



THE NSW REGIONAL CONFERENCE STRATEGY & ACTION PLAN 2017 - 2021





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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The NSW Regional Conference sector is a key part of the broader NSW Visitor Economy, and has the potential to bring significant economic and employment benefits to Regional NSW. The sector generates:

- Expenditure of \$290 million by delegates attending business events
- Additional visitor expenditure of \$11.6 million from pre and post conference touring
- Employment of more than 2,300 people¹

However, in the last decade the number of visitor nights generated for Regional NSW by business events has declined by an average annual rate of 1.9%. Moreover Regional NSW's market share of the eastern seaboard (NSW, Victoria and Queensland) has been in decline, down from 13.1% in YE March 2007 to 11.5% in YE March 2017. During the same period, the Queensland regional market has also lost market share of the business conferencing market, while Victoria's share has increased.²

As the Visitor Economy Taskforce Report and the subsequent Visitor Economy Visitor Industry Action Plan identified, for regional conferencing to grow and to prosper, a strategic approach and funded program was needed.

The NSW Government has responded through the creation of the Regional Conferencing Unit within Destination NSW and the delivery of this Regional Conferencing Strategy and Action Plan.

Two overarching challenges need to be addressed:

- NSW needs leadership and coordination in terms of regional conference opportunities, and has not had a regional conference strategy in place to address challenges and maximise opportunities.
- The NSW Regional conference sector needs a collaborative framework to encourage innovation and initiate concerted action.

Throughout Regional NSW the industry also faces very specific operational challenges in areas such as identifying potential opportunities, putting together successful bids, marketing, measurement, lack of quality infrastructure and skilled staff, operational delivery of conferences and regional air services.

The NSW Government has developed a four-year plan to address the challenges facing the NSW Regional conferencing market and maximise the growth opportunities. The NSW Regional Conference Strategy Action Plan 2017-2021 aims to build capability, improve NSW's competitive position, stimulate demand and return the sector to growth.

A newly established Regional NSW Business Conference Unit within Destination NSW will lead the implementation of the strategy, and support Regional NSW in effectively targeting opportunities, identifying capability and undertaking promotional activities to grow the market. Programs will be supported by Government funding and assisted by additional co-operative investment from industry.

For the strategy to be successful, a collaborative effort is required between industry and local and State Governments. To that end, industry will be asked to support and jointly fund the marketing initiatives developed by the Regional NSW Business Conference Unit, facilitate skills development and training, invest in product and infrastructure development and develop high quality conferences and events that will help build the reputation of Regional NSW as a preferred conferencing destination.



Luminosity, Port Macquarie

¹ AEC Group, Regional Business Events Economic Assessment 2013

² Source: IVS and NVS Y/E March 2017

The NSW Regional Conference Strategy Action Plan 2017-2021 identifies eleven strategic imperatives:

Strategic Imperative 1: Sector Leadership

Establish a dedicated, appropriately resourced, Regional NSW Business Conference Unit within Destination NSW to lead implementation of the NSW Regional Conference Strategy.

**Strategic Imperative 2:
A New Destination Framework**

Develop a framework to prioritise and systematically support regional business conference destinations.

**Strategic Imperative 3:
Partnering with Government and Industry**

Develop a strong collaborative network of Local Government and industry business partners to nurture and realise regional conference opportunities.

**Strategic Imperative 4:
Destination Infrastructure Development**

Assist Regional NSW in developing business cases, which promote investment in conference infrastructure by Local Government and the private sector.

Strategic Imperative 5: Research and Evaluation

Implement a renewed focus on research, monitoring and evaluation to identify economic impacts, trends and opportunities.

**Strategic Imperative 6:
Activating Regional Networks**

Develop regional networks to leverage business conference opportunities.

Strategic Imperative 7: Product Development

Improve the quality and range of conferencing experiences through product development initiatives.

**Strategic Imperative 8:
Industry Training and Skills Development**

Improve regional capability through business conferencing education and mentoring programs.

Strategic Imperative 9: Destination Marketing

Improve and increase the promotion and awareness of regional business conference destinations relevant to their capability.

**Strategic Imperative 10:
A NSW Regional Business Conference Portal**

Prioritise the establishment of a NSW Regional Business Conference website portal and target client database.

**Strategic Imperative 11:
Generating Conference Leads**

Create and foster lead dissemination and referral systems.

A detailed Action Plan has been developed to deliver the eleven strategic imperatives, led by the new Regional NSW Business Conference Unit, in partnership with other Government agencies, Destination Networks, Local Tourism Organisations (LTOs) and industry.



Kooindah Waters



Tinklers Winery, Hunter Valley



INTRODUCTION

CONFERENCING IN REGIONAL NSW

The Regional Business Conference sector forms a part of the broader NSW Visitor Economy and has the potential to be a critical growth area. The sector brings substantial benefits³ to Regional NSW generating:

- Expenditure of \$290 million by delegates attending business events
- Additional visitor expenditure of \$11.6 million from pre and post touring
- Employment of more than 2,300 people.

However, in the last decade, the number of visitor nights generated by business events and actually spent in Regional NSW has declined by an average rate of 1.9%. Regional NSW's share of the eastern seaboard (NSW, Victoria and Queensland) declined from 13.1% in YE March 2007 to 11.5% in YE March 2017.⁴

COMPETITOR PERFORMANCE

During the same period the Queensland regional market has also decreased their market share of business conferencing whilst Victoria has increased:

- Regional Queensland's share has decreased from 25.3% to 16.6% since YE March 2007⁴
- Regional Victoria's share has increased from 8.8% to 9.0% since YE March 2007.⁵

The differences in performance between competitor states and NSW are correlated directly to investment in the infrastructure and resources required to develop and market regional areas within this sector.

Queensland currently invests \$1.6 million annually in regional conferencing and, in 2014, Victoria renewed its budget commitment of \$1.2 million over four years.

Declining regional conferencing trends in NSW reflect the lack of industry and Government investment that ultimately led to the disbandment of the NSW Convention Bureau in 2007. Although limited marketing activity has continued via Business Events Sydney (BES), regional conferencing growth has not proved to be sustainable under current resourcing levels.

THE CHALLENGES

Throughout Regional NSW, the industry faces specific operational challenges in:

- Identifying potential business conference opportunities
- Marketing conferences to build delegate numbers
- Major regions lacking qualified staff and/or a Convention Bureau to manage sales and bid activities
- Developing competitive bids and completing bid documentation
- Responding to Conferencing Requests For Tender (RFTs) or Expressions of Interest (EOIs)
- Operational delivery of conferences
- Measuring the number and/or economic impact of conferences.

ROLE OF GOVERNMENT

The NSW Visitor Economy Taskforce recognised that action needed to be taken to arrest the declines in regional conferencing and return the sector to growth. As part of the NSW Visitor Economy Industry Action Plan (VEIAP), the NSW Government agreed to adopt a whole-of-government approach to attracting and hosting conferences in Regional NSW.

The NSW Government's specific role is to develop and implement a new NSW Regional Conference Strategy and support Regional NSW in effectively targeting opportunities, identifying capability and undertaking promotional activities that will grow the market.

ROLE OF INDUSTRY

Destination NSW, in partnership with industry, will implement eleven Strategic Imperatives aimed at building destination and industry capability, stimulating market demand and returning the market to growth.

³ AEC Group, Regional Business Events Economic Assessment 2013

⁴ Source: IVS and NVS Y/E March 2017

⁵ Tourism Accommodation Australia, Submission on Regional Business Events Funding, March 2013

CHALLENGES

SECTOR CHALLENGES

The business events sector as a whole is extremely susceptible to changes in the economy and business confidence. Although the sector has shown some growth due to overall increases in the number of business events, it is facing a long-term trend towards lower delegate attendance numbers and shorter lengths of stay. This in turn has affected yield from visitor expenditure.

For Regional NSW other specific challenges include:

Pressure on Corporate Clients to Reduce Costs

Time poor workforces, improved virtual meeting capability and low business confidence puts constraints (time and cost) on organisations and their ability to travel to and/or host conferences in regional areas.

Client Expectations

Client groups have increasingly high standards and expectations for conference services. The quality of venue, IT and telecommunication access, food and beverage services, audio visual equipment, entertainment and production services are crucial elements – particularly for repeat business.

Value Proposition

Clients are savvy and value conscious, seeking innovative and creative options to achieve their conference outcomes. The value of a conference cannot be sold purely on destination assets, such as a beach, river, or hinterland experiences – the intricacies of the conference experience itself and how it is delivered are key.

Market Readiness

Within Regional NSW there is often a misinterpretation of what it means to be a 'business conference destination'. To be a leading business conference destination, the destination must have: high-quality, meeting specific infrastructure; a supply chain of quality service providers including logistics and transport, accommodation, audio visual equipment and operators, entertainment options and quality tourism leisure product; and moderate to strong economic diversity and innovation within its region. It must also have reasonable proximity and/or access to its target markets.

To maintain or attract additional business event clients, a leading business conference destination must be able to demonstrate a successful track record in providing quality customer service and outcomes for clients.

Moving from Reactive to Proactive Marketing

During the consultation process to develop this NSW Regional Conference Strategy and Action Plan, many regional operators indicated their approach to promoting and marketing business conferences was purely reactive. Many viewed conferences as a supplementary revenue stream to simply increase utilisation of their tourism leisure product (i.e. spa treatments, wine and food tasting, nature tours and other activities) or for accommodation providers to increase occupancy rates of their existing facilities during the mid-week period.

