and raise Brisbane’s profile internationally.”

An example of this is the Lord Mayor’s Convention Trailblazer Grant, which Brisbane Marketing launched in 2017. The initiative supports early career researchers and industry representatives to attend an international association conference in their field. In return, the Trailblazers work with Brisbane Marketing to bid for Brisbane to host the conference in a succeeding year.

“We recently announced the third round of Trailblazer Grant recipients and are now working with seven more inspiring researchers and professionals to attract more leading conferences to Brisbane.”

“Conference bids won through the initiative include the *International Peptide Symposium 2021*, which was secured with 2018 recipients Dr Christina Schroeder and Dr Johan Rosengren of the University of Queensland. To be held at the Brisbane Convention & Exhibition Centre, this symposium will deliver an economic impact of \$2 million

“Our reputation for innovation doesn’t go unnoticed by conference organisers”

and attract over 800 experts from the United Kingdom, Europe, America, Asia and Australia to Brisbane for the first time.

“We also worked with the Clinical Director of pediatric hearing and healthcare not-for-profit, Hear and Say, Emma Rushbrooke, to secure the *AG Bell Global Listening and Spoken Language Symposium* for Brisbane in 2021.”

Brisbane’s focus on digital innovation also plays a role in securing business events. In 2012, Brisbane was the first Australian city and the second city in the world to appoint a Chief Digital Officer. The Digital Brisbane Strategy was then launched in 2013 to speed up the pace of change in Brisbane.

The start-up community has grown significantly, and Brisbane is now Australia’s second-largest city for start-up founders.

“Brisbane’s reputation for innovation doesn’t go unnoticed by conference organisers,” says Juliet Alabaster.

In late 2019, Brisbane hosted SIGGRAPH Asia, the region’s largest computer graphics conference and exhibition. The event saw the world’s top technical and creative talent come together for four days

of discussions and demonstrations on emerging computer graphics and interactive techniques.

“This year, we hosted the second annual *QODE Brisbane*, where entrepreneurs, investors, business executives, government, researchers and start-ups from across the world gathered to explore technology and innovation trends.”

Bursting with positivity, confidence, a sustainable outlook and an appetite for innovation, Brisbane is clearly a business events destination to watch in 2020 and beyond.

*Juliet Alabaster is General Manager of Business and Major Events with Brisbane’s economic development board, Brisbane Marketing. In this role, she leads a team generating long-term economic growth for Brisbane through the attraction and support of meetings, conferences and incentives, as well as major events including sporting blockbusters, cultural performances and exhibitions.*

*Growing up in the tourism industry, Juliet Alabaster went on to build a career in business events, developing a vast working knowledge of all aspects of event bidding, business development, services and promotion.*

*Working with Brisbane Marketing for over ten years, she has been instrumental in raising Brisbane’s profile as a world-class destination to visit, meet and do business. Juliet Alabaster has a Bachelor of Laws and a Bachelor of Business (Management) from The University of Queensland.*





Lyn Lewis-Smith, Chief Executive Officer, Business Events Sydney PHOTO Narrative Post

# The Future of BUSINESS EVENTS LEADERSHIP

**FROM THE GET-GO**, Business Events Sydney is different to its convention bureau peers around the world.

It describes itself as a specialist bidding services organisation responsible for attracting global meetings to Sydney. A local expert with remarkable connections, the organisation is working to grow Sydney's (and consequently, Australia's) international reputation as one of the world's most memorable hosts.

Financially supported and backed by the New South Wales State Government, the services offered by Business Events Sydney are free and unbiased as a not-for-profit company with a focus on value creation. Their global team partners with clients to win a range of global meetings.

"To bring global meetings to Australia, we have talented people located in Asia, Europe and the Americas, as well as our head office here in Sydney. We hail from ten nationalities and speak 19 languages. Moreover, with our vast experience across a range of industry sectors, we can quickly get to the bottom of a client's needs, and open their eyes to the unique ways Sydney can make their next meeting unforgettable. Our work is built on diversity and driven by purpose and passion," says Lyn

Lewis-Smith, Chief Executive Officer, Business Events Sydney.

"This independent global perspective puts us in an outstanding position as an industry. We have an opportunity to shape our cities. I think for far too long, our industry has focused on the room nights (many still do), placing their value on tourism supply chain growth and not thinking carefully enough about each meeting and the way it might be able to shape our cities. When I talk with people outside our industry, they are astounded by the impact we have on Sydney.

"Your organisation needs to be engaged in the thought leadership of your city. A couple of my board positions help me shape what we do here in terms of contributing to the future of our city. I'm involved in a thought leadership think tank called the Committee for Sydney, and the advisory board at the University of Technology Sydney Business School.

"If we go back six years, when we had the opportunity to reshape Darling Harbor in Sydney, the NSW Government was developing this amazing new harbourside financial services district, and the State's Premier at the time said, 'We want to be the financial services destination in the Asia Pacific'. Taking that lead, I said, 'Well,

what is the biggest financial services event in the world where we can have that vision realised and bring people here to showcase what we are doing?' That was *SIBOS*.

"We hosted *SIBOS* in 2018. Winning and hosting *SIBOS* was a remarkable way to showcase our state-of-the-art new International Convention Centre Sydney (ICC Sydney) to the world's financial services sector. Additionally, securing that major anchor event was the catalyst for us to attract a raft of other sectors and professions who put their faith in us, the government and the partnership building that new centre, by showing that we could deliver," says Lyn Lewis-Smith.

"With an eye on the future, there is so much development going on in Sydney right now. We have a new airport being built from the ground up by 2026, and a whole new smart city being developed around it. This is one of three new precincts the NSW Government is developing in Sydney to drive future growth in the industry sectors and research fields our country excels in.

"We look at how our work can contribute. What are the best conferences in the world around logistics and infrastructure? What about waste

**“Our politicians have been listening.  
There is an opportunity for growth”**

and water technology, urban design, architecture? It’s also an agriculture area with lots of global research leadership, so we look at the top conferences in that space – anything that can help our city reach its global potential as it grows.

Careful consideration is being made as the architecture of this new city develops, with a real focus on medical sciences, med-tech and the likes of defence, tourism, agritech and education.

“To do all that, think of everything involved in building a city, we need people. We have got universities looking at a STEM Institute in a decentralised model,” says Lyn Lewis-Smith.

“All of these new precincts, industry and academia need talent, the world’s best, to help us grow our city. Again, the global meetings that Business Events Sydney attracts bring talent to Australia.

“As well as our own team of experts, we also reach out to our ambassador network – such an incredible soft power asset for our business. They are incredibly important in selling the business and innovation story to the world and helping us secure a broad range of meetings in their world. They help us

create a real business brand presence for Australia.

“People outside our industry are so surprised at how future-focused we are. It’s normal for us to be pitching for events and making sure we’re getting an understanding of what the delegates’ experience will look like in the five, ten, fifteen years ahead. It is an interesting concept to sell to governments and corporates sometimes.

“We don’t lose sight of our tourism roots though. With our tourism partners and city leaders, we look at the customer journey from the airport to the hotel and the event venues. We look at the cultural institutions. We question if there is more that can be done to ensure the tourism experience is the best in the world.

“Then there are cultural considerations. Our APAC location is a key factor in attracting events on rotation. Asia is a huge market for Australia with 1.4 million visitors from China each year alone. Sydney, as a major gateway to Australia, has to be ready for future growth from that market, and the other diverse cultures across Asia that are right on Australia’s doorstep.”

