



BUSINESS EVENTS AND CLIMATE CHANGE

BECA Submission for the Australian Government's

TOURISM ACTION PLAN ON CLIMATE CHANGE

1. MARKETING

In the business events sector it is expected that Australia will face challenges overcoming the negative perceptions associated with long-haul destination in relation to carbon emissions when bidding for international events. European potential clients are already adding the climate impact into the consideration factor when choosing event destinations and this trend is expected to rise.

To quote Martin Sirk, CEO of the International Congress and Convention Association, based in The Netherlands:

"Environmental issues are increasingly moving from the fringes to the mainstream in our industry. Some countries such as Germany already have extremely robust legislation in place for their venues, but other suppliers will be increasingly pressurized by environmentally sensitive clients to overtly address the key issues. What hasn't yet arisen as a major issue but is certain to in the future, is the impact our industry has on the environment as a result of using air travel, which over the last 12 months has been increasingly identified as a major source of carbon emissions. "

It is interesting to note that an environmental charitable organisation has started a "Blue Green Meetings" website which offers tips to reduce the environmental impact of meetings and Tip No 3 is:

***Meet close.** Reduce distances traveled by speakers and delegates. Choose a host city that's close to as many delegates as possible, and within the city choose a venue and hotel that are close to the airport and within walking distance of each other. <http://www.bluegreenmeetings.org/HostsAndPlanners/10EasyTips.htm>*

Although aviation is only responsible for 2% of total global carbon emissions, it has a disproportional high negative profile in the consumers' minds. The effect of this on decision-making regarding destinations cannot be ignored.

Australia is competing against many shorter-haul destinations: in fact the majority of our competing destinations are closer to clients' home bases. Australian bidding organisations, if they haven't already, will have to tackle the issue of sustainability in bid criteria.

If and when the bid is won, then it may be necessary to promote environmental issues to prospective long-haul delegates to overcome any reluctance to attend because of perceived climate change impacts caused by individual travel choices.

Recommendation:

Tourism Australia, convention bureaux and relevant industry practitioners work together with the support of the Australian government to ensure they are well armed with facts and creative marketing solutions. A unified Australian BE strategy needs to be developed and adopted, then promoted internationally.

Some specific ideas might include:

- Sponsoring carbon-neutral site visits and fam trips for international organisers and potential clients considering Australia as an event destination

- Designing low-impact Australian exhibition booths at BE trade shows, and using the booth as a showcase for Australia's environmental position (and submitting the booth for a "green" award – *Visit London* won the Green exhibitor award at the BE trade show IMEX, Frankfurt, 2007).

- Providing incentives as part of bids for international meetings which provide organisers with carbon credits for long-haul delegates.

- Promoting eco-friendly Australian venues.

- Promoting case studies of carbon-neutral events hosted in Australia.

- Encouraging APEC to implement "green" initiatives for the forthcoming Summit in Sydney.

- Include Green Event information on Tourism Australia's and convention bureaux' websites.

- Become an active partner in the Green Meetings Industry Council
<http://www.greenmeetings.info>.

- Recommending to inbound visitors an easy, credible method of offsetting the carbon impact of their travel to Australia..

2. AUSTRALIA'S ECO PROFILE

The Hon Ian Macfarlane MP, Minister for Industry Tourism and Resources, at the recent TTF Summit in Canberra spoke about Australia's leading edge in such related areas as geothermal and solar power and clean coal. Global concerns about sustainability, energy and climate change has spawned a growing number of international conferences dealing with the topics.

Australia has already hosted or has secured some of these related events e.g.

19th World Energy Congress, Sydney, 2004

13th International Rainwater Catchment Systems Conference and

5th International Water Sensitive Urban Design Conference, Sydney 2007

The 10th International Congress of Ecology, Brisbane 2009

International Union of Geodesy and Geoscience , Melbourne, 2011

5th SETAC World Congress - The Society of Environmental Toxicology and Chemistry, Sydney, 2008

15th Pacific Basin Nuclear Conference, Sydney 2006

There are many more such events. One senior conference management company has advised it is working with a leading academic on a proposal for Australia to host an inaugural world congress on sustainable cities. This is one example of business events which are springing up as a result of increased interest in these issues. These events offer Australia to demonstrate its environmental credentials and lift its global profile.

Recommendation:

There is an opportunity for Australia to further enhance its international standing and profile by bidding to host more conferences related to the issues of energy, sustainability, the environment and climate change. Support could be provided by the Australian government to help secure these existing events, and to support the creation of worthwhile inaugural events on these topics. A government/industry working party could be established to identify such opportunities.

3. CONFERENCE, MEETINGS AND EXHIBITION VENUES

There are already a number of meeting venues taking action on the environmental front in terms of design and operations. For example:

The new Melbourne Exhibition and Convention Centre, currently under construction, will have a six-star green energy rating. It will boast the highest possible environmental rating under the Australian Green Building Council rating system. The six-star green rating is based on a mix of green initiatives, including water recycling, solar panels, radiant slab heating, and building materials sourced from renewable sustainable industries.

