## Achieving Sustainability in Business Events; Challenging the Role of Personal Values

*Judith Mair\* & Leo Jago* °

\* Victoria University, Australia, judith.mair@vu.edu.au
° Victoria University, Australia, leo.jago@vu.edu.au

### Introduction

Achieving sustainability is a challenge for all of society, but one that may prove especially problematic for the business events sector. Tourism in general and the business events industry in particular may be even more susceptible than other sectors to changing public opinion regarding travel, particularly air travel and long haul flights. Long haul destinations, because of their physical location, are likely to be more susceptible than other destinations. As some business travel is discretionary in nature, it is likely that corporations will cut back on this travel in seeking to reduce the environmental footprints of their organisations.

In recognition of these potential impediments to business tourism, a number of stakeholders in the business events sector have taken steps to improve their sustainability performance and profile.  High visibility projects such as the new Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre, which is the first convention centre in the world to be awarded a six star green star rating (Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre, 2008), along with a number of less conspicuous developments have been at the forefront of the business events sector's response to climate change (Melbourne Convention and Visitors Bureau, 2008).  Conclusive research, however, on whether consumers are interested in or willing to pay extra for such 'green' products appears to be lacking (Bergin-Seers & Mair, 2008). Given that consumers do not appear to be driving the business events sector's push for sustainability, it is interesting to reflect upon who is driving the push for suppliers to increase their investment in sustainable facilities and practices.

Recent research has suggested that the values of influential owners, managers and members of staff may be of particular importance in determining the extent to which business events suppliers are willing to become more sustainable (Mair & Jago, 2009).  In addition, a number of other studies have identified values, or the presence of someone for whom the environment is an important personal issue, as being an important driver of greening (*inter alia* Bansal & Roth, 2000; Kusyk & Lozano, 2007; Marshall, Cordano, & Silverman, 2005).  Other drivers of sustainability in industry have been identified (including gaining a competitive advantage, complying with regulations, and stakeholder pressure), but

for the most part, the literature in this area concerns itself with producing lists of potential drivers, and in some cases, testing the validity of these drivers in a specific industrial context. Relatively little research has examined the dimensions of these individual drivers. This paper documents an exploratory study which aims to examine the personal values of suppliers in the business events sector and determine the extent to which personal values can and do play a role in achieving sustainability.