“Our politicians have been listening. There is an opportunity for

growth given the agenda I’ve just mapped out, and we work hard to make sure that we keep bringing results, and sharing them at every opportunity,” says Lyn Lewis-Smith.

“We are so lucky that our state tourism minister also has the portfolios of jobs, investment and Sydney’s new city, so we can discuss our contribution across all of his portfolios – it’s a much broader conversation. Some in government see our role clearly as a cog in the engine room of the state economy. But for others, it’s much harder to see how they can leverage business meetings for their portfolios. They’re not dissimilar to our clients. We look at their needs in developing our pitch, and we adjust our messaging for government in exactly the same way. It is about changing the language.

“Since we began our research collaboration with the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) ten years ago, looking into the ‘beyond tourism’ benefits of business events, it is much easier conversation for me to have and introduce meaning to our government stakeholders. We can now talk in their language.

“All that said, my whole organisation knows the importance and value

of the tourism supply chain. We have such strong expertise in Sydney and a great range of products and experiences. We have a very strong sustainability agenda with the local city government driving a major agenda there, showing real leadership for several years now.

“We evolved significantly a few years ago to step away from being the traditional Destination Marketing Organisation and into the realms of a professional services culture. We did a lot of work in scoping the cultures of organisations we wanted to operate like – Deloitte, KPMG, Social Ventures Australia to name a few. We needed to get the balance between the private sector, the not-for-profit sector and the government sector right. We changed structure, capability and competencies, and we have slowly recruited accordingly. We have a really high performing team and the best systems in place to support them.”

“The next challenge involves us meeting the goals of our three-year plan in both customer-centric focus and digital-first focus. Internally, we’ve got the systems up and running, but externally, for our customers, we want to develop tools that are really

going to create and add value for them.

“That piece of work saw me travel to Silicon Valley to learn how start-ups approach their funding, innovation, growth and partnerships and how we might take the lead on new technology that’s going to add value to the business event client.”

“Change is constant in every industry now. People and partnerships, and business and service innovation are the keys to leading on the wave, not letting it wash over you,” says Lyn Lewis-Smith.

*Lyn Lewis-Smith is the Chief Executive Officer of Business Events Sydney, the organisation tasked with securing international business events for Sydney to deliver economic, strategic and social benefits for Australia and global communities.*





Geoff Donaghy, CEO, International Convention Centre Sydney (ICC Sydney) PHOTO: Michael Amendolia

## ICC Sydney IS AT THE HEART OF INNOVATION

**IN DECEMBER** 2016, International Convention Centre Sydney (ICC Sydney) opened its doors as Australia's first fully integrated harbourside convention, exhibition and entertainment venue. It distinguished itself with its spectacular location in one of the most cosmopolitan cities in the world, striking purpose-built design, state-of-the-art technology, industry-leading culinary philosophy, and array of flexible features, designed to respond to future demands of the meetings industry, and it has achieved exactly that.

In 2019, ICC Sydney hosted corporate, association and trade events that saw over 1.34 million attendees pass through its doors attending the likes of *Pacific 2019*, *Robocup 2019* and *Million Dollar Round Table 2019* (MDRT), with these large scale events all choosing the venue's world class facilities and stunning location to attract delegates from around the world.

*Pacific 2019* broke records in every major metric in the event's 20-year history with a 27 per cent increase in delegate attendance and 20 per cent increase in exhibitor attendance. 182 delegations from 48 nations enjoyed 48 major conferences, symposia and

forums all housed under the roof of the venue. Bringing together international government, defence and academics to explore maritime issues and technology, the event welcomed 21,241 delegates over three days.

Due to the size of the event, ICC Sydney bolstered customer service support by 50 per cent, with extra staff brought on board to meet the daily requirements of the tailored event.

To accommodate the high-ranking officials, the detail put into bespoke menus and culinary options matched that of the security detail with 30 guards and police operating sweeps within the advanced, purpose-built security of the convention centre.

"I commend the team that worked on the highly successful International Maritime Exposition. Without exception, every staff member was wonderful. With their professionalism, work ethic and can-do attitude, we ended our show with accolades from the Chief of Navy that have never been received before," says Jane Blackett, Head of Event Production, ADMA.

The team members are well versed in delivering tailored requirements for association and exhibition events. The international exhibition of *Robocup 2019* included a robotic soccer

tournament to promote robotics and AI research. The tournament saw over 2,000 participants and more than 300 teams compete in the international automated game.

"ICC Sydney's infrastructure and capabilities allowed us to bring this event to Sydney for the very first time, placing our local talent and knowledge on the global stage," says Professor Claude Sammut, Robocup Chair.

Geoff Donaghy, CEO of ICC Sydney: "Exhibitions are an equally important business segment for us and we've got a number of major repeat events returning to us annually. *The Sydney International Boat Show*, which uses all of our exhibition space, open-air event deck and builds a major temporary jetty facility in the adjacent Cockle Bay area to display yachts and super boats, has been hosted at ICC Sydney for the past three consecutive years."

The convention centre was designed to host a broad range of market segments, from national and international conventions to trade and consumer events, as well as important local events like gala dinners and sales meetings. The venue is also the major downtown

entertainment venue for the city, which sees them deliver live concerts, musicals and comedy shows.

ICC Sydney’s third year of operation saw events it hosted deliver significant impact for the economy of New South Wales. According to figures released for 2018/2019, delegates attending the venue generated \$896 million in direct expenditure for the state. International and interstate

STEM students and budding artists from years nine to twelve from across the state,” says Geoff Donaghy.

“It’s a given that success will attract competition and our industry is immensely competitive, across the globe.

“The most important priority for our team is to maintain the highest possible standards at the highest possible level of consistency, ensur-

the venue’s ability to connect the city’s knowledge hubs and attract global thought leaders to the nation’s cultural and economic capital will deliver powerful, long-term benefits.

“Innovation is key to Sydney’s future prosperity and ImagineSydney: Create is focused on recognising and exploring growth opportunities for the decade ahead. Large, established organisations such as ICC Sydney, which use the power of connections to facilitate fresh ideas, are essential to realising our city’s social and economic potential. The convention centre will be central to attracting and driving conversations, research, investment and partnerships across sectors.”

Geoff Donaghy says that the precinct is an important component of the New South Wales Government’s suite of infrastructure projects and, through its role as a centre of creativity, is set to generate \$5 billion in economic benefit to New South Wales over the next 25 years.

“As the \$1.5 billion centrepiece of the more extensive \$3.4 billion rejuvenation of Darling Harbour, the venue connects the city’s financial districts, media and creative, cultural and student hubs. The precinct is also purpose-built to provide the ultimate platform for the world’s leaders and thinkers to meet, collaborate and innovate.”

Geoff Donaghy says that ICC Sydney’s Feeding Your Performance (FYP) philosophy is also delivering a raft of socio-economic benefits across the state.

“The convention centre is driving business growth and economic development for regional communities by partnering with a network of local farmers. Our 2018/2019 results revealed we had invested \$12.2 million in direct food and beverage expenditure for regional New South

## “We ended our show with accolades from the Chief of Navy that have never been received before”

visitors helped generate 73 per cent (\$654 million) of the total spending. Furthermore, the venue’s operations and events delivered an economic contribution to New South Wales of \$902 million, generating 5,790 full-time equivalent jobs for the local economy and 1.77 million overnight stays.

ICC Sydney has a burgeoning reputation for the highest quality of operation and with both client and delegate satisfaction ratings at 99 per cent, they believe they offer very significant value for money.