CHALLENGES FACING NEW SOUTH WALES

Two overarching challenges need to be addressed in order to return the NSW regional conferencing sector to growth:

- NSW needs leadership and coordination in terms of regional conference opportunities, and does not currently have a regional conference strategy in place to address challenges and maximise opportunities.
- The NSW Regional conference sector needs a collaborative framework to encourage innovation and initiate concerted action.

Throughout Regional NSW the industry also faces very specific operational challenges in:

- Identifying potential business conference opportunities
- Lack of conference facilities that are equipped to cater for large conferences
- Lack of adequate, quality accommodation facilities
- Marketing conferences to build delegate numbers
- Major regions lacking qualified staff and/or a Convention Bureau to manage sales and bid activities
- Developing competitive bids and completing bid documentation
- Responding to conferencing RFTs or EOIs
- Operational delivery of conferences
- Service standards and quality of F&B offerings
- Measuring the number and/or economic impact of conferences
- Access and cost of some regional airfares.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

Destination NSW, in partnership with industry, will implement eleven Strategic Imperatives aimed at building destination and industry capability, stimulating market demand and returning the market to growth.

STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE 1: SECTOR LEADERSHIP

Establish a dedicated Regional NSW Business Conference Unit.

To consolidate and grow the sector, Destination NSW will establish a Regional NSW Business Conference Unit (RBCU) within Destination NSW.

The role of the unit is to lead implementation of the NSW Regional Conference Strategy and Action Plan.

STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE 2: A NEW DESTINATION FRAMEWORK

Develop a framework to prioritise and systematically support regional business conference destinations.

NSW regions are not equally prepared to meet the needs of the business conferencing sector; while some destinations may be able to fully service the requirements of a major international conference, others are better suited to smaller conferences sourced from Sydney or local regional markets.

The NSW Regional Conference Strategy proposes a tiered framework, which matches regional conference destinations with appropriate client groups and source markets. This is based on assessment of regional destinations against criteria such as quality infrastructure, services, industry capability and access. They are further differentiated by the size of conferences that they can handle and their relevance to different client groups. As business conferences thrive in areas closely linked to high economic growth, this is also a consideration in assessing regional conference destinations.

The proposed framework divides NSW regional conference destinations into four tiers:

- **Tier One:** Established and Growing Business Conference Destination
- **Tier Two:** Boutique Business Conference Destination
- **Tier Three:** Emerging Business Conference Destination
- **Tier Four:** Local Business Conference Destination.



Port Stephens

TIER	CRITERIA	SOURCE MARKETS
Tier One: Established and Growing Business Conference Destination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good air/road access to Sydney • Quality services • Quality and scale of infrastructure • City destination 	International Interstate Sydney Local markets
Tier Two: Boutique Business Conference Destination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Premium regional tourism product • Proximity to a Tier One destination • Moderate economic growth • Reasonable air/road access • Quality services and infrastructure 	Sydney Interstate Local markets
Tier Three: Emerging Business Conference Destination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality regional tourism product • 1-2 key primary industries • Reasonable road/air access • Quality services and infrastructure 	Sydney Local markets
Tier Four: Local Business Conference Destination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some tourism product • Some conference facilities 	Local markets



STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE 3: PARTNERING WITH GOVERNMENT AND INDUSTRY

Develop a strong collaborative network of Government and industry partners to nurture and realise regional conference opportunities.

Business events are sourced from a broad range of industries operating across primary, secondary and tertiary economic sectors. Developing strong collaborative partnerships with business and Government partners is key to the success of growing conference visitation.

STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE 4: DESTINATION INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

Assist development of business cases, which promote investment by Government and the private sector in conference infrastructure.

To ensure success as a business conference destination, the destination must have quality infrastructure, including accommodation, flexible, well-equipped meeting venues, efficient transportation networks and high-speed telecommunications.

Development Approaches

Developing or upgrading the necessary infrastructure requires both industry and Government investment which is increasingly dependent on presenting business cases that clearly demonstrate the sustainability of the business events sector within that destination.

Conferencing infrastructure also needs to be incorporated into major planning initiatives under the NSW Economic Development Framework;

examples include the Industry Action Plans, the Accommodation Supply Plan and Regional Economic Development Strategy.

To succeed in leveraging these initiatives, the industry has to work closely with the NSW Government to identify and prioritise projects based on relevance, degree of industry partnership and collaboration, and the potential to deliver outcomes.

Accommodation and Meeting Venues

Accommodation providers face significant capital investment when upgrading to target the conference market. They need to show a consistent Return On Investment (ROI) by boosting delegate occupancy as an ongoing and growing proportion of their business mix.

During stakeholder consultations, venue operators indicated that for industry to consider maintaining or developing the quality of the infrastructure required for business conferencing, they require a minimum occupancy rate of 70%.

This indicates that upgrading the accommodation and meeting venues in regional conference destinations will have to evolve as the market slowly returns to growth, led by better marketing engagement.

In the interim, Regional NSW operators and destinations have been able to present detailed and accurate information relating to destination conference facilities and services as part of their marketing effort. To date, this information has not been centrally collected and distributed or maintained consistently by regional destinations.



Rice Conference, Griffith



The Byron, Byron

STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE 5: SECTOR RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

Implement a renewed focus on research, monitoring and evaluation to identify economic impacts, trends and opportunities.

Research, monitoring and evaluation of Regional Business Conferencing is still largely in its infancy, not only in Australia but internationally. From a visitor economy perspective, the sector is a generator of measurable visitor expenditure; however, business events are also a catalyst for business growth and are a key component of the global knowledge economy.

Regions have to fight hard for Government and private sector funds to support development of their local conferencing sector. As practices such as subvention (payment of subsidies to secure major conferences) take hold in the industry and competition from other states becomes more intense, regional destinations have to be able to attract investment in their conference sector to remain competitive. To do so requires a strong business case formulated on evidence-based research, market insights, ongoing evaluation of conference benefits with timely and regular monitoring of State tourism data.

STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE 6: ACTIVATING REGIONAL NETWORKS

Develop regional networks to leverage business conference opportunities.

Proactive engagement with the business conferencing market is still largely underdeveloped in Regional NSW; while many regions note the importance of business events, their approach is for the most part, reactive. Very few have detailed strategies in place to maintain or grow the sector.

To address these issues regional operators and local conference sector stakeholders need to work collaboratively in improving skills, sharing information, identifying conference leads and responding to bids.

STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE 7: PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

Improve the quality and range of conferencing experiences through product development initiatives.

Regional destinations engaging with the highly competitive conferencing market must be able to differentiate themselves by offering a compelling range of experiences and events that can be included within a conference program.

While the destination's natural assets, existing leisure tourism product and local event calendar offer a starting point, products need to be adapted and enhanced to meet the expected service levels and operational requirements of conference organisers and their clients.

STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE 8: INDUSTRY TRAINING AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Improve industry skills through business conferencing education and mentoring programs.

Issues associated with improving core work force skills in regional visitor economies are far ranging and require an ongoing focus on vocational training delivered in partnership by industry, Government and education providers.

Improving overall service standards and skills in the areas of hospitality, catering, event management and audio-visual production will



⁸ www.nsw.gov.au/news/2014-priorities-industry-and-jobs-growth

⁹ www.nsw.gov.au/news/2014-priorities-industry-and-jobs-growth

support conference delivery. However, these programs need to be supplemented by specific business conferencing training, customised to the needs of regional destinations.

STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE 9: DESTINATION MARKETING

Improve and increase the promotion and awareness of Regional Business Conference destinations relevant to their capacity and capability.

Unlike leisure tourism, conference marketing is not usually undertaken as broad-based awareness campaigns. Instead the focus is on B2B (business to business) marketing programs indicating smaller audience segments and more direct and personalised marketing approaches.

The primary audience for conferencing is tightly segmented and sometimes hard to reach and includes Professional Conference Organisers (PCOs), National or State Associations, Corporate Event Managers (CEMs) and Government Event Managers.

Regional NSW operators are currently experiencing difficulty in selling their business conference product; marketing approaches are generally frustrated by resource and access limitations; lack of co-ordinated leadership; poor information and fragmented messaging.

Marketing Approaches

Conference organisers and their clients are primarily interested in obtaining knowledge and detailed information to make rational decisions and choices about a conference destination. They are specifically looking for factors that add value to the conference experience and elements that save time, money and resources.

Each bid also has to be customised to the specific interests of conference clients and reflect the local economic, business or industry context of the destination.

The conferencing market is also relationship-driven, indicating a need to focus on building relationships through sales visits, networking opportunities, corporate hospitality, trade show representation and educational visits.

Digital marketing is a powerful communication channel but approaches must be directed to key decision makers, indicating the importance of database development and maintenance. Content has to be professional and tailored to the interests of the audience.

Once a meeting or conference is secured, destinations can also be called upon to assist conference organisers to boost delegate attendance by providing marketing support. This ranges from advertising in specialist business publications, to electronic direct marketing (EDM) promotions.



Regional Events Conference, Wagga Wagga



Waste Conference, Coffs Harbour

STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE 10: A NSW REGIONAL BUSINESS CONFERENCE PORTAL

Prioritise the establishment of a NSW regional business conference portal and target client database.

During stakeholder consultation, client groups confirmed that they had generally low awareness and knowledge of Regional NSW conference destinations. They identified problems with accessing relevant information on-line and specialised ground assistance, and they advocated strongly for the creation of a centralised online information resource.

The importance of digital infrastructure should not be underestimated in conference marketing; decisions regarding conference destinations are often made by technology savvy and time-poor event staff. They are looking for accurate, reliable and detailed information to confirm that a destination can meet their needs and provide a quality outcome.

Information and Search Issues

Many large corporate, PCO and Government client groups consider that there are high risks associated with hosting a conference event in Regional NSW. These perceived risks relate to uncertainties in the quality of program content, infrastructure and services.

