

## INDUSTRY VIEWS

AIPC on the role of conference centres

# Government support

Whether or not we like it, most of us in the meetings industry are dependent on government support, writes **Geoff Donaghy**.



In addition to his role as AIPC president, **GEOFF DONAGHY** is the CEO at ICC Sydney and director: Convention Centres at AEG Ogden.

He also represents AIPC on peak global body the Joint Meetings Industry Council.



**G**OVERNMENT INVESTMENTS FUND the development of major facilities in most parts of the world. Government policies determine, to a large extent, attendance and participation at many events. And government immigration, trade and access decisions heavily influence the conditions that either facilitate or obstruct the global exchanges we represent.

So it's important that governments – and the communities they represent – see the value in what we do. And that value must be in terms that matter to them, not just us, if we are to enjoy ongoing support.

That's why it has become increasingly important to ensure our industry is seen not just as a source of visitor revenues but as a major contributor to key areas like global economic, academic and professional development that contribute in a direct and significant way to a wide range of government policy objectives. The challenge to governments – who remain the major investor in this area due to their typical role as owner/operators of the major convention facilities that make this all possible – is how to measure the return on their investment in as realistic a way as possible.

## ROLE AND VALUE

So what do we say to governments about our role and value? The starting point is a realisation that the myriad organisations and associations that count meetings, conventions and exhibitions among their key organisational responsibilities do so because of what they achieve in

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terms of business, professional and organisational advancement – and this is where the greatest benefits lie for governments and communities alike.

This means that, beyond the "tourism effect" – and the associated incremental jobs and derived tax revenues it generates for governments – there is what might best be called event outputs. These are business, professional and academic advancements that result from meetings and events and include not only such economic rewards as inward investment, talent attraction, knowledge transfer and innovation/creation that directly support economic policies but also impact many other areas of government policy and responsibility like healthcare, education and employment readiness.

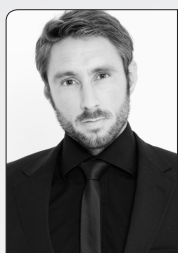
Once governments realise the breadth of these impacts on their own policy priorities, they start to understand why this is an industry they need to support and invest in. The broader values we deliver are never going to be easy to measure with precision – but they still need to be taken into account in order to support good investment decisions, particularly with public money. This is our job, and our responsibility, as an industry and it's long overdue. **M**

## INDUSTRY VIEWS

SAACI's take on keeping current

# Time to stay focused

If the daily news makes you want to move to a deserted island, you are not alone. But there is hope, as **Rudi van der Vyver** discovers.



**RUDI VAN DER VYVER** is the CEO of SAACI.



**T**HE WORLD HAS gone crazy. Donald Trump is still president of the United States, Brexit is happening and let me not even comment on our state capture. But not all is lost. I once read that hope begins in the dark – the stubborn hope that if you just show up and try to do the right thing, the dawn will come. You wait and watch and work, you don't give up. And that is what the business events industry in South Africa has done.

With business events having influence across all functional units within both the corporate and public sectors, we are seeing budgets once again being allocated to events, exhibitions and educational components such as seminars and conferences. Many corporates have previously cut budgets on these business initiatives due

to cost-cutting and budget constraints, but the return on investment is clearly noticeable on a well-executed business event. Thus, we are seeing corporate clients being more willing to spend again but with a cautious approach.

## INNOVATIVE APPROACHES

This is where we as SAACI are driving standards in the industry, with a huge focus on education and training. We also need to be innovative with our approach to assessing and handling risk as this is a very real and relevant focus, but it cannot be allowed to devalue the experience and subsequent return on investment in various forms of a business event. We need to learn from the mistakes other countries across the globe are making in damaging their feasibility as business event destinations. **M**