“As a landmark venue in the city, we run a wide range of public events from children’s shows and exhibitions to those hosting international artists such as Kylie Minogue, Elton John and Seinfeld. We also support events for charities like the Variety Children’s Charity Annual Christmas Party and the Stand Tall event involving over 6,000 high school students. In 2019, we hosted the inaugural *VIVID School*, which we’re again hosting this year, bringing together

ing we’re constantly reviewing and refreshing what we offer to clients across all our market segments.”

Opening and establishing a world class venue does come with challenges. What pleases Geoff Donaghy most is watching the team come together and receive recognition for their extraordinary efforts across Australia and around the world. This is what he finds most gratifying as a CEO in the venue business.

A study from Deloitte Access Economics in 2017 examining Sydney’s innovation and growth potential highlighted ICC Sydney as an essential contributor to change in the city – actively strengthening its local knowledge economy.

Delivered in partnership with the Sydney Business Chamber and University of Technology Sydney (UTS), the ImagineSydney: Create report includes a case study on Australia’s premier convention, exhibition and entertainment precinct.

According to Deloitte Sydney Manager Partner, Dennis Krallis,

## “In 2018/2019, delegates attending ICC Sydney generated \$896 million in direct expenditure for the state”

Wales, representing 97 per cent and 92 per cent of our food and wine purchases. In fact, we are committed to procuring 100 per cent of our wine from New South Wales producers.

“Our approach to creating a sustainable, local food and beverage supply chain is an industry-first,” says Geoff Donaghy.

In addition to FYP, ICC Sydney is committed to cultivating a powerful legacy for the events it hosts. The venue’s Legacy Program and the five streams of Generation Next, Innovators and Entrepreneurs, First Australians, Sustainable Events and Creative Industries, provides clients and their delegates opportunities to connect with the local community. These include creating opportunities for young and emerging performers to take to the venue’s global stage, exhibiting artwork during events from First Nations artists and providing opportunities for local startups to pitch their ideas to delegates.

According to the Deloitte Access Economics research, if just ten per cent of the 138,000 ‘non-innovator businesses’ in Sydney made small incremental changes in best practice, process development, management methods and the like,

Sydney’s gross regional product could increase by \$25 billion.

“We proudly put innovation at the heart of our organisation and hope to be an inspiration for others, as we believe the benefits here are truly great. The future for Sydney is bright, and with ICC Sydney already delivering more than 1,500 events since it opened, we are proud to be fostering continued innovation in the heart of the city,” says Geoff Donaghy.

*Geoff Donaghy is CEO of the International Convention Centre Sydney (ICC Sydney); the ASM Global Group Director of Convention Centres for the Asia Pacific, India and the Middle East; the immediate past President of the Brussels-based International Association of Congress Centres; and a member of the executive committee of the Joint Meetings Industry Council. He served as Chairman of the Business Events Council of Australia for five years and has been awarded the Australia Centenary Medal by the Federal Government, the Australian industry’s Outstanding Contribution Award, and the Joint Meeting Industry Council’s Global Power and Profile Award.*





Peter King, Chief Executive, Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre PHOTO Nick Harrison

## A Year of Milestones FOR MELBOURNE CONVENTION AND EXHIBITION CENTRE

**LAST YEAR**, Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre (MCEC) celebrated the tenth anniversary of the Melbourne Convention Centre and one year since opening its new expansion space. MCEC Chief Executive, Peter King, says the expansion had been a great addition to the venue, increasing MCEC's economic impact.

"In 2018–2019, we contributed more than \$1.1 billion in economic impact to the state of Victoria. The expansion has exceeded all expectations as it provides such exciting flexible options for our customers to consider. Our golden expansion has already become an iconic addition to the Melbourne skyline. On the back of the expanded space we have grown our revenues by 40 per cent in just over two years," says Peter King.

Since the official opening in July 2018, MCEC's expansion has hosted over 300 events including a diverse range of meetings, conferences and exhibitions. The Melbourne Convention Centre was officially opened on 5 June 2009 by former Premier of Victoria, the Hon. John Brumby AO,

who now presides as Chairman of the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Trust (MCET).

Since opening, the Melbourne Convention Centre has become an iconic Melbourne events destination, hosting over 7,000 events and welcoming millions of visitors through its doors.

"We're a government authority, so partnering with the State Government is essential to us. There are growth limitations for our physical site, given that we are positioned between a freeway and the Yarra River, so we have completed our major infrastructure work for the near future. However, there's an enormous amount of work we can do within the building to sweat the asset harder including better utilisation, increased flexibility and finding new ways to use the spaces we have. We continue to partner closely with our customers to find new ways we can work together."

"We've had an excellent year financially and we're putting together a strategy for the future. We are

“The expansion has exceeded all expectations”

focusing on our impact from an economic perspective, but also importantly, at a legacy and community level. We are evolving our business by being smarter and embracing all things digital in the way we work, engage and communicate. The other challenge we are dealing with is the conversation around the future of events. Our people have the keys to the future and by nurturing their innovation, we will unleash their potential to help us navigate our way forward over the next few years.”

A couple of recent and significant recruitments in the business reflect the tone of the organisational plans in data, insights and sustainability.

“As most industries, we now make our core decisions and identify new business opportunities through the use of data and analytics. We have dedicated business insights employees who help manage our strategies. We have invested in greater capability in our marketing and communications team to provide a more sophisticated and mature approach to driving sales initiatives. Our teams work closely together and this is building a pipeline of business that we have not seen before. As CEO, it gives me comfort that we have a very solid

platform for continued growth well into the future.”

With sustainability being another focus, MCEC recently hired a dedicated sustainability manager, Samantha Ferrier.

“We needed someone who wakes up focused every day on sustainability. We have initiated many ‘green’ projects and work practices over the years, including things like the Melbourne Renewable Energy Project, which is a partnership approach to energy procurement. Until now, our employees have driven most of this change in isolated groups. Now, we are finding our customers want to partner with us to help them be more sustainable in their work practices. Sam is our dedicated resource who will not only amplify what we are already doing but will set up a strategy that will lead the industry in this area. Our employees and our customers are demanding it.”

“It’s important to acknowledge it has been a challenging start to the year and those of us in the business events industry have undeniably been affected. Despite the challenges, it has also been heartening to see how the industry has responded and rallied together during this time. At times

like this, it is important we stand together as a community to support the event and visitor economy.”

“International and domestic visitation is an enormous industry and employs many thousands of Australians. Our industry is an economic powerhouse of which we should be very proud. In times of difficulty and challenge, we can solve the problems of the world if we can communicate, learn and transfer knowledge. These are interesting times but the fact we can work together so effectively gives me great reasons for optimism.”

*Peter King is the Chief Executive at Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre (MCEC) and Deputy Chairman on the Board of Melbourne Convention Bureau (MCB). He sits on the Global Board of the International Association of Convention Centres (AIPC) and is on the Committee of the MCC (Melbourne Cricket Club) which operates the MCG (Melbourne Cricket Ground).*

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Simon Burgess, General Manager at Adelaide Convention Centre PHOTO: Simon Casson/Adelaide Convention Centre

## Destination Innovation ADELAIDE TRANSFORMED

**ADELAIDE**, Australia's Convention City, has undergone a period of significant growth and development, which has further enhanced the city's business events landscape and destination appeal for meeting and event planners. This transformation has included not only a multi-million-dollar expansion of the Adelaide Convention Centre (ACC) but also a significant investment in the city's Riverbank Precinct, including the development of an 'Innovation Corridor' stretching from BioMed City in the city's west through to the Lot Fourteen innovation neighbourhood in the east.