At present, they are required to undertake time-consuming searches of regional or destination websites, that are often found to contain

inconsistent information, no guarantee of quality and little or no information on experiential options specific to the needs of client groups. The effort required significantly increases the cost and time to plan the event.

In addition, they frequently require hands-on assistance (rather than general advice) from destination contacts with good knowledge of the local industry and sound understanding of the needs and expectations of conference organisers. Otherwise conference organisers believe that they will have to take specialist services with them into the region to organise transport and logistics, further adding to costs.

STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE 11: GENERATING CONFERENCE LEADS

Create and foster lead dissemination and referral.

Business leads are generated through many avenues including networking, referrals, industry alliances and targeted sales and marketing activities. However, the conference market in Regional NSW currently has an ad hoc, reactive approach to generating and managing business or sales leads.

To address the situation, the new Regional NSW Business Conference Unit will spearhead a co-ordinated approach to lead-generation by identifying new conference opportunities, developing relationships with new customers and ensuring Regional NSW is competitively positioned.



Novotel, Wollongong












Tamworth Regional Conference Centre

ACTION PLAN

ACTION	LEAD RESPONSIBILITY	PARTNERS	TIMEFRAME			
			2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE 1: SECTOR LEADERSHIP						
1. Establish a dedicated Regional NSW Business Conference Unit, funded by Destination NSW over four years initially, to lead implementation of a NSW Regional Conference Strategy. Ongoing funding thereafter will be based on the unit's progress in achieving performance targets, in conjunction with industry. Project expenditure will be supplemented by co-operative investment from industry. The focus on the unit will be to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increase awareness of regional destinations through promotion and marketing.• Support business development within the regions.• Facilitate training programs.• Manage lead dissemination and referrals to the regions.• Provide a central point of expert contact for conference clients considering Regional NSW.• Undertake research on business conferencing in the NSW regions.• Monitor and report on the initiatives of the NSW Regional Business Conference Strategy.	DNSW		<div><div></div></div>			
2. Develop and implement strategic priorities for the optimum delivery of the Regional NSW Conference Strategy.	DNSW	Industry	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>		
3. Identify and confirm Government funding to support the strategy over 4 years.	DNSW		<div><div></div></div>			
4. Develop a funding application process and disseminate to Regional NSW stakeholders.	DNSW		<div><div></div></div>			








ACTION	LEAD RESPONSIBILITY	PARTNERS	TIMEFRAME			
			2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE 2: A NEW DESTINATION FRAMEWORK						
5. Develop a tiered framework to prioritise, differentiate and support regional business conference destinations. The framework will match regional conference destinations with appropriate client groups in source markets, based on assessment of the destinations against criteria such as quality infrastructure, services, industry capability, access, size of conference they can handle, relevance to different client groups and economic growth, given business conferences thrive in areas closely linked to high economic growth.	DNSW		●			
6. Develop customised sales and marketing activities for each region.	DNSW	Destination Networks	● —————→			
7. Target appropriate source markets and client groups for each region.	DNSW	Destination Networks	● —————→			
8. Develop a destination development plan for each region that will allow it to evolve through the tiers as appropriate.	Destination Networks	DNSW, Industry	● —————→			
STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE 3: GOVERNMENT AND INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIP						




ACTION	LEAD RESPONSIBILITY	PARTNERS	TIMEFRAME			
			2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
9. Develop a strong, collaborative network of Government and industry partners to nurture and realise regional conference opportunities. Government offers many opportunities which can assist implementation of the NSW Regional Conference Strategy including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitating business connections Sourcing information, analysis and resources to assist in bid preparation As a potential client base for meetings and conferences As a potential source of funding through event sponsorship or business and industry grant programs Promoting conference destinations to different industry and business networks Supporting initiatives that can build regional capability 	DNSW	Other relevant NSW Government agencies, Destination Networks, Industry				
10. Work with Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC), NSW Trade & Investment (NSW T&I) and the NSW advisory committees of Regional Development Australia (RDA) to develop resources and business connections to assist in lead generation and bid preparation.	DNSW	DPC, NSW T&I, NSW RDA advisory networks				
11. Promote awareness of regional business conferencing capability and benefits throughout Government networks.	DNSW	Destination Networks, Relevant NSW Government agencies				
12. Explore funding opportunities to assist implementation of the NSW Regional Conference Strategy, and communicate to industry: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Event sponsorship opportunities from government agencies; Business development programs to improve industry capability; Local, national and state Government funding opportunities to assist destination infrastructure development; Federal and local Government subvention opportunities to support bids for conferences in Regional NSW. 	DNSW					








ACTION	LEAD RESPONSIBILITY	PARTNERS	TIMEFRAME			
			2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
13. Support the NSW Government's Accommodation Supply Plan to ensure that Regional NSW has sufficient capacity to meet future demand for overnight visitor accommodation.	Destination Networks	Industry				
14. Promote the opportunities for business conferences in Regional NSW to the newly formed NSW 'Knowledge Hubs' – an industry-led initiative to develop a network of collaborative partnerships, to share information, direct research and drive innovation and growth within a sector. The initiative brings together businesses, research organisations and industry associations into a cohesive group. NSW hubs include: Creative Digital; Energy; Financial Services; MedTech; Transport and Logistics and Rail.	DNSW					
15. Review the NSW Government's Industry Action Plans (IAPs) and identify potential clients and opportunities for promotion of business conferences in Regional NSW. The IAPs cover: Agriculture; Creative Industries; the Digital Economy; International Education and Research; Manufacturing; Professional Services and the Visitor Economy.	DNSW					
16. Work with Local and State Governments to position business conferencing as a priority within Regional Destination Management Plans.	Destination Networks	DNSW				
17. Explore opportunities with Government to encourage hosting conferences and business meetings in Regional NSW, e.g. mandating NSW Government funded agencies to host a minimum of one meeting/conference in Regional NSW annually.	DNSW					








ACTION	LEAD RESPONSIBILITY	PARTNERS	TIMEFRAME			
			2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE 4: DESTINATION INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT						
18. Support the development of successful infrastructure feasibility studies and business cases to attract investment and funding, by providing improved industry evidence of the benefits of business conferencing in regional NSW.	DNSW	Industry, Regional Networks				
19. Work across the NSW Government to support the effective development and integration of business conference needs into significant planning initiatives.	DNSW	Relevant NSW Government agencies				
20. Develop a detailed venue audit of conference facilities and services to support the development of a NSW Regional Business Conference portal: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Seek industry participation to complete an initial audit survey and commit to updating information regularly;Develop and conduct an initial audit survey;Establish a comprehensive data feed to the portal;Assign responsibility to an authorised representative to check and update information regularly to ensure accuracy.	DNSW	Industry				
STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE 5: SECTOR RESEARCH AND EVALUATION						
21. Commit to a renewed focus on research, monitoring and evaluation to identify economic impacts, trends and opportunities. Through face-to-face forums, business conferencing fosters innovation, education, networking, trade, research and practice. The business events industry argues that these impacts should be captured through evidence-based research.	DNSW	Industry				
22. Monitor and report on the outcomes of the NSW Regional Conference Strategy and individual destination performance.	DNSW					
23. Incorporate latest regional conferencing data (including, where possible, benchmark data against other states) in DNSW's annual schedule of market research publications – quarterly Regional Visitor Statistics destination updates and Local Government Area Visitor Profiles.	DNSW					



ACTION	LEAD RESPONSIBILITY	PARTNERS	TIMEFRAME			
			2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
24. Add an annual Market Segment Report on NSW Business Events, including latest regional data and analyses, to the DNSW publishing schedule.	DNSW					
25. Establish agreed guidelines to measure the socio-economic value of regional business conferences, in line with the Beyond Tourism Benefits methodology and delegate survey tools. Specifically agree an achievable data capture methodology to support the evaluation guidelines.	DNSW	Destination Networks, Local Tourism Organisations				
26. Prioritise a study evaluating the impacts of business conferencing in Tier 1 destinations.	DNSW					
27. Conduct exploratory studies of the impacts of business conferencing in up to three Tier 2 destinations.	DNSW					
28. Promote research findings to raise awareness within key Government portfolios and industry sectors of the broader value and economic and community potential of business conferences.	DNSW	Destination Networks, Local Tourism Organisations				
29. Develop an online survey tool (web/app) for clients to record their conference outcomes, and promote usage of the tool.	DNSW	Business Events Sydney, Tourism Research Australia, Industry				
STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE 6: ACTIVATING REGIONAL NETWORKS						
30. Develop regional networks to leverage business conference opportunities. These should include local key conference operators, business leaders, entrepreneurs, professional and education/research specialists to foster and develop new regional conference concepts and identify potential leads.	Destination Networks, Local Tourism Organisations	DNSW				
31. Develop annual business conferencing action plans for integration into local Destination Management Plans.	Destination Networks	DNSW, Local Tourism Organisations				