The Sydney Convention and Exhibition Centre has been accredited as a Green Globe Benchmarked Convention Centre, one of only two centres in the world to achieve this ranking as at March 2007. *Green Globe* is a global benchmarking, certification and improvement system for sustainable travel and tourism, established by the World Travel and Tourism Council in 1993.

However, much more needs to be done to encourage venues to move in this direction. It is easier for new properties which are being built in today's environment. Older properties face greater challenges and need adaptation strategies. There is also confusion in the market as to what steps are genuinely helpful, and what are simply window dressing. For instance, a conference venue offering to plant trees to supposedly offset carbon impacts of a meeting, may sound a worthwhile action, but may not actually make an appreciable difference.

There are two angles for the venues – the building design itself and how it can improve its “green” rating – and the operations within the building in terms of recycling, reusing, and reducing waste.

It is noted that *Green Globe's* benchmarking and accreditation system is increasingly becoming the standard adopted by companies in 80 countries.

Recommendations:

The government, in conjunction with industry associations, should provide assistance and guidance to encourage Australian venues to increase their sustainability and aim for a credible “green” accreditation. It may be that information workshops need to be provided, and endorsed programs offered at a reasonable price.

In the short term, government meetings should aim wherever possible to choose meeting venues which have taken steps to reduce, recycle and reuse.

Longer term, green credentials should be a prerequisite in the choice of venues for government meetings.

4. CONFERENCE, EXHIBITION AND EVENT ORGANISERS

Business event organisers need a two-pronged approach to sustainability to cover:

- their own business operations
- the events for which they are responsible

Australian operators can expect more focus on their own green practices.

To quote a leading European association and event management company:

“We not only see it as our responsibility as leading and responsible company to drive CSR forward, we also see this as a growing request from our clients. More and more corporate clients are asking about our CSR policies in their RFI's.

This also means that more and more clients are starting to choose agencies, venues and destinations on their environmental practices. We are now also offering our client carbon-neutral event solutions.”

Robin Lokerman
MCI Travel, Brussels

Another major global travel and event management company, has embraced the trend. **BCD Travel**, the world's third largest travel management company, has its consulting division providing guidance to clients on creating and managing travel programs that are environmentally sustainable, socially responsible. The company's consultant division provides a 4-step solution that diagnoses a company's current environmental impact, eradicates emissions where possible, reduces its carbon footprint and offsets remaining emissions.

Whilst a number of Australian operators have become more conscious in this area, largely they have not approached the issue in a formal way. There is a need for reliable information and tools to be made available to the industry to help operators find a practical path through the myriad of options coming onto the market.

There are some industry practitioners already working to reduce their carbon footprint. One example is Jeremy Garling, Managing Director of Great Southern Events, a company which won the MEA Australian Special Events Organiser Award in 2007. Great Southern Events has gained accreditation as a Low CO₂ company through the Carbon Reduction Institute, a process which involves quarterly auditing of the company's environmental footprint and purchasing of carbon offsets when emissions can't be reduced further through reduction and recycling. Interestingly, the company's first audit revealed that 65% of its carbon emissions was identified as air travel, an essential part of business for a national events operator. The company now also offers clients an option to make their events carbon-neutral.

A proactive “climate change” operator, Mr Garling has worked with the Australian Conservation Foundation, the Department of Environment and Climate Change NSW and Virgin Blue to produce a Checklist for Green Meetings (refer Annexure 2).

Recommendations:

Government and industry to work together to:

- Encourage event managers and associated suppliers to get their own businesses in order by reducing their environmental and carbon footprint

- Providing case studies to illustrate ways this can be practically achieved

- Promulgate a green check list similar to the attached document (Annexure 2)

- Endorse an affordable, credible green accreditation/certification system which would suit SMEs in our industry sector

- Establishment of a central “green” website for the industry to access information and tools on environmental sustainability.

5. BUSINESS EVENTS

While initiatives at holding “climate neutral” events are relatively new, we are starting to see attempts to create events which have a low environmental impact. It is a theme expected to spread as more companies include environmental concerns in their own Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) codes. The pressure will come from corporates demanding more action in this area from event managers. The industry needs to be prepared for these requests, and to be proactive in offering low-impact alternatives to clients.

Globally, there are advances being made through the Green Meetings Industry Council which is encouraging best practice in this area. Advice on “green” meetings is available on the web. For example: <http://www.bluegreenmeetings.org>

According to the Green Meeting Industry Council a green meeting incorporates environmental considerations throughout all stages of the meeting in order to minimize the negative impact on the environment. By the year 2020 the Green Meeting Industry Council envisions a green meeting as an activity that:

- has zero net environmental effect.
- achieves full integration of environmental responsibility into return on investment analysis for the global meetings industry.
- is an accepted and standard industry practice, while 'brown' meetings are a thing of the past.
- achieves economic and strategic business goals and minimizes and eliminates environmental impacts and positively contributes to the environment and host communities.
- meets minimum green meeting practices as set out by the GMIC.