In 2010, the team at the ACC participated in the Convention 2020 study, focused on forecasting trends and the needs of delegates in the future. Major themes arising from the survey highlighted client demand for innovation, the importance of flexibility and functionality in terms of meeting spaces, and the growing role of technology.

The ACC addressed these themes in the planning and subsequent construction of its two-phase \$397 million redevelopment, which was completed in 2017 and saw the centre emerge one of the world's most modern, flexible and technologically

advanced meetings and events venues.

While the ACC is indeed impressive and acts as the anchor point for Adelaide's business events industry, the theme of 'innovation' extends beyond its walls to the city at large. Additional activity and development in the Central Business District (CBD) are actively helping position Adelaide as a 'City of Innovation' and in turn, helping capture the attention of associations and business event planners.

"Adelaide is very much a city in transformation; the South Australian government has injected serious energy and investment into reinventing the State economy and establishing the city's future vision," says Simon Burgess, General Manager, Adelaide Convention Centre.

"This investment, including new industry and infrastructure, is all contributing to Adelaide's growing destination appeal for the business events industry in particular."

Adelaide was once a city known for traditional manufacturing. The closure of the Mitsubishi factory in 2008 provided a catalyst for change, with the city moving its focus to advanced manufacturing and innovation.

You only need to look at the ACC's immediate surroundings on the

Adelaide Riverbank for evidence of the transformation. For those unfamiliar with the South Australian capital, the Adelaide Riverbank is a place where the city's entertainment, sporting, cultural, education, medical and conferencing zones merge, making it Australia's best-connected business events district. Tracing the Riverbank also lies the city's newly established 'Innovation Corridor'. The convention centre proudly sits at the core of this new zone.

Bordering the 'Innovation Corridor' to the west lies the \$3.1 billion BioMed City, one of the largest health and life science precincts in the Southern Hemisphere. It comprises the new Royal Adelaide Hospital and the South Australian Health & Medical Research Institute (SAHMRI), along with the University of Adelaide's Health and Medical Sciences facility and the University of South Australia's Cancer Research Institute.

The precinct is set to further expand with the addition of SAHMRI 2, which will be home to the Australian Bragg Centre for Proton Therapy and Research, the Southern Hemisphere's first proton therapy unit. SAHMRI 2 is earmarked for completion in 2023.

"If we could choose our neighbours, BioMed City would have been

at the top of our list, particularly for a venue like ours where medical and health-related conferences account for more than one third of our business,” says Simon Burgess.

“Our positioning right next door to BioMed City has undoubtedly helped bolster Adelaide’s reputation as a leading and innovative medical conference capital. It makes for a unique proposition for conference organisers, providing valuable support in everything from access to

also helped his team focus their research efforts on the key themes of the precinct, and hence provide natural synergies and added value for associations and conference clients. SAHMRI has five key research themes: Precision Medicine; Lifelong Health; Aboriginal Health Equity; SAHMRI Women and Kids; and SAHMRI Impact.

“We’re always on the lookout for opportunities that connect with these themes. We even teamed up

exciting opportunities for knowledge transfer. Beyond these, the Lot Fourteen precinct is also home to the Australian Institute of Machine Learning and Australian Cyber Collaboration Centre, as well as the MIT big data Living Lab, which is committed to driving further innovation by crunching massive amounts of data. Bringing together students, researchers and commercial interests to develop popular products, Adelaide’s MIT Living Lab is one of only four in the world. The others are located in New York, Beijing and Istanbul.

“From a conferencing perspective, the establishment of Lot Fourteen further reinforces South Australia’s strengths in the fields of technology, innovation and discovery,” says Simon Burgess.

In addition to BioMed City and Lot Fourteen, Adelaide is also home to the Tonsley innovation neighbourhood, which occupies the site of the former Mitsubishi factory. Located just 10 km from the CBD, it is another example of where academic research meets corporate reality to deliver practical outcomes. Dedicated to hi-tech manufacturing and R&D, Tonsley’s focus sectors reflect the State’s major economic strengths and opportunities, including health, medical devices and assistive technologies; cleantech and renewable energy; software and simulation; and mining and energy services.

There is, however, lots more to Adelaide than these innovation hubs. Further development in the city centre, including new hotel infrastructure and airport expansion, is helping further broaden the South Australian capital’s appeal.

These include the \$330 million casino expansion (2020), complete with a new 123-room luxury hotel and spa; along with the \$165 million Adelaide Airport development

## “Adelaide is very much a city in transformation”

delegates and speakers to the ability to facilitate tours of world-leading facilities.

“BioMed City provides conferences coming to Adelaide with a ready supply of speakers and delegates, with more than 2,000 researchers and thousands of academics, staff and clinicians on our doorstep. SAHMRI is a definite drawcard, having successfully attracted many leading experts from around the world. This coupled with the next wave of medical professionals in the University of Adelaide’s Health & Medical Sciences Building and the University of South Australia’s Cancer Research Institute, provide a multitude of opportunities for knowledge transfer. Our close proximity to BioMed City also makes it easy for conference organisers to include precinct tours in their programmes as an experiential element, with zero need for transportation.”

Simon Burgess goes on to add that BioMed City’s positioning next door to the convention centre has

with leading nutritional experts at SAHMRI to develop our Honest Goodness menu, which is focused on mindful eating, and has an emphasis on minimal intervention foods and the conscious reduction of processed elements.”

A short stroll east of the convention centre is Lot Fourteen, Australia’s first “creation and innovation neighbourhood,” which is dedicated to showcasing some of the world’s fastest-growing industries, including artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, robotics, defence and space technologies, media and creative industries. The precinct is spearheaded by the Australian Space Agency which is a lasting legacy from the *2017 International Astronautical Congress* which was held at the Adelaide Convention Centre. The Space Agency officially opened in February 2020 and will be joined by a new Mission Control and Space Discovery Centre in 2021, further bolstering the city’s strengths in space and defence and providing

## “BioMed City provides conferences coming to Adelaide with a ready supply of speakers and delegates”

(2021), which is focused on expanding the airport’s international terminal. There is also a string of new hotels in the pipeline, including the five-star Westin and Sofitel brands. In total, the city has more than 2,000 hotel rooms in development.

“With so much change and infrastructure development in our city, it is an exciting time in Adelaide. The enviable cooperation between research and educational institutions, industry and government will help further reinvent our State and city over the next decade, providing even more reasons why people should revisit Adelaide,” says Simon Burgess.

*Simon Burgess is the General Manager at Adelaide Convention Centre (ACC) and has been instrumental in increasing levels of business to match the new capacity of ACC following its \$397 million development. Over the years, he has held a range of senior management roles in hotels, destination marketing and tour operation across Australia, North America, Europe, Asia and the Caribbean.*

### Knowledge sectors at a glance

**Key South Australian Industries** In addition to an intense focus on the medical industry, Adelaide, South Australia enjoys a strong reputation for innovation and discovery and excels in the fields of technology, education, agriculture and defence.

**Technology & Innovation** Adelaide’s strong reputation for innovation and discovery makes it an engaging and relevant destination for the sharing of knowledge, best practice and resources when it comes to technology and innovation.

**Education** South Australia prides itself on being Australia’s ‘Knowledge State’; home to three world-class public universities, international education remains the State’s largest service export with students from 125 countries coming to study in Adelaide each year.

**Agriculture** Agriculture is a key economic priority for South Australia, employing one in five local residents. Benefitting from a clean, green, environment, the State enjoys a global reputation for food and beverage production, as well as for its strengths in food safety, biosecurity, freight, cold chain logistics and more.