ACTION	LEAD RESPONSIBILITY	PARTNERS	TIMEFRAME			
			2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
32. Promote and encourage partnerships between locally based industry, Government, universities and research organisations to host business conferences relating to their specific areas of excellence and expertise.	Destination Networks, Local Tourism Organisations					
STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE 7: PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT						
33. Create targeted product development strategies within Destination Management Plans that are relevant to target markets, local economic context and available infrastructure and services.	Destination Networks, Local Tourism Organisations	DNSW				
34. Explore new conference opportunities, particularly local expertise and connections to achievements in the field of educational research and medical research, as well as innovations in agriculture, technology, business and environmental management.	Destination Networks, Local Tourism Organisations	DNSW				
35. Structure new conferences to appeal primarily to the local market, and also build on identified delegate target pools from Sydney, national and international client groups.	Destination Networks, Local Tourism Organisations	DNSW, Industry				
36. Review current and develop new destination specific conference events and experiences including: unique immersive experiences; hospitality, entertainment, sporting, cultural and team building events; corporate social responsibility (CSR) projects and a fresh range of pre and post touring options.	Destination Networks, Local Tourism Organisations	DNSW, Industry				
37. Build a portfolio of quality regional business conference packages and develop pre and post conference touring packages for delegates attending major Sydney conventions.	Destination Networks, Local Tourism Organisations	Business Events Sydney Industry				
38. Consider the potential of developing business conferences connected to major events in region, e.g. Country Music Awards of Australia (CMAA) built into the Tamworth Country Music Festival.	Destination Networks, Local Tourism Organisations	Business Events Sydney Industry				

ACTION	LEAD RESPONSIBILITY	PARTNERS	TIMEFRAME			
			2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE 8: INDUSTRY TRAINING AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT						
39. Identify specific skills and training required to meet the standards and service requirements of business events markets and develop a practical and appropriate training response.	DNSW	Destination Networks, Local Tourism Organisation, Industry associations, Business Events Sydney, Relevant NSW Government agencies				
40. Develop a business conferencing workshop training program to be held within regions for Destination Networks, Local Tourism Organisations (LTOs) and industry operators. <ul style="list-style-type: none">Workshop delivery formats to include: expert presentations; ideas forums; practical case studies of successful regional conferences; conference manuals/workbooks for later referral.Workshop topics to include: understanding the conference market; evaluating destinations/venues for the conference market; developing a conference marketing strategy; bidding for conferences; delivery of quality conference services and operations; upskilling workforces to be conference ready; industry accreditation and training options; information sources and additional resources; and measuring, benchmarking and reporting results.	DNSW	Industry Associations, Business Events Sydney				
41. Consider the provision of specialist services, or referrals, to a panel of pre-selected (approved) advisors who can provide assistance, advice and support in areas such as: event acquisition and bidding; marketing; specialist representation and business development; conference product development; conference concept/content development; conference delivery; conference analysis; research and reporting.	DNSW	Business Events Sydney, Industry				

ACTION	LEAD RESPONSIBILITY	PARTNERS	TIMEFRAME			
			2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE 9: DESTINATION MARKETING						
42. Provide a cooperative investment, matched dollar for dollar, under the Regional Visitor Economy Fund (RVEF) to support conference destination and marketing and promotional initiatives.	DNSW					
43. Develop an integrated sales and marketing approach targeted to reach conference organisers, associations and potential government and business audiences, with a focus on digital marketing, targeted business print media and publicity.	DNSW	Industry				
44. Consider the development of branding devices, such as taglines and Destination NSW endorsement logos, integrated within the existing Destination NSW destination brand identity and brand architecture, to assist regional destinations in identifying themselves as NSW conferencing destinations.	DNSW					
45. Conduct and facilitate site inspection tours of relevant NSW conferencing facilities and locations for professional conference organisers, national association executives and incentive program decision makers.	DNSW	Business Events Sydney, Local Tourism Organisations, Industry				
46. Promote Regional NSW destinations at the Asia Pacific Incentives and Meetings Expo (AIME) and other business showcase events.	DNSW	Business Events Sydney, Local Tourism Organisations, Industry				
47. Initiate a co-operative program of sales calls and trade education events aimed at building relationships and providing regular updates on latest developments in regional destinations.	DNSW	Business Events Sydney, Local Tourism Organisations, Industry				
48. Undertake co-operative planning with Professional Conference organisers (PCOs) and Business Events Sydney to identify pre and post tour opportunities and satellite meetings associated with large congress events taking place in Sydney.	DNSW	Business Events Sydney, PCOs				

ACTION	LEAD RESPONSIBILITY	PARTNERS	TIMEFRAME			
			2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
49. Prioritise new program packaging to refresh product and destination offering.	Industry	Destination Networks, DNSW				
50. Develop joint sales promotions to encourage delegate attendance and/or increase length of stay through incentives such as discounted prices of value add inclusions.	Industry					
51. Develop and maintain a comprehensive database and initiate regular electronic direct marketing (EDM) programs.	DNSW	Industry/BES				
52. Support associations and industry groups in boosting conference attendance through co-ordinated marketing programs across multiple channels, e.g. EDM, social media, advertising in industry publications and websites or publicity campaigns in trade publications.	DNSW					
53. Implement business conference promotions at events, which promote regional destinations, products and services such as the Sydney Royal Easter Show.	DNSW					
54. Participate and present at NSW Government conferences, such as the annual Local Government and Shires Association (LGSA) Tourism Conference.	Destination Networks, Local Tourism Organisations					
55. Develop destination specific conference marketing resources of a consistent professional standard, including images, selling points, detailed content, guides and online tools, to assist regions in responding successfully to sales lead referrals.	DNSW					

ACTION	LEAD RESPONSIBILITY	PARTNERS	TIMEFRAME			
			2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE10: A NSW REGIONAL BUSINESS CONFERENCE PORTAL						
56. Develop a portal incorporating a comprehensive inventory of Regional NSW facilities and services that is easily accessible to Destination Networks, Local Tourism Organisations and industry. The portal must have an appealing modern interface, and be downloadable, with multi-platform versions of apps for smartphones and tablets. The portal will include: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Quick search capability for potential clients seeking immediate information on regions and their business conference capability from a central point, without commitment for referral• Automated basic lead dissemination and referral to end operators, or a destination contact, determined by the client through opt-in or call to action requests• Advertising of special regional promotional conference deals.• Live inventory for assessing conference space and accommodation• A database of regional conference client targets across all sectors of associations, corporate, Government, PCOs and event companies.	DNSW	Industry Destination Networks, Local Tourism Organisations				
57. Deliver a broad range of content via the portal in a uniform and consistent format: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Venue information including floorplans, images and high resolution footage to showcase facilities, venues etc.• An image/footage library for use by conference organisers.• Available services, including audio-visual, transportation, team building, group tour options etc.• Information on major industries and centres of excellence in each region.• Regional and destination conference content including sample conference itineraries, experiential and social program offering, dining options, special promotions and client testimonials.• Quality rating for venue facilities and accommodation.	DNSW	Industry, Destination Networks, Local Tourism Organisations				

ACTION	LEAD RESPONSIBILITY	PARTNERS	TIMEFRAME			
			2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
58. Engage an ICT (Information and Communications Technology) specialist to review and assess the feasibility of utilising existing regional websites for the new portal, as well as the feasibility of integrating non-conference asset information from the Australian Tourism Data Warehouse (ATDW)	DNSW		●			
STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE 11: GENERATING CONFERENCE LEADS						
59. Develop a database of Association Conferences with ability to meet in Regional NSW.	DNSW	Business Events Sydney		● ———→		
60. Provide a lead generation service on the NSW Conference and Meetings website.	DNSW			● ———→		
61. Set targets for inclusion of regional satellite conferences in international conference bids for Sydney.	DNSW	Business Events Sydney		● ———→		
62. Identify partner opportunities for satellite meetings and technical/field visits that are complementary to Business Events Sydney bids already won and on the books.	DNSW	BES	● ———→			
63. Form alliances and partnerships with PCOs and host committees to 'mine' relevant conferences in Canberra, Victoria and Gold Coast for satellite meeting and pre and post touring opportunities (a partnership with a host committee of PCO is necessary to facilitate a lead-referral opportunity of this nature).	DNSW	Industry	● ———→			
64. Facilitate an improved referral process between hotel properties, including passing leads into other NSW regions.	Hotel groups		● ———→			

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NSW REGIONAL SWOT ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Destination appeal and uniqueness of coastal, hinterland and city experiences in Sydney and surrounds • Anticipated weaker Australian dollar for 2015-2016 • Progressive recovery in the global economy • Strong economic growth and projects associated with Hunter and Illawarra city regions • International standard airport in Newcastle • Strong corporate, Government and association market base from Sydney, Canberra and Brisbane (far North Coast destinations) from which to draw business. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor awareness and visibility of business conferencing destinations in Regional NSW • Impact of poor consolidation of regional product information on client buying behaviour as it becomes too difficult to access information on regions • Access – regional flights are costly; many regional areas are more than a three hour drive from Sydney • Industry highly reactive and is generally not innovative or experienced in identifying and growing local market opportunities, bidding for conferences • Disparate level of skills and difference of opinion on service standards by regional operators • Little/no standards for service levels for business conferences • Infrastructure in many regions is tired • Telecommunications, audio visual and technical support is often poor.
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New digital media and information systems planned in Business Events Sydney (BES)/Destination NSW (DNSW) • The future economic outlook of Tier One destinations to support key conference infrastructure developments • Proximity to Asia and strong export trade in some regions – in particular with Hunter and introduction of new airport services • Anticipated weaker Australian dollar for 2015-16 and beyond • Focus on domestic growth through growing population base and diversity in regional economic outlook • Gold Coast Commonwealth Games 2018, given proximity to northern NSW • Regional and national conference locations often replace off-shore in times of austerity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued slower economic growth than forecast; business conferencing and business confidence usually trails economic growth and recovery • Improved strength in competitive position of Regional Victoria and Queensland Business Conferencing markets • Increasing competition from Asia/Indonesia/ New Zealand for conferencing • Potential slot availability issue at Sydney Airport where smaller regional airlines can charter flights during peak fly periods • Privatisation of train and road infrastructure increasing costs of travel • Longer working hours, pressure to link out of office time and travel to conferences, etc • Damaging reputations for convention delivery in regional areas by provision of low or poor quality infrastructure and services offering • Sensitivity to austerity and negative media comment on organisations seen to be spending during time of austerity • Improved corporate and Government in-house meeting and conference capability and trend to host meetings in-house • Pharma codes of practice impacting on the pharma/ medical meetings. • Time poor executives, travel times and cost pressures have resulted in shorter conference stays and conferencing at 'home' or in own local area

FINDINGS FROM THE REGIONAL TOURISM ORGANISATION CONFERENCE SURVEY

As part of the consultation for development of the Regional NSW Conference Strategy an online survey was conducted with NSW Regional Tourism Offices (RTOs). The aim was to identify which destinations and regions wished to grow their business conference sector and profile existing business trends, infrastructure and industry barriers.

