

## **CLOSING ADDRESS**

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In choosing the conference theme for this year's South West Focus Conference I have to say the Committee was pretty ambitious. The South West of Australia is a region of 24,000sq kilometers, 135,000 people an economy worth around \$9.0 billion. We are not very big on a global scale and we are certainly not all that well known.

The hotspots we chose were Europe and Russia, the Middle East, China and India. With the exception of Europe all of these economies are undergoing immense change and growth, and together have a combined domestic product in the order of \$27trillion USD. We only have to make a minuscule impact in these markets to make a big impact on our South West.

Kevin's keynote address kicked the first goal for the conference. Apart from an overwhelming urge to whirl my jacket around after he had finished, I think he took us back to some pretty basic facts. Opportunity is not always where you expect it. The best opening line is "hello", followed up with learning and sharing. Kevin said to us the future is in front of you, it's just you can't always see it.

When we held the last South Focus Conference 2 years ago who would have imagined the current global financial crisis. As we review what we have heard today who would have foreseen a new industrial park in Collie spring up in the midst of a financial crisis. A park that will set new benchmarks in fast tracking approvals with a time line of 12 months to go from state forest to zoned industrial land.

We could not have foreseen Perdaman opening up a totally new market for what is essentially Collie Coal reprocessed into Urea for India, and basing a \$3.5 billion plant at Collie.

Kevin told us opportunity is often to be found where people don't normally look. On the back of this investment is a new relationship with India which will lead to visits, exchange of ideas and perhaps further opportunity.

The Australian Center for Digital Innovation's director Alan Lindsay said the scale of the title did not make headway with the Commonwealth but it certainly has with the rest of the world. Bunbury is part of a new network of partnerships in digital animation taking us into a whole new world of opportunity. Would we have foreseen this at the last conference – possibly, but no one then was really certain how digital technology would unfold for us.

Kevin's theme about saying hello resonated with our speakers on the 'global hotspots'. Noel Ashcroft spoke about the opportunities that exist at the premium market in Europe and Russia and the importance of having gained a foothold working the market. I distinctly heard him say you have to watch the French in the wine sector, but I wasn't quick enough to get the name of the Spanish wine he highly recommended.

Edmund Damouni and Vada Ng spoke about the trade environment in the Middle East and China. Both countries have emerging wealth, with significant development opportunities and a growing demand for food, wine tourism and other opportunities that flow from people who have discretionary expenditure. Edmund particularly reminded us to pay attention to the detail. I was always told coke was bad for you but here was proof – don't always assume reading is from left to right.

The important message here was about building relationships, learning about others, and understanding. This is why the Chambers, the South West Development Commission, the Port, local governments and many others are pursuing the development of business and cultural relationships with overseas groups. Kevin gave us some very basic statements of wisdom when he said hello is the best business word and business leaders are in the business of building bridges.

Adam took us through the huge potential of engaging globally but again the message was be well planned, explore the opportunities and take the time to become acquainted with the people you want to do business with. At the end of the day they have the same aspirations as people everywhere but we all have a different way of expressing those aspirations.

I have often heard people say "what has the South West got to offer"? I think the answer is very easy, it is excellence. Nearly all of our products are at the premium end of the market and this is our greatest strength when going overseas. We cannot compete on the mundane but we can compete on excellence. A bloke who spent a lot of time writing well before suit cases had wheels said "we are what we repeatedly do". Excellence then is not an act but a habit. With that in mind I have to say the South West is a habit forming region.

There are a few thanks I would like to make for the conference. To all our speakers thank you for taking the time to be with us and for your thoughts and insights.

Our major sponsors; SMR, a South West company which many of us have seen grow from strength to strength. Griffin energy a long time supporter, the South Western Times, Telstra, AusIndustry, Numans, Landcorp and the Bunbury Port Authority. And the Board of the South West Development Commission for their continuing support.

I would particularly like to thank the committee members chaired by David Kerr and supported by Jenny Dyer from Motive Conventions, Julie Wade and Teneille Watson from the Commission.

David always brings a profound sense of optimism and new ideas. I would also like to acknowledge Rolf Stene who is without doubt the master of bridge building.

On behalf of the Committee I would like to invite you to join us for refreshments at the closing function.