**Defence** Adelaide is widely recognised as Australia’s defence centre and is the headquarters for much of the country’s defence industry research, development and investment. Illustrating the State’s active participation in this field, South Australia is home to the Future Submarines Project, along with the Australian Space Agency.





Associate Professors Carmel Foley (left) and Deborah Edwards (right), University of Technology Sydney PHOTO Ari Soenarso

## Business Events MUST COUNT MORE THAN COFFEE CUPS

A **THREE-YEAR** international study into the long-term benefits of business events has underlined a mismatch between the way governments value the sector and the much broader outcomes, proving the benefits of events beyond that of tourism follow the same patterns across global borders.

In the Business Events Legacies: Joint Meetings Industry Council (JMIC) Case Study Project Report, Associate Professors Carmel Foley and Deborah Edwards at the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) say that business events have long been judged under the narrow assumption that their legacies are best measured in terms of hotel rooms and coffee cups. Governments, in particular, have focused mainly on what is commonly known as the tourism contribution.

However, in their most recent study, the two UTS Business School researchers – involving a panel of international academic experts and nine case studies drawn from

four continents – found that measuring conferences this way not only seriously underestimated and undermined the rich legacies of such events, but that this problem is replicated around the world.

“Organisers, venues and government bureaux have focused their energies and resources for far too long on maximising the tourist dollars generated by business events,” says Associate Professor Deborah Edwards.

“This ignores the significant scientific and research value on offer; value that directly drives economic development, creativity and innovation. Our research also shows that these benefits have a multiplying effect.”

Conducted on behalf of the JMIC, a global council of associations representing the business events industry worldwide, the study highlights the broader contributions that conferences, congresses, trade shows, convention centres and bureaux deliver to destinations, communities, industries and economies.

**“We believe that governments need to demand reporting beyond the tourism benefits”**

The researchers found that the global business event industry is supporting broader agendas by building knowledge economies, encouraging industry innovation and enhancing community wellbeing.

“The study formally documents that these events are all about economic, academic, professional and community enhancement outcomes, and how a strategic approach to hosting such events can play a broad and important role in advancing the development prospects of destinations around the world. As a result, destinations and the governments that represent them need to rethink their engagement with the industry and how they can best use and invest in it to the overall benefit of their respective communities,” says JMIC President Kai Hattendorf.

Associate Professor Carmel Foley notes that governments typically locate business events in their tourism portfolios.

“Few people would dispute the high value of business event visitors to host destinations, but many political leaders and a large section of the business events industry itself are still in the dark in respect to what can be leveraged from conferences and congresses to support their trade and

innovation agendas. The study was the first coordinated global effort to measure and document these benefits in ways that can be used to lobby governments and communities about the vital role played by business events.”

While finding mostly positive effects from business events, the report also identifies barriers to achieving lasting legacies, such as organisers neglecting to set long-term objectives or look beyond internal organisational goals.

In response, the researchers have developed six ‘golden rules’ for business events gleaned from best practice among the global case studies, which covered scientific conferences, industry congresses and focused gatherings for specific groups such as the tech sector.

These include, as first steps, involving stakeholders such as governments and business in setting legacy objectives, based on agreed industry problems, issues and opportunities.

Overall, the report recommends more significant investment in improved measurement, evaluation and formal reporting of the longer-term contributions of business events beyond the tourism spend, particularly to government stakeholders.

So, what is the next step in developing the global business events industry?

“Previously, we focused on longtail conference benefits which are challenging to evaluate due to the timeframes involved. Now, we’re turning our attention to analysing the JMIC project case studies more closely.

“If we’re going to make a significant change in this industry, which we all know is required, we believe that governments need to demand reporting beyond the tourism benefits,” says Deborah Edwards. “How that comes about depends on our discussions with people and the Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage Program. The ARC is a federal funding body that funds research of strategic importance to Australia. We’ve been working with them for some time now. Together with ARC we are working on new ways to meet government reporting requirements, and to include things beyond just the tourism dollars generated. We could work on a source of templates. The research would only be conducted in Australia as that’s its only focus. While the events and meetings industry is firmly lodged in the tourism trade just about everywhere, we feel it should also be involved in

**“Business events have long been judged under the narrow assumption that their legacies are best measured in terms of hotel rooms and coffee cups”**

trade and the innovation and scientific sectors. The business events industry should be included in this program.

“One of the things we have seen in our work with Business Events Sydney is the impact of business events. Business Events Sydney CEO, Lyn Lewis-Smith is such a leader in this area. She’s done amazing work with the government to increase awareness of the full value of meetings and how governments can leverage them for their innovation agendas, like attracting conferences focused on key industry sectors. This is a continual process as governments and ministers change so we have to get business events outputs into the government’s system with a requirement for the industry to report on them. That will ensure a more long-term understanding of the value of conferences and how governments should be leveraging them to upgrade economies and communities. We think this is such an important step that we’ve made it an integral part of our new work.

“Another next step is completing the work on evaluation and understanding the sheer scope of the impacts. With the range of contributions made by the meetings industry,

we don’t think the job is finished quite yet.

“It’s essential that the work continues. It’s time to start leveraging what the industry and all the roles within it can do.”

*Associate Professor Deborah Edwards and Associate Professor Carmel Foley, from the University of Technology Sydney, in partnership with Business Events Sydney, co-authored The Power of Conferences, published in 2017, exploring the long-term impacts of conferences through the stories of ten prominent Australians. They have since collaborated with the Joint Meetings Industry Council (JMIC) on the Event Case Study Program, an international project aiming to transform how the value of the global business events industry is measured.*



## Brisbane Wins Bid TO HOST THE 2021 INTERNATIONAL PEPTIDE SYMPOSIUM

**DR JOHAN ROSENGREN** is an Associate Professor at the School of Biomedical Sciences, University of Queensland. His position is research-focused, and he works primarily on bioactive peptides. These naturally-occurring substances have evolved for specific functions, and they have been used in both biotechnological and pharmaceutical applications. His laboratory isolates and characterises novel substances, and through molecular design aims to develop them for innovative purposes.

Dr Johan Rosengren completed his PhD, which focused on structure-activity relationships of antimicrobial peptides, under the supervision of Professor David Craik at the Institute for Molecular Bioscience, University of Queensland, in 2003. After two years of post-doctoral work at IMB, he moved to Sweden in 2005 to take up a position as Assistant Professor at Linnaeus University, Kalmar. During 2008–2009 he held a joint appointment between Linnaeus University and Uppsala University. In 2009, he was awarded the Swedish “Docent” title before returning to University of Queensland as a Senior Research Officer, funded by an NHMRC Career Development Award and an ARC Future Fellowship.

His research focuses on structure-activity relationships of bioactive peptides, in particular, peptide hormones and the use of NMR spectroscopy in the design of novel peptide drug leads.

Dr Johan Rosengren grew up in a small village on the island of Öland, Sweden.

“My dad was a local electrician, and I worked with him on weekends and school holidays since I was 12 or 13 years old. I think everyone always thought that I would take over the business, which would have been a natural choice. As much as I liked the practical work, I also enjoyed school and pretty early on liked science in general and chemistry in particular. During the last year of high school, we went to an expo about higher education and career paths in Stockholm. There were some really cool young scientists presenting there, and I decided then that was what I wanted to do and that my goal was to become a doctor by the time I was 26 years old. Somewhat ironically, I handed in my PhD thesis eight years later, just one week after I turned 27. I’m still not sure if that can be considered as acceptable within the margin of error or if I failed ...”