SURVEY FINDINGS

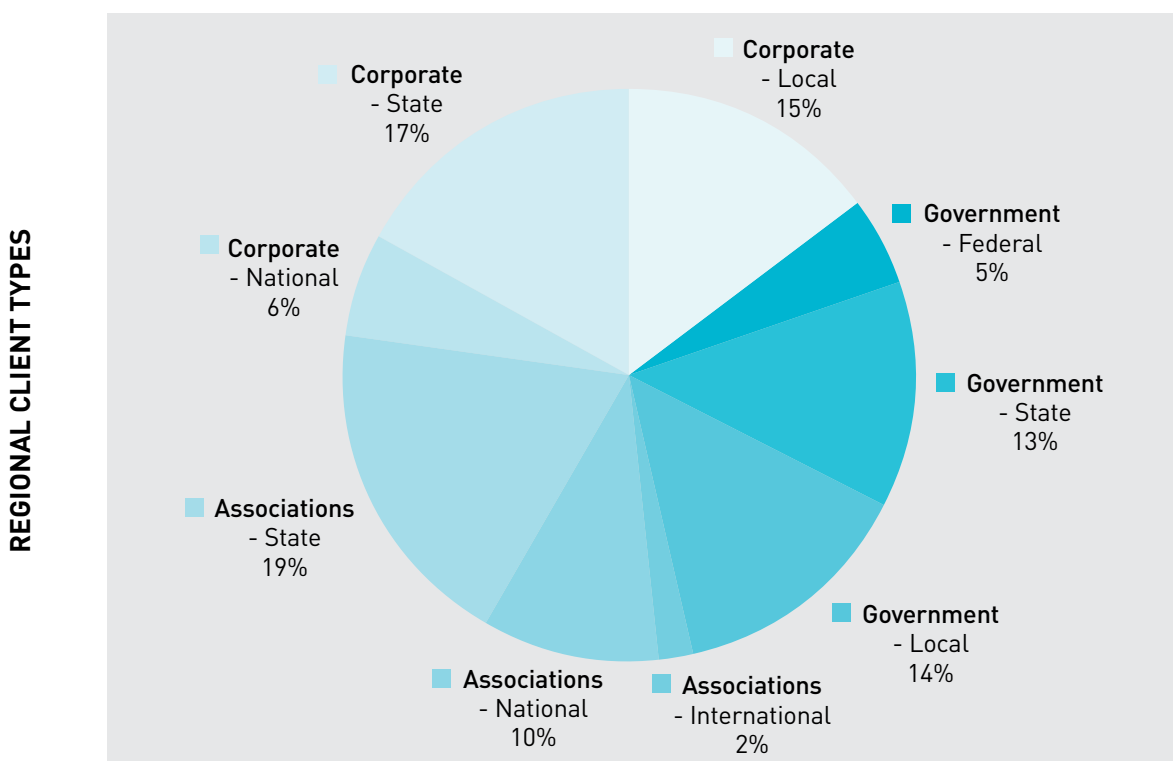
The following destinations/regions/areas identified that they wished to grow their business conference sector in the future:

DESTINATIONS AND REGIONS SEEKING TO GROW CONFERENCE BUSINESS

- Broken Hill, Outback NSW
- Central Coast
- Central NSW
- Coffs Coast
- Deniliquin
- Goulburn
- Griffith
- The Hunter
- Inland NSW - Southern Inland (Capital Country)
- Lord Howe Island
- Newcastle
- New England
- North Coast - Mid North Coast and Northern Rivers
- Murray Region
- Port Stephens
- Shoalhaven
- South Coast NSW
- Southern Highlands
- Riverina
- Young

Of those who could profile their market segments, the majority of business conferences hosted are state-based conferences (49%) followed by local conferences (27%) and international or national (24%).

The mix of client types hosting meetings in Regional NSW is fairly evenly distributed for Association, Government and corporate client groups.



Many regions identify resourcing capacity and staff capability issues that impact their current business conference operations. It is recognised that a whole-of-region focus must be included, not just individual locations or properties. It is widely accepted that there is a need to improve marketing and promotion of regions to potential clients; bid documentation and response capability; stakeholder collaboration and information sharing; research and information collection and measurement.

Stakeholders have identified that there are challenges (to varying degrees) across all aspects of business conferencing. These include:

- Identifying potential business conference opportunities
- Marketing conferences to build delegate numbers
- Developing competitive bids
- Completing bid documentation
- Delivering the conferences
- Measuring the economic impact of conferences.

The key infrastructure issues identified by the stakeholders surveyed related to conference facility capacity, including the size of main facilities (68.2%), accommodation capacity (63.6%) and air transport (59.1%). Many feel regional conference facilities are of a poor quality or simply old with ongoing maintenance issues (59.1%).

Secondary considerations included the type of accommodation, enough facilities and the location of facilities to other attractions.

Only 20% of stakeholders identified issues relating to audio visual, catering and support infrastructure.

Most destinations are self-drive/coach destinations or include some air travel. The majority of participants who responded to the survey were from destinations within a 2-3 hour drive time from Sydney. Regional areas such as the Hunter, Riverina and Coffs Harbour are well-served by local airports.

Some identified that although there is train access, generally demand for train travel for business conferencing is limited.

The main pre and post touring activities and experiences identified by respondents were:

- Nature Based (96%)
- Agricultural (88%)
- Arts/Cultural (88%)
- History and Heritage (88%)
- Food and Wine (80%)
- Festivals (76%).

CLIENTS AND SERVICES: CLIENT GROUPS AND MEETING TYPES

KEY BUSINESS CONFERENCE CLIENT GROUPS

- Professional Conference Organisers (PCOs)
- National Associations
- Corporate Event Managers (CEMs)
- Government Event Managers.

TYPES OF MEETINGS

- Corporate meetings
- Government meetings
- Association meetings
- Entrepreneurial meetings
- Academic meetings
- Charity meetings/functions
- Awards events
- Sporting meetings
- Special interest group meetings
- Military meetings
- Public meetings
- Political meetings
- Scientific meetings
- Professional meetings
- Trade meetings
- Trade union meetings
- Education meetings.

CLIENTS AND SERVICES: CLIENT SERVICE EXPECTATIONS

CLIENT TYPES	SERVICE EXPECTATIONS
Corporate	
International	Seek premium and customised service for most business conferences. Some exceptions may be made for specific trade training, technical days and tours, which will often relate specifically to a business within the region which may only require venue hire or venue hire with basic audio visual services.
Interstate	
Ex-Sydney	
Association	
International	Seek premium and customised service that is highly competitive. Pre and post touring and satellite meetings could be attractive for bigger congress meetings.
National	Seek premium and customised services or venue hire and touring experiences that relate specifically to interests and business opportunities within the region. Pre and post touring and satellite meetings could be attractive for bigger congress meetings.
State	
Government	
Federal	Depending on the nature of the meeting and the profile of delegates, these meetings will generally require: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Premium and customised services;• Venue hire with experienced service providers; or• Venue hire with catering & basic audio-visual (AV) services.
State	
Local	
Education	
University	Seek venue hire with catering and basic AV services and, in some instances, may seek experiential offers.
TAFE	
Research Excellence Centre	Depending on the nature of the meeting and the profile of delegates attending these meetings will generally require: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Premium and customised services;• Venue hire with experiences services; or• Venue hire with catering and basic AV services.
Other training providers	Seek venue hire with catering and basic AV services.

CLIENTS AND SERVICES: VENUE SERVICES REQUIRED BY DIFFERENT CONFERENCE/MEETINGS

SERVICE TYPE	Premium and customised services	Venue hire with experienced service providers	Venue hire with catering & basic AV	Venue hire only
TYPE OF CONFERENCE / MEETING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conferences Conventions Congresses Promotions/ product launches Board meetings/ retreats AGMs/EGMs[#] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conferences Conventions Congresses Satellite meetings Marketing and sales meetings Information days Board meetings/ retreats AGMs/EGMs[#] Symposium 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conventions Workshops Short courses Forums Seminars Training programs Satellite meetings Meetings Information days Board meetings/ retreats Technical/field/ study trips 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Technical/ field/ study trips Workshops Short courses Forums Seminars Training programs Exhibitions

[#] Annual General Meetings (AGMs)
Extraordinary General Meetings (EGMs)

CLIENTS AND SERVICES: TARGET INDUSTRIES AND BUSINESS SECTORS

The following industries represent targets for business conferencing in Regional NSW:

Blue Mountains:

- Tourism and Hospitality Management Education

Central Coast:

- Health and Aged Care

Central/Inland:

- Zoology and Zoo Management
- Agriculture and Animal Husbandry

Central NSW:

- Food Agriculture
- Food and Wine (Orange)
- Land and Water Sustainability (Bathurst)

The Hunter:

- Wine and Viticulture (Hunter Valley)
- Coal Mining and Coal Seam Gas Production (Newcastle)
- Clean Energy (CSIRO Newcastle)
- Education
- Medical Research (Hunter Medical Research Institute)
- Defence and Aviation Maintenance
- Government enterprises including law
- Mining