Recommendations:

Australian Government to encourage its own departments to reduce the environmental impact of their conferences and to aim for carbon-neutral events.
Government to encourage and acknowledge efforts made by tourism-related associations, and convention bureaux, to stage their own carbon-neutral meetings.
Government to consider introducing a short-term incentive scheme which would encourage all event organisers to aim for carbon-neutral events.

6. INDUSTRY ASSOCIATIONS

Industry associations and events have an important role to play. Through their unique direct contact with industry, they have the responsibility and capacity to promote and showcase best practice environmental best practice.

International action

On the international scene the environmental issue is gaining traction as a major issue. For example, a major trade show for the global industry, IMEX in Frankfurt, has introduced global green meetings awards. The annual award is open to any meetings industry supplier, such as a hotel, convention centre or visitor bureau, that can demonstrate innovative and practical ways in which it has prevented waste and reduced overall environmental impact.

Also in Germany, the German Convention Bureau is setting a good example and exploring new avenues, having staged its first climate-neutral general meeting in July 2007. The greenhouse gases caused by the event (e.g. by local energy consumption, delegate travel and overnights, catering and the production of printed material) were offset by bureau investments in a wind park project. The delegates received a personal certificate confirming that both their attendance and the event itself was climate-neutral.

Early this year, a large US-based industry association, the Professional Conference Management Association (PCMA) aimed for a 100% waste free event for its annual conference in Toronto attended by 4,000 delegates. Methods employed included full recycling, full recovery of all products, and no paper handouts. The convention centre partnered with association to make this happen: all surplus F&B sent to homeless shelters.

The “climate change” or “green” topic is cropping up in our international industry conference programs. Meetings Professionals International featured a session on “Trends in Sustainability” at its 2007 European conference. Most recently, the International Association of Congress Centres (APIC) had included a plenary session on green meetings during July annual conference in Austria. A meetings industry debate on environmental issues is scheduled in the UK in the coming weeks.

In the United Kingdom, The Institute of Travel Management developed an initiative called, *Project Icarus*, a policy and accreditation (BS8901) system for sustainable events. Project ICARUS was established to promote carbon reduction in travel management programmes throughout the UK business travel industry. The project is led by, and targeted primarily at, travel buyers/managers. ICARUS was conceived after the ITM conference in 2006, when a number of leading industry figures and journalists all independently discussed their concerns with ITM about a lack of leadership on Climate Change in business travel management.

The initial goals of the project are to create the following:

1. A Toolkit for buyers to use to implement a Carbon Reduction System
2. A system of accreditation to recognise buyers who implement the toolkit and have success in reducing carbon emissions
3. A system of awards to recognise suppliers who demonstrate leadership and innovation in making their products more environmentally friendly

The project has received government funding from the Omega fund (<http://www.omega.mmu.ac.uk>).

More details: <http://www.itm.org.uk/icarus/index.asp>

Australian action:

The issue is starting to emerge in Australia. For example:

- Meetings and Events Australia (MEA) is introducing a new award category in 2008 to recognize industry practitioners' environmental efforts.
- Inclusion of the environmental topic in industry conferences and trade shows, eg the large annual industry trade show, AIME, has chosen an Environmental theme for 2008, with the objective of setting a new environmental impact benchmark for exhibitions in Australia. To quote the manager of the show

“We are using recycled stock and reducing the amount of material that we will be bringing on site. We will be recycling everything we can at AIME 2008, from badges and lanyards to paper, cardboard, glass and other materials. Exhibitors will be encouraged to reduce the amount of printed material they bring to the show, to use environmentally friendly materials and to provide all media kits on USBs. With the assistance of the MECC, which already has a number of recycling initiatives in place, AIME will be able to significantly reduce its waste.”

AIME will also work with supporting airlines and other bodies to provide a carbon offset program to address environmental impact issues, including greenhouse gas emissions. Hosted buyers, exhibitors and visitors who fly to AIME will be encouraged to participate in the program.

- AIME 2008 will also include a Master Class on Green Events with experts giving practical advice on how organisers of meetings, incentives, exhibitions and special events can all reduce their impact on the environment.
- Another industry trade show, RSVP, included “Green Meetings” as a new seminar topic in its 2007 program.
- The Association of Australian Convention Bureau (AACB) is including “climate change” at its bureaux staff conference this year.
- BECA has formed an Environmental Working Party to consider ways the industry might tackle this issue. The committee has provided input to this submission.

Recommendations:

BECA to work with Government to further develop recommendations made in this submission.

Government to acknowledge work already being done within the business events industry.

Government to consider sponsoring an internationally recognised environmental expert in BE to speak at a major industry conference in Australia to help promote the issue.

BE industry bodies to use own websites to promote environmental practices and provide practical information.

The Business Events Council of Australia would welcome the opportunity to work with government to help position Australia as an environmentally conscious destination which is capable of delivering low-impact business events.

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Annexures:

1. Green Meetings Report, Convention Industry Council, USA, 2004

http://www.conventionindustry.org/projects/green_meetings_report.pdf

2. Green Event Checklist, J Garling, Great Southern Events, Australia, 2007

<http://www.rsvpevent.com.au/rsvp07sydney/downloads/Green%20Checklist.pdf>