“Somehow I ended up doing my PhD in Australia, which was never the plan; I just wound up tagging along

with a mate who wanted to do his masters project work in Brisbane and needed some company. I liked Brisbane and University of Queensland, met my future wife, and the rest is history.”

Dr Johan Rosengren’s work is centred around the structural biology of small proteins referred to as peptides. These are signalling molecules that are produced by all organisms for communication between cells in different parts of the body and for defence or capture of prey as components of animal venoms. By understanding how these molecules can, very specifically, interact with receptors and evoke functional responses, Johan Rosengren hopes to be able to design drugs that can mimic their activities and treat a wide range of human diseases. The peptide field is growing rapidly, and he thinks in the near future, we will see a lot more of this type of pharmaceuticals on the market.

“The challenge with peptides as drugs is that the body generally breaks them down as they are, by default, meant to be signals that can be turned on and off depending on conditions, for example the mechanism through which the peptide hormone insulin controls your blood sugar levels. Peptides and proteins in food are also broken down by

your body to be reused as building blocks for new proteins. The main challenges are related to designing in chemical features that make our peptide stable and long lasting so that when used as pharmaceuticals their unique bioactivities can be taken advantage of.”

Johan Rosengren’s colleague, Dr Christina Schroeder is researching peptides with the aim of developing a treatment that allows people to manage chronic pain, exploring

highly potent, and you can get better receptor selectivity with peptides, which means that you can reduce side effects. These are some of the reasons why I think they are good, and why I am pursuing them as drug leads.”

Spiders and snakes and other venomous creatures have a library of up to 200 peptides in their venom targeting different receptors in humans. One bite from a spider or a snake can be lethal since the prey gets exposed to the whole cocktail of

connections are critical for being able to achieve the results you want, as there are always people that can do some experiments that you cannot.”

Through the years he has been to many congresses, conventions, conferences and events concerning his professional job.

“I have probably been to somewhere around 40–50, I usually go to two or three [conferences] per year. I attend to present my work, to listen to work from colleagues, to form collaborations and last but not least they are generally a lot of fun.

“Australia is a fantastic place to visit, and lots of delegates like coming here. It is also pricewise pretty good value. I just booked in to go to a meeting in the U.S. and I worked out it would be a lot cheaper for the U.S. people to fly to Australia and come to our meeting than to go to their own local meeting. Scientifically, my field is very strong in Queensland, so it makes sense to organise the meetings here in Australia. I went to the American Peptide Symposium in California in June as a delegate, and I organised the Australian Peptide Conference in Port Douglas, Queensland in September. The last outing this year will be as a speaker at ANZMAG in the Margaret River wine district in Western Australia in November. Normally, I plan one year at a time, but we have already started the planning for the larger International Peptide Symposium, which I am involved in organising in Brisbane in 2021. It will require a fair bit of work.”

The networking part of his job is essential, for knowledge development but also for collaboration to be able to fund and carry out top-level international research. Interdisciplinary approaches are the way to solve complex questions.

“It requires a lot of work to maintain and develop my professional

## “I always come away with new ideas and inspiration from a meeting”

the relationship between drugs and receptors, focusing on expanding on the traditional lock and key mechanism to include the membrane surrounding the receptors. She aims to unlock a detailed understanding of how venom-derived peptides engage with receptors in the body and how we can use this knowledge to design more potent drugs with fewer side effects.

“For a long time now, I have used venomous creatures and their venom, to try to come up with new therapies for a range of different diseases, but I am focusing mainly on pain. Especially chronic and neuropathic pain, which are highly prevalent conditions, but one of those diseases that people do not talk about.”

“Peptides are underexplored in drug discovery. Peptides are natural, built of amino acids that we need every day, and that we have in our bodies. Because they are natural components, they tend to be less immunogenic, so you do not tend to have an immune response. They are usually

venom peptides, in principle shutting down the nervous system in the body. By isolating one peptide from this cocktail, you can achieve target specificity thereby potentially treating human disorders including pain, but also epilepsy and stroke.

Johan Rosengren attended his first meeting when he went to the Australian and New Zealand Society for Magnetic Resonance (ANZMAG) conference in 2000, only a month after he started his PhD studies.

“It was held at a ski-resort outside Melbourne but during summertime, and it was awesome. The conference dinner was held at a hut up on the mountain and to get there you got handed a welcome drink and were put in a ski-lift heading up the slope. I still have friends from that conference.”

His participation in international conferences and meetings has always been very important.

“I always come away with new ideas and inspiration from a meeting and in my field your international

network, and indeed just to keep my research job in the first place! Putting together a sustainable and fundable research programme is not straightforward; it’s not only the research, the funding sources also constantly change. Being part of a national network is actually a key part of the job. People get to know you, your work, and what you are about. It helps when you are trying to publish work and fund new projects,” says Johan Rosengren.

Working with Brisbane Marketing and industry stakeholders the Brisbane Convention & Exhibition Centre and Tourism and Events Queensland, the pair won the bid for Brisbane to host the 2021 International Peptide Symposium, which will see approximately 600 scientists converge on the city, providing opportunities for networking, collaboration and knowledge sharing.

“Collaborations are essential for success in research and hosting the

whole process easy with support every step of the way.

“The programme has significantly helped raise my international profile in my field, and I have made many new important connections and future collaborations by attending the International Peptide Conference and the liaison meeting with the chairs for various international societies,” says Johan Rosengren.

*Dr Johan Rosengren is an Associate Professor at the School of Biomedical Sciences, University of Queensland. He completed his PhD, which focused on structure-activity relationships of antimicrobial peptides in 2003. In 2005, he moved to Sweden to take up positions at Linnaeus University and Uppsala University, returning to Brisbane and University of Queensland in 2009. His research is focused on discovery and structure-based design of peptides as novel therapeutics.*

*Dr Christina Schroeder, an Associate Professor at the Institute for Molecular Bioscience, University of Queensland, is a bioactive peptide engineer who uses venom-derived peptides from spiders, cone snails and snakes to develop novel treatments for chronic and neuropathic pain. She is particularly fascinated by the possibility of harnessing the venom from an animal that has evolved to kill its prey to develop something that could benefit humankind.*

## “Australia is a fantastic place to visit, and lots of delegates like coming here”

“There is a big international network of peptide scientists working on venom research and collaborations are crucial for scientific discoveries,” says Christina Schroeder. “Conferences are a great place to form collaborations and learn about what other people do. Seeing collaborations form during a conference and then reading the papers arising from a scientific partnership is very rewarding and is why I am involved in a number of conferences around the world.”

In 2018, Brisbane’s economic development board Brisbane Marketing launched the Lord Mayor’s Convention Trailblazer Grant, an initiative designed to empower the city’s early-career professionals and researchers to make their mark and to grow Brisbane’s reputation as a global conventions city.

Johan Rosengren and Christina Schroeder were two of the seven winners of the inaugural grant and travelled to Tokyo in December 2018 to attend the International Peptide Symposium.

symposium in Brisbane will help further strengthen and grow our international knowledge network. It will be an exciting opportunity for the University of Queensland to showcase its world-class research, and for a large number of peptide scientists at University of Queensland and other universities across Brisbane and Queensland to interact with leading scientists from around the world,” says Johan Rosengren.

Brisbane’s excellence in Life Sciences research has helped boost Australia’s reputation as a leading player in the world-wide peptide community. Hosting the International Peptide Symposium in 2021 will facilitate further networking opportunities creating long-lasting collaborations and partnerships with the city.