Inland/New England:

- Cotton Production (Narrabri/Moree)
- Wool Production
- Poultry Farming (Tamworth Regional)
- Aviation Maintenance (Tamworth)
- Country Music (Tamworth)
- Coal Mining and Coal Seam Gas Production (Gunnedah)
- Research – Animal Genetics and Breeding (UNE Armidale)
- Medical Research (UNE Armidale)
- Agriculture Research (UNE Armidale)

Lord Howe Island:

- Environmental Research and Education
- Marine Biology
- Eco-Tourism

The Murray:

- Food Manufacturing
- Food Agriculture
- Dairy Farming and Production

North Coast:

- Sugar Cane Production (Northern Rivers)
- Renewable Energy in Agriculture (Northern Rivers)
- Marine Biology (Port Macquarie)
- Creative Industries

Outback NSW:

- Mining
- Wool Production
- Photography and Cinematography

Riverina:

- Land Irrigation
- Rice Production
- Food Agriculture and Production
- Wine and Viticulture

South Coast:

- Manufacturing (Wollongong)
- Coal Mining (Wollongong)
- Engineering (Wollongong)
- Steel Innovation and Education (Wollongong)
- Information and Communication Technology (University of Wollongong)
- Dairy (Bega and Eurobodalla)
- Abalone (Shoalhaven)
- Ethanol (Manildra)
- Aquaculture (Far South Coast)

Southern Inland:

- Wheat Production
- Sheep Farming and Wool Production
- Potato Farming
- Viticulture
- Alpaca Farming
- Truffle Production

Snowy Mountains:

- Snow Industry
- Hydro Power Generation
- Agriculture and Animal Husbandry
- Wine and Viticulture.

INFRASTRUCTURE: CONFERENCE FACILITIES IN REGIONAL NSW DESTINATIONS

A range of facilities is on offer in various locations across NSW. A small sample is listed below:

Hunter Valley

Hunter Valley (mostly in and around Pokolbin) has existing experienced conference facilities to attract conferences of up to 2,000 delegates. Conference services in this area rated highly and offer a range of 4-4.5 star accommodation options.

Premium branded hotels and boutique function venues in region have the primary target of the ex-Sydney corporate market. Given the diversity within the local economy and growth across the business sector, these venues should consider broadening their target market to attract local conferences and meetings to fill mid-week vacancies.

Newcastle

Newcastle has been identified as a Tier One Business Conferencing destinations in Regional NSW (the other being Wollongong). The city offers a good selection of venues including Newcastle Entertainment Centre which accommodates up to 4,000 people.

Consideration should be given to developing a convention/exhibition facility to boost the city's ability to attract small/medium sized international and interstate conferences and exhibitions similar to medium facilities such as those located in Cairns, Geelong and Darwin. This should be subject to establishing the expanded local airport as an international destination airport with support from appropriate air operators.

Port Stephens

The venues and supporting accommodation in Port Stephens (including Nelson Bay and Shoal Bay) are ideally suited to smaller (up to 200 delegates) for conferences and meetings.

Blue Mountains

Conferencing destinations with 4.5-5 star accommodation in the Blue Mountains include the Fairmont Resort in Leura, which attracts conferences of 800 delegates and Lilianfels Blue Mountains Resort and Spa in Katoomba, suited to conferences of 100-200 delegates. The Hydro Majestic Hotel in Medlow Bath re-opened in late 2014 and has meeting facilities for up to 250 delegates.

Other notable conference facilities exist at the Carrington Hotel in Katoomba (200 delegates) and Waldorf Leura Gardens Resort (100-150 delegates).

Lithgow

The 5 star Emirates Wolgan Valley Resort and Spa accommodates 90 delegates. A range of high end pre and post conferencing activities are offered including dining under the stars, day spa, horse riding and 4WD activities. The venue is also marketed as a Carbon Zero certified organisation.

Oberon

Jenolan Caves offers some accommodation and facilitates conference delegations of 120 in theatre-style and 220 in cocktail-style. However, the resort and the destination, need additional accommodation capacity to house delegations of this size.

Central Coast

Gosford offers conferencing facilities catering for groups of 200-300, however, the destination will require additional capacity and accommodation offerings above 3 stars.

The Quay West Magenta Shores at The Entrance can handle up to 400 delegates while Mercure Kooindah Waters in Wyong has capacity for 400 delegates also.

Ettalong Beach offers two 4 star properties catering for conference groups of up to 700 delegates (Mantra Ettalong Beach and Ettalong Beach Club).

Terrigal offers the Crowne Plaza catering for 450 conference delegates and providing 4 star on-site accommodation, as well as venues in the 100 delegate range with on-site and off-site accommodation.

Orange

Orange Civic Centre and Orange Function Centre cater for 1,000 delegates each; however, the destination lacks branded 4-5 star accommodation to support groups of this size. There is a good range of 3-4 star accommodation and smaller conference venues catering for groups of around 100 delegates.

Mudgee

Mudgee offers the Australian Rural Education Centre for outdoor exhibitions and small meeting rooms, and the Parklands Resort and Conference Centre caters for up to 1200 delegates in the main auditorium. However, the destination lacks branded 4-5 star accommodation to support groups of this size. Smaller venues offer conferencing for groups of 50-200 with 3 star on- and-off site accommodation.

Parkes

Parkes has a Leagues Club and a Services Club catering for 400-500 delegates each. However, the destination needs branded 4-5 star accommodation to support groups of this size. Smaller venues offer conferencing for groups of 50-100 with 3 star on- and off-site accommodation.

Dubbo

The Dubbo Showground Woolpack Function Centre caters for 500 delegates, and the Regional Theatre and Convention Centre caters for 750 delegates. Taronga Western Plains Zoo offers the most experienced conferencing facilities for groups of 180-250. There is a range of options for smaller conference groups; however, the destination needs branded 4-5 star accommodation to house delegations of this size.

Tamworth

Tamworth Regional Entertainment and Conference Centre holds 4,800 delegates in theatre-style, with accommodation off-site.

Other venues include the Australian Equine and Livestock Events Centre, Tamworth Town Hall and the Capitol Theatre Tamworth.

Armidale

Armidale Ex-Services Club caters for groups of up to 750, however, it needs accommodation capacity. Smaller venues holding 100-200 delegates may be suitable for associations or education industry conferences. There is a small range of boutique-style 4 star accommodation.

Broken Hill

Broken Hill offers The Broken Hill Civic Centre catering for up to 700 delegates in various configurations; The Broken Hill Regional Events Centre catering for banquet- and cocktail-style events (900pax). The destination needs additional 4-4.5 star accommodation in the region to support facilities of these types.

Currently the region is better suited to conferences of 200-300 delegates. There are several clubs and 3.5 star hotels to support these capacities.

Albury

The Albury Entertainment Centre caters for up to 1000 delegates. The destination needs additional 4-4.5 star accommodation in the region to support these facilities when attracting certain segments of the market. This would need to be considered in order to increase the business conference sector in this area.

Currently the region is better suited to conferences of 200-300 delegates. There are several clubs and 3.5 star hotels to support these capacities.

Tweed Heads

Tweed Heads has existing conference facilities and venues to attract conferences of up to 1200 delegates. The largest facility is the Twin Towns Services Club. Branded 4-5 star accommodation to support a facility of this type may also need to be considered to support delegations of 1200, depending on the market segment and target events to the facility.

Salt by the Mantra Group in Kingscliff (Tweed Shire), a 4 star seaside resort, facilitates conferences of 100 classroom-style and 400 banquet-style, with rooms to accommodate 100 delegates.

Peppers Salt & Spa Resort caters for up to 400 delegates.

Byron Bay

Byron Bay has several 4-5 star seaside properties with accommodation to attract conferences of up to 200 delegates, notably the Lord Byron Resort, Elements and the Byron at Byron Resort and Spa.

Ballina

Ballina Beach Resort is a 4 star seaside resort that facilitates conference delegations of up to 160. However, the resort and the destination needs additional accommodation capacity to house delegations of this size.

Ramada Ballina caters for 140 delegates and often works in tandem with the Ballina RSL Club which can cater for up to 400 delegates.

Coffs Harbour

Coffs Harbour has several conference venues with accommodation which facilitate conference groups of 200-250 delegates, and two that cater for groups of 400-500 delegates (Novotel Coffs Harbour and Opal Cove Resort).

Lord Howe Island

The Lord Howe Island Community Hall can cater for up to 100 delegates, LHI Museum 50 delegates plus meeting room facilities at hotels and the Bowls Club.

Port Macquarie

Port Macquarie Panthers facilitates 1000 conference delegates, and the Glasshouse 600 delegates, however, the destination needs sufficient branded 4-5 star accommodation to support such delegations. Port Macquarie also offers The Westport Club which houses 200 delegates without in-house accommodation, and several 4 star hotels which accommodate conferences of 100-150 delegates.

Wagga Wagga

Wagga Wagga offers diverse conferencing venues including Wagga Wagga Showground and Charles Sturt University, catering for up to 1000 delegates. Accommodation to support facilities of these types would need to be considered in order to increase the business conference sector in this area.

Leeton/Yanco

Although distance from major cities is a challenge, Yanco provides a business conferencing opportunity with the Murrumbidgee Rural Studies Centre – Amaroo, which accommodates 100 delegates theatre-style and 144 rooms in 3 star accommodation. Leeton offers two facilities which accommodate 500 delegates theatre-style and 450 banquet-style. However, it needs additional accommodation capacity and accommodation offerings above 3 stars.

Griffith

The Griffith Ex-Servicemens' Club has a capacity for 500 delegates theatre-style, however, needs additional accommodation capacity and properties above 3 stars to support this facility.