The support from Brisbane Marketing and Brisbane Convention & Exhibition Centre was crucial to them winning the bid. The team assisted them with applying for conference funding and made the





Tonsley, South Australia PHOTO Business Events Australia

## Tonsley Is Australia's FIRST INNOVATION DISTRICT

**TONSLEY HAS BEEN** the home of innovation since the 1800s when the Ragless family farmed the site and developed several automated harvesting technologies.

For almost five decades, Tonsley was also a cornerstone of South Australia's manufacturing industry, the home of Chrysler Australia and later Mitsubishi Motors. Both companies developed their own innovations at the site.

Tonsley is today a project that is intrinsic to the state's economic development as it transitions to a high value industrial base that is underpinned by innovation and collaboration. The vision for Tonsley was to create an operating environment, a precinct, that would assist South Australian businesses in their move up the value chain and into global markets.

The model for achieving the Tonsley vision has been based around a triple helix partnership between

government, university and industry. This model incorporates the development of high amenity, mixed-use urban development (physical assets), populated with anchor businesses as well as research and training institutions (economic assets) in an environment that supports entrepreneurial activity and a culture of innovation (networking assets) to create an innovation district.

"The Tonsley precinct is evidence South Australia has transformed from a manufacturing state, to a state that is focused on and embraces innovation. The simple fact that Tonsley now has more employees under its roof compared to when it was manufacturing cars is testament to this," says Damien Kitto, CEO, Adelaide Convention Bureau.

"Over the years we have secured business events that have accelerated start-ups and innovative companies in getting a foothold in the marketplace. Having the National Energy

“It’s the best example that we can see in Australia for such a technology precinct”

Storage Conference and Exhibition in Adelaide gave Tonsley an opportunity to promote its precinct to a larger audience of global companies. And when the convention bureau secured the Asia Pacific Land Forces event for multiple years, it provided a trade and investment platform for the individual companies within Tonsley to travel ‘up the road’ to meet multinational organisations. This is the value that business events can deliver.”

Tonsley’s economic development objectives are highly aligned to the state’s strategic priorities, in particular: commercialisation of research and the student experience, growth through innovation, and showcasing South Australia as the best place to do business.

Tonsley’s four focus sectors of health, medical devices and assistive technologies, cleantech and renewable energy, automation, software and simulation, and mining and energy services reflect South Australia’s economic strengths and opportunities.

“Technology precincts have a great potential for industry, government and research coming together. This is what attracted us to Tonsley. It’s the best example that we can see in

Australia for such a technology precinct,” says David Pryke, Executive Vice President, Energy, Siemens.

The enthusiasm of the South Australian public for all things tech and Tonsley helped make the innovation neighbourhood’s recent first open day an outstanding success, attended by an estimated 10,000 adults and children.

More than 70 activities were offered on the day, with 43 Tonsley-based businesses, organisations and attractions involved. This included ZEISS, Micro-X, Voxon Photonics, ZEN Energy, Tesla, Humanihut, Somark, Siemens, TAFE SA, Flinders University, and the Global Centre for Modern Ageing.

Innovyz is a good example of the innovative spirit and vibrancy of Tonsley. Innovyz is an end-to-end provider that helps individuals, universities, research centres, existing companies, and corporate spinouts build and grow companies, to bring their innovations, research, and ideas to market. Instead of allowing finance to dictate innovation, their intensive nine-month programmes ensure that the ‘idea’ remains paramount during the company’s growth. Equally,

cofounder Brett Jackson believes that the key to their success is working with people who they like and trust, and who are open to being coached through the scaling of their business. Their approach to partnership synergy and underlying business mission is what distinguishes Innovyz from other business incubators on the market.

Cofounders Brett Jackson and Stuart Douglas delight in helping companies to innovate, scale, and raise capital. While many would be discouraged, the duo had no qualms in establishing Innovyz during the global financial crisis. Fast-forward ten years, they’ve started 60 companies with a collective value of more than half a billion dollars (with more in the works), and they’ve raised funds in excess of AU \$70 million.

“What we found is that if you have a great innovation, a great team, and a great plan, you get great money. If you don’t have that, then you’re not going to get it. That’s the secret to what we do,” says Brett Jackson.

Flexibility is also an important consideration for the Innovyz team whose programmes need to work across multiple sectors. Being able

“Back ten years ago there was no eco-system for entrepreneurship and the commercialisation of innovation. Tonsley has enabled like-minded people to connect”

to work with clients such as Green Industries SA to deliver a commercialisation programme to reduce waste and enhance recycling then switch gears to help commercialise the innovative approach to welding developed by KTIG is part of what makes Innovyz unique.

KTIG is a great example of the power of the Innovyz programme. Born out of South Australia’s CSIRO, the founder of KTIG, Dr Laurie Jarvis, presented with a new keyhole welding technology that took one per cent of the time usually required and with a cost saving between 80 and 95 per cent. Since working with Innovyz, KTIG is now a successful global business, winning Australia’s Best Industrial Product Award 2014.

“Back ten years ago there was no eco-system for entrepreneurship and the commercialisation of innovation. Tonsley has enabled like-minded people to connect,” says Brett Jackson.

Entrepreneurs and start-ups are key to Tonsley’s future. From day one, they benefit from the collaboration and the guidance, mentorship and support of established businesses in their own sector and educational

support from Flinders University and TAFE SA.

Education and business are innovation and collaboration partners at Tonsley, focusing on identifying industry needs and researching and developing smart solutions. This collaborative culture encourages educational institutions to be heavily embedded in industry activity at Tonsley, with high value manufacturing a primary focus.

“Our investment in Tonsley reflects our commitment to stimulating jobs growth, bringing our students together with the very best academics, researchers and entrepreneurs in the state-of-the-art facility that encourages innovation and drives new industry,” says Professor Colin Stirling, Vice Chancellor, Flinders University.

*Flinders University has built a strong reputation for excellence in teaching and research underpinned by a network of strong external relationships and collaboration with industry. Its Tonsley campus is a five-minute drive from its main Bedford Park campus and more than 150 staff and 2,000 students are located at Tonsley. The university runs a bus loop between the two campuses and a train line connecting the two campuses with the city centre is due to open later this year.*

*Flinders University is preparing graduates to work in Tonsley’s four focus industry sectors. Flinders at Tonsley is also a hub for entrepreneurs and next-generation start-ups through the New Venture Institute (NVI).*





Professor Sharon Lewin, Director of the Doherty Institute PHOTO: Atti Soenarso

# Meeting People Face to Face GENERATES NEW IDEAS AND SOLUTIONS

**SINCE ITS** inception Professor Sharon Lewin has been the Director of the Peter Doherty Institute for Infection and Immunity (Doherty Institute), a joint venture of the University of Melbourne and The Royal Melbourne Hospital. Her research program is funded by the NHMRC, the National Institutes of Health, The Wellcome Trust, the American Foundation for AIDS Research and multiple commercial partnerships. The overall goal of her work is to find a cure for HIV and understand how HIV interacts with other viruses such as the hepatitis B virus to cause worse health outcomes

*Meetings International* sat down with her to find out more.