Wollongong

Wollongong has existing conference facilities and venues (e.g. Novotel Wollongong, North Beach Hotel and Chifley Hotel) to attract conferences of up to 6,000 delegates, though the largest facility is the WIN Entertainment Centre which is in need of refurbishment. Services to the venue are rated highly due to its success in staging major sporting, arts and entertainment events. It has been proposed that a purpose-built conference centre will be built by upgrading the WIN Entertainment Centre or developing a new facility. Branded 4-5 star accommodation to support a facility of this type may also need to be considered to support delegations of 6000, depending on the market segment and target events to the facility.

The University of Wollongong has new state-of-the-art facilities that can cater for up to 1000 delegates; they also have off-season (educational period) capacity.

There are also a number of branded properties in the region that can cater for events ranging from 100-200 people and 300-500 delegates.

Murray/Riverina

Quest Albury, Novotel Albury and Cadell on Murray have meeting facilities.

Shellharbour, Shoalhaven and Batemans Bay

Shellharbour has two major conference venues (Warilla Bowls & Recreation and The Shellharbour Club). However, it lacks sufficient uniform level accommodation to effectively grow this sector. Likewise, Shoalhaven has a range of conference and meeting venues, including the 914 seat Shoalhaven Entertainment Centre and partnerships with University of Wollongong (Shoalhaven Campus) and TAFE Illawarra; however, it needs accommodation capacity to attract medium to large conferences.

Establishment of a large branded hotel in close proximity to the Shoalhaven Entertainment Centre and/or the development of the proposed Shaolin Temple project incorporating a 400-500 room hotel and large conference facilities would significantly increase the capacity to build the business conference sector in these areas.

Further south, Batemans Bay is well positioned and has the venues to attract multi-day conferences and meetings out of Canberra. Merimbula may attract business meetings particularly from the ACT and Victoria and has airport facilities nearby. However, it needs branded 4-5 star accommodation with purpose-built conference and meeting facilities.

Snowy Mountains

Thredbo, Lake Crackenback Resort and Spa, The Station and Bungarra all offer meeting facilities.

Kiama

The venues and supporting accommodation in Kiama are ideally suited to smaller groups of up to 200 delegates for conferences and meetings.

Southern Highlands

Bowral, Bundanoon and Mittagong offer diverse conferencing venues including experienced 4-4.5 star offerings with accommodation to support conferences of 250-300 people off-site.

Goulburn

Goulburn offers conferencing facilities catering for groups of up to 800; however, it requires accommodation capacity and accommodation offerings above 3 stars.



INFRASTRUCTURE: TRANSPORT NSW REGIONAL TRAINLINK SERVICE NETWORK



Source: Transport NSW TrainLink

INFRASTRUCTURE: RAIL TRAVEL TIMES FROM SYDNEY

TOWN	TRAIN LINE	APPROX TIME FROM SYDNEY BY TRAIN (hours)
Wauchope	North Coast	6.5
Grafton	North Coast	10
Casino	North Coast	11.5
Gosford	North Coast	1.4
Maitland	North West	2.4
Singleton	North West	3
Tamworth	North West	6
Armidale	North West	8
Moree	North West	8.5
Bathurst	Western	3.5
Dubbo	Western	6.5
Parkes	Western	6.5
Broken Hill	Western	13.5
Canberra	Southern	4
Cootamundra	Southern	5.5
Griffith	Southern	8.5
Wagga Wagga	Southern	6.5
Albury	Southern	8

Note: There is currently a lack of conference packaging of unique food and beverage offerings and entertainment options on Regional NSW TrainLink services. This presents an opportunity for rail product development for some sectors of the conference market.

GOVERNMENT AND INDUSTRY PARTNERS: TOURISM, GOVERNMENT INDUSTRY GROUPS THAT SUPPORT THE CONFERENCE SECTOR

KEY INDUSTRY AND NOT-FOR-PROFIT ASSOCIATIONS AND REPRESENTATIVE ORGANISATIONS

Meetings & Events Australia (MEA) - Not-for-profit organisation that fosters excellence in all aspects of meetings management and B2B business; www.meetingsevents.com.au

Australian Tourism Export Council (ATEC) - The peak industry body representing Australia's tourism export sector; www.atec.net.au

Business Events Council of Australia (BECA) - The peak industry body representing the interests of the meetings, conventions, incentives and exhibition sector in Australia; www.busesseventsCouncil.org.au

National Tourism Alliance (NTA) - Represents the interest of Australian Tourism and hospitality Industries to the Federal Government on issues of common interest; www.tourismalliance.org

Association of Australian Convention Bureaux (AACB) - 17 city and regional bureaux, dedicated to marketing their specific region and Australia, as premier Business Events destinations to intrastate, interstate and international markets; www.aacb.org.au

Professional Conference Organisers Association (PCO) - Not-for-profit organisation that assists conference and Event Managers with access to a range of services, best practice documentation and preferred rates from suppliers; www.pco.asn.au

Tourism Accommodation Australia (a division of AHA) - A peak industry body of accommodation providers; www.tourismaccommodation.com.au

Tourism and Transport Forum (TTF) - The peak industry group for Australian tourism, transport, aviation and investment sectors; www.ttf.org.au

COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT

Austrade-Tourism Division - Federal Government Department whose role is to advance Australia's international trade, investment, education and tourism interests by providing information, advice and services; www.austrade.gov.au

Tourism Australia - The Federal Government statutory authority responsible for international and domestic tourism marketing as well as the delivery of research and forecasts for the sector; www.tourism.australia.com

Tourism Research Australia - Australia's leading provider of quality tourism intelligence across both international and domestic markets. Data is used to underpin government tourism policy and help improve the performance of the tourism industry for the benefit of the Australian community; www.tra.gov.au

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) - Australia's official statistical organisation assists and encourages informed decision-making, research and discussion within governments and the community, by providing a high quality, objective and responsive national statistical service; www.abs.gov.au

REGIONAL ORGANISATIONS

Destination Networks represent six tourism regions (Riverina Murray, Southern NSW, North Coast including Lord Howe Island, Country & Outback NSW, Sydney Surrounds North and Sydney Surrounds South) and are responsible for facilitating visitor economy growth through representing and co-ordinating their region's tourism industry and Local Tourism Organisations (LTOs). The regions receive funding from, and work closely with, Destination NSW. Each Destination Network is responsible for developing and implementing a Destination Management Plan (DMP) and Business Plan for their region, to increase visitation and yield. Regional conferencing opportunities should be defined by them and referenced in their DMPs.

Local Tourism Organisations (LTOs)/Visitor Information Centres (VICs) - Within each region LTOs and VICs work with the local tourism industry, Local Government (Council), the RTO and Destination NSW to develop and market tourism in their local area. Each LTA and VIC operates independently.

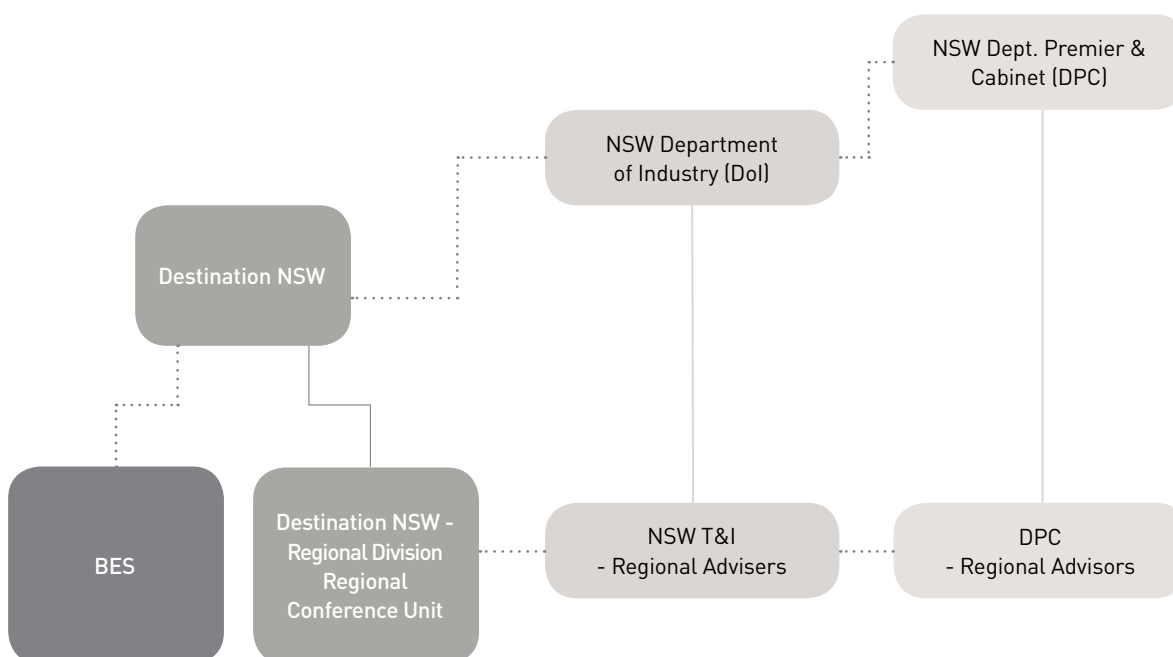
Local Councils - Advise on the building, zoning, operating and health and safety issues impacting businesses in local areas. The Council may have a unit or an employee whose role is managing tourism within the local area and may also manage a Visitor Information Centre.

GOVERNMENT AND INDUSTRY PARTNERS: GOVERNMENT AGENCY AND REGIONAL INTEGRATION

NSW Trade and Investment is the lead Government Department for trade and investment, regional infrastructure and services. The agency drives sustainable economic growth in NSW. It unites the key NSW Government economic development agencies, offices and authorities to provide maximum benefit to the State. NSW Trade & Investment strives for a strong customer service culture in all areas of service delivery.

NSW Trade & Investment develop and implement regional Industry Action Plans that support the 10 Year Plan of 2021. NSW Trade & Investment oversees Government agency integration to support the delivery of recommendations and actions under the Visitor Economy Taskforce Action Plan, which Destination NSW's Board is responsible for delivering.

Whole-of-Government linkages and integration for the business conference sector in Regional NSW can be achieved by accessing and leveraging the existing regional and integration mechanisms of Destination NSW, NSW Trade & Investment and the NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet. The agencies deliver their respective agency objectives through co-ordinated and integrated regional priorities for service delivery, planning, development and issues resolution to support the Regional NSW Business Conference Sector, and are represented as:



SOURCES OF GOVERNMENT FUNDING AND ASSISTANCE

A comprehensive funding strategy for Regional NSW business conferencing should involve a mix of the existing funding programs administered by Destination NSW and sources from other State and national programs.

The table below illustrates the streams of funding that can support regional business conferencing:

DESTINATION NSW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regional Visitor Economy Fund (marketing, product and RTO funding) Regional Flagship Events Program (event funding)
OTHER TOURISM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NSW Trade & Investment: Regional Tourism Infrastructure Fund Tourism Research Australia: Visitor Profile and Satisfaction Program (research and reporting)
OTHER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Various - training grants Various regional business grants and assistance scheme (including product, workforce and business planning)

Funding for Destination Networks and Local Tourism Organisations

Destination Networks and LTOs are usually funded:

- Wholly or partly by membership-based funds from operators
- Wholly or partly funded by the Local Government (Shires or Councils)
- In some instances, whether wholly-funded or membership-funded, some receive dollar-for-dollar matching of funds from Destination NSW or their relevant Local Government.

Destination NSW: Regional Events Program

Destination NSW's Regional Events Program supports the marketing of events with tourism potential in Regional NSW to serve as flagships for the region – building its image and boosting visitation numbers.

Destination NSW has four event funding programs. For more information go to website destinationnsw.com.au

Tourism Research Australia: Destination Relevant Tourism Research Program (DRTR)

Tourism Research Australia provides research information that supports improved decision making, marketing and tourism industry performance for the Australian community. The aim of the Destination Relevant Research Program is to undertake research on strategic issues of importance not only nationally but at a state and regional level.

Meetings & Events Australia and the Australian Events Academy - Commonwealth Government Funding of Nationally Recognised Training

Meetings & Events Australia (MEA) in conjunction with the Australian Events Academy (AEA) are exploring Government funding for nationally recognised training for the Tourism and Events industry.

These organisations seek expressions of interest for individuals and/or employers who may be interested in participating in this training opportunity. They will then provide classroom training, some of which could be delivered within regional locations.

CONFERENCE EVALUATION: BEYOND TOURISM RESEARCH MODEL

The Beyond Tourism Benefits – Measuring the Social Legacies of Business Events study was conducted by the NSW University of Technology (UTS) and commissioned on behalf of Business Events Sydney (BES). The research responded to a need identified at Business Events Council of Australia's 2009 Business Events Summit which called for a new paradigm to consider the positive impact of business events beyond the direct tourism spend.

The study included an online survey of 1090 attendees (comprising delegates, sponsors, exhibitors and members of the organising committee) to five international congresses held in Sydney between 2009 and 2011. The findings of the research identified that business conferences provide benefits and outcomes which can be considered as leaving intrinsic, practice, social, economic and attitudinal legacies.

Legacy types include¹²:

Intrinsic legacies are the opportunities afforded by congresses to delegates to develop their knowledge, skills and practices to fulfill part of their potential to work within the chosen industry sector.

Practice legacies result from the skills and knowledge that delegates gain and are directly integrated into their professional practices and organisations.

Social legacies represent the relationships that are enhanced and developed, and the broader benefits that accrue to the communities in which the congress is held. Business events develop a social space that is important, as it facilitates collaborative learning.

Economic legacies are realised through: development of social networks which affect the flow and the quality of information; trust as people come to know and understand others; dissemination of new knowledge resulting in improved workforce practices, better education, new investments and better industry sector policies.

Attitudinal legacies arise from the reactions of delegates through their experiences at the congress, and from Governments, the private sector and other individuals who become aware of important issues that are communicated through the international and local media.

The research identified five recommendations including the need for:

- Convention bureaux, national associations and event organisers to leverage the benefits and outcomes of business events to better plan and deliver outcomes
- Organisers to improve the chances of dialogue between exhibitors, sponsors and other business event delegates to improve innovation and product development
- Utilise the findings of the research to educate national and local associations of the benefits of hosting congresses in Sydney and NSW; and the development of goal setting and evaluation templates to support planning and measuring event legacies
- Further research undertaken regularly to support improved understanding of the benefits for stakeholders and enable international benchmarking
- For Business Event organisers and national associations to use the information to better plan for their future events to support marketing to goal setting and to leading change.

¹² D. Edwards, C. Foley, K. Schlenker, University of Technology, Sydney
Measuring the social legacies of business events 2011

BEYOND TOURISM RESEARCH MODEL BENEFITS AND OUTCOMES: LEGACIES ARISING FROM BUSINESS EVENTS

The research provides a table of the benefit and outcome legacies arising from business events which maps the benefits to the five legacy types:

GENERAL BENEFITS AND OUTCOMES	Intrinsic	Practice	Social	Economic	Attitudinal
Exposed delegates to new insights, knowledge and ideas	▲	▲		▲	
Fostered net working to bring people together to share new knowledge and ideas			▲		
Focused on the latest research and its practical applications		▲			
Led to the dissemination of new knowledge, techniques, materials and/or technology to the professional sector		▲			
Contributed to building the knowledge and capabilities of young people working in the sector	▲	▲		▲	
Contributed to building the knowledge and capabilities of graduates who enter the field				▲	
Contributed to improving the quality of education in the field				▲	
Led to net working that resulted in the generation of ideas that drive future research agendas			▲		
Enabled the international community to focus its attention on global issues and challenges		▲			
Acted as a catalyst for research collaborations		▲	▲		
Resulted in the creation of business relationships			▲		
Resulted in research collaborations that have led to the development of new products and technologies				▲	
INDIVIDUAL BENEFITS AND OUTCOMES GAINED	Intrinsic	Practice	Social	Economic	Attitudinal
Opportunities to share knowledge		▲	▲		
New knowledge and ideas that have enhanced my professional practice	▲	▲			
Affirmation of my current research and/or practice	▲	▲			
New contacts			▲		
A global perspective	▲				▲
A renewed sense of purpose	▲				▲
New knowledge and ideas that have enhanced my teaching	▲	▲			
New knowledge and ideas that have enhanced my research	▲	▲			
Opportunities for career advancement	▲				
Opportunities for research collaboration		▲			
Opportunities for business collaboration		▲		▲	

BENEFITS AND OUTCOMES TO THE HOST DESTINATION	Intrinsic	Practice	Social	Economic	Attitudinal
Facilitated networking opportunities for local delegates			▲		
Exposed local delegates in the congress destination to cutting edge research and world's best practice		▲			
Enhanced the capacity of the professional sector in the congress destination		▲		▲	
Showcased local talent from the congress destination					▲
Raised the profile of participating local organisations, associations, and/or centres from the congress destination					▲
Resulted in the implementation of new knowledge, techniques or materials into professional practice in the congress destination		▲			
Enhanced the capacity of the academic sector in the congress destination		▲		▲	
Implementation of new knowledge, techniques or materials into professional practice that have improved outcomes for the community in the congress destination		▲	▲	▲	
Provided research and net working opportunities for local postgraduate research students from the congress destination		▲	▲		
Increased the attractiveness of the education sector in the congress destination for academics and students outside the congress destination				▲	
Enhanced the reputation of the congress destination as capable of driving social change and action			▲		▲
Raised awareness of broader issues at the congress destination			▲		▲
Raised both public and government awareness of sector-specific issues in the congress destination					▲
Received local and international media coverage that reflected positively on the congress destination					▲
Provided opportunities for local organisations, associations, and/or centres from the congress destination to access funding support from government and/or the private sector				▲	
Resulted in expressions of support for the sector from government representatives in the congress destination					▲
HOW INDIVIDUALS USED BENEFITS AND OUTCOMES	Intrinsic	Practice	Social	Economic	Attitudinal
Shared information gained with colleagues and peers		▲			
Applied new insights to professional practice		▲			
Shared information gained with students		▲			
Formed or strengthened collaborations with researchers and/or practitioners from the congress destination			▲		
Formed new collaborations with international researchers and/or practitioners			▲		
Strengthened advocacy and/or policy work				▲	▲
Refined existing research		▲			
Applied new insights to research programs		▲			
Undertaken new research		▲			

The Beyond Tourism research methodology is being considered for adoption by other leading global cities including: Abu Dhabi, Durban, London, San Francisco, Seoul and Toronto.

Note: The nature of this research and method has been developed with a focus on the benefits of international congress events and may need further adaption for regional conferences. UTS is of the opinion that the approach to future research must maintain the rigor of the previous study and is recommended to be undertaken by appropriately skilled researchers.

Contact: Destination NSW

Level 2

88 Cumberland Street

Sydney NSW 2000

Postal address:

GPO Box 7050, Sydney NSW 2001

Email: info@destinationnsw.com.au

www.destinationnsw.com.au

Tel: (02) 9931 1111

Fax: (02) 9931 1490