**What's the history of the Doherty Institute?**

"The Doherty Institute was established in 2014. It is named after Nobel Laureate Peter Doherty, and it has allowed us to bring together several different departments across the University of Melbourne and The Royal Melbourne Hospital who work in infectious diseases and immunology. Both organisations have a long history working in research, education, clinical care and public health. The philosophy was that by bringing all the experts together in one institute it would allow much better interaction and would be an attractive one-stop-shop in infection and immunity. Many governments around the world, including in Australia, are worried

about infectious diseases outbreaks whether they are happening now, like HIV and influenza, or sudden new outbreaks, such as the novel coronavirus, COVID-19. This is why we were the first to isolate and share the virus with the rest of the world in the first few weeks of the pandemic. With all the experts under the one roof, together we play a major role in the initial response through detection, surveillance and developing policies, but also work to develop long term solutions with new vaccines, treatments and a detailed understanding of the different diseases."

**Moreover, you did, at the same time, create a knowledge hub?**

"Yes, we have put all different disciplines in one area into a small hub, effectively inside a bigger hub of the Melbourne Biomedical Precinct. There are, just across the road, a cancer institute, a neuroscience institute and world-leading adult and children's hospitals. All of us collaborate extensively. Infectious diseases and immunology are relevant to every discipline, so we have many interactions with other institutions."

**You have been a speaker at, at least, 100 conferences. Are you networking at the same time as you work here?**

"In my research work, networking is incredibly important. For scientists, this is not just to gain knowledge, but to disseminate knowledge and to

road test your ideas and discoveries in different settings. When you meet people face to face, you often get a new idea or see solutions to problems that you might not have previously considered. Also, by presenting your work internationally, you can tell your scientific story, which is a powerful way to engage other experts in your thinking. Although research is very objective and vigorously reviewed, exciting colleagues with your story is just as important."

**How important is it for institutions to have national conferences every year or every second year?**

"National conferences are essential for a range of reasons. Australia is a very isolated place geographically, even if we live in a connected world. We have our systems of working and have a lot to offer. We need to make sure that scientists and researchers work together with our governments. Both the Federal Government and State Government want collaborations. National conferences are not only important for local policy, response and capacity building, but they are also much cheaper options for people to attend. To send someone to an international conference can cost AUD 3,000 to AUD 5,000. I like to provide both as options for my junior staff, if at all possible. National conferences are important for the cohesion of different disciplines in Australia."



“Networking is incredibly important. For scientists, this is not just to gain knowledge, but to disseminate knowledge”

**Also, you are an Ambassador for Melbourne?**  
“The initiative came from the Melbourne Convention Bureau and Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre to attract conferences to Melbourne through their professional networks. Each year, the City of Melbourne awards the title of Melburnian of the Year to someone who has had a significant impact on the city. I was named Melburnian of the Year in 2014 after chairing the International AIDS Conference in Melbourne – the largest health conference ever held in Australia.”

**What are your main challenges at the moment in your science work?**  
“I work in a very challenging area of science, trying to find a cure for HIV, but I have optimism in my work. I have optimism because of the incredible advances we have seen with HIV over the past 30 years as a result of science. Currently, people living with HIV have to take life-long treatment because the virus can hide from treatment. We are trying to understand where and why the virus goes into hiding and then trying to eliminate it. Current treatments for HIV are fairly simple. People can take one tablet a day and lead a pretty normal

life. Treatments are getting cheaper and simpler. However, if you live in a country with no universal healthcare, you have limited access. If you live in a low-income country, treatments are available, but this is dependent on global funding, particularly contributions from countries such as the U.S. The challenges are that we have to come up with something safer than what people are taking already. It also has to be cheap and accessible for people living in a low-income setting. That is a very high bar, but with the right mix of science, funding and community engagement, I am sure we can get there.”

**Are you hoping for a new international conference to come here?**  
“Yes, we are thinking about that always – whether it is immunology or other infectious diseases. There are 700 people in the Institute. They all have their extensive professional networks. We recently had 600 people in Melbourne meeting about hepatitis B virus where I was one of the speakers. I would also love to attract the major HIV prevention meeting to Melbourne. This is called HIV R4P. This meeting has always been in Europe or the U.S. Maybe in the future, the International AIDS Conferences will

come back to Australia! It’s important for that conference to move around the world. Few cities can host these mega conferences, especially in Asia. Hosting it in India or China would be fantastic, as both countries have large numbers of people living with HIV and also have active clinical and research programs.”

*Leading infectious diseases expert, Professor Sharon Lewin is the inaugural Director of the Peter Doherty Institute for Infection and Immunity, Professor of Medicine at The University of Melbourne, and a National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) Practitioner Fellow. She has authored over 260 publications, given over 100 major international invited talks on HIV cure, and her work has been published in Science, Nature, Nature Medicine, The Economist and The New Yorker. She co-chairs the International AIDS Society’s Towards an HIV Cure initiative, and in 2014, was the local co-chair for the 20th International AIDS Conference in Melbourne.*



**ROGER KELLERMAN** *Publisher, business intelligence analyst, trend creator, educator and networker. Has close to 40 years’ experience of the global meeting industry. Founder of Mötesindustriveckan. [twitter.com/thekellerman](https://twitter.com/thekellerman)*

PHOTO Sara Appelgren

Australia AS A ROLE MODEL

**DO YOU HAVE** any role models in the meetings and events industry? Do you think some have come further in their way of running their business to a higher professional level? Who has the knowledge you also want to have?  
You should have role models. Not only because it’s good to learn from the best, but also because other people’s examples can help you understand the opportunities that exist in your working life. Role models are an important source of motivation and building your self-confidence. When people who are similar to yourself do something good, you realise that you can do the same.  
Surprisingly, few people can answer the question straight up: Who are your most important role models in the meetings and events industry?  
Or can it be considered a bit childish to have role models? A role model is not the same as an idol. Idols are people we admire and glorify in a rather uncritical way, without necessarily learning anything from their example.  
An example is a person or company from which you learn something; a person or company that you recognise yourself in and who does something that you could also do.  
To be able to do something good in life, you must know that it is doable; otherwise, it becomes hard to feel motivated. But you also need to know that you can do just that.

It can also be about benchmarking. Benchmarking becomes comparison opportunities with the importance of evaluating their business quantitatively or qualitatively concerning those that they perceive behave best in their respective business areas and aims to align their goals with the most exciting and prominent designed solutions and examples in the areas they are focused on.  
It is usually a process that can cost a lot of money by doing several investigations, both externally and internally within the company. Travel costs can also occur if you are to compare with other competitors in other countries or if you are a global company, but most often this cost is fine when you see the benefits of using the benchmarking model.  
We see Australia as both a role model and the benchmarking destination number one, within the worldwide meetings and events industry. The distance may be part of the explanation why Australia, which is on the other side of the earth for us living in Europe and quite far away from the US and South America, needs to be better than the rest at getting the attention it needs for its development as individuals and as a society.  
In this report, you can read about Carmel Foley and Deborah Edwards, who work at the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) where they have developed Australia’s business events

strategy. Also, read the interview with Geoff Donaghy at ICC Sydney, perhaps the world’s most successful meeting place in meetings and events today? All the articles you can read in this report talk about successful researchers, companies and events.  
After writing about the global meetings industry for more than 30 years, I am not often impressed, or almost never during my global travels. Some destinations are good, few are very good, and Australia is at the forefront of the global meetings and events industry. This is when it comes to strategy, service, knowledge, facilities, hotels, restaurants, food, wine, personalities and not least important: the desire to continually improve in the meetings and events industry. And we do see a fantastic collaboration between different people, universities and companies. Lots of meetings and events destinations should look to Australia and try to be inspired and then take a step closer to the way the Australians are developing the global industry.



An aerial photograph of a vibrant coral reef in turquoise water. Two white seaplanes are visible in the upper left, flying over the reef. The reef itself is a complex pattern of brown and green patches against the blue water.

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