**2nd Australian Universal Design Conference**

**Transcript of the Panel Session: The Economics of Inclusion**

**Minor edits by Jane Bringolf**

**Panel Members** were Ms Ro Coroneos, Lendlease; Ms Sally Coddington, Curb Cut Effect, The Hon Kelly Vincent MLC, South Australia, and Mr Paul Nunnari, Department of Premier and Cabinet (NSW).

MS RO CORONEOS:

I want to say upfront that we are not perfect at this, we still have work to do in this space, but being responsible for the social strategy at Barangaroo South, one of the claims we make about that development is that it is world‑leading, that it is world class and it's certainly superlative in terms of its sustainability features. When I look at it from a social sustainability perspective the question did arise, “how are we demonstrating inclusiveness?” and in reality there wasn't a very strong response, there was a compliance response of course, but it prompted me to really think about what is the experience of people coming to a place that will eventually have 23,000 people working there, about 1.8 million visitors a year, what are we actually going to do to create a sense of dignified and equitable access at Barangaroo South.

So the starting point was an internal inquiry and we did this in partnership with the Australian Network on Disability, who were fantastic as collaborators, and that exercise was really interesting. So we engaged with development managers - these are the people that develop and negotiate leasing deals for the site, project managers and designers and it was evident that people's lived experience was often quite removed from ‑ there wasn't that personal contextualisation of thinking about how you design a space for somebody who might have a condition, be it visual or a mobility.

If you think about almost 20% of the Australian population has a condition of some sort with an ageing population on top of it, the ability to design, to think more thoughtfully about designing places that people feel included is an area that's in a lot of respects, a bit of a no‑brainer, but it was evidence there was work to be done to build that awareness internally. In those consultation sessions there were a lot of ah‑ha moments by people, particularly with designers who said "My goodness, of course, you would need to look at this early on in the design stage". T traditional property view is that you kind of do a bit of a tick and flick, and I don't mean that in a facetious way, but you send it off to an expert consultant who will vet the Australian Standard compliance requirements and job done. Then for those older buildings there's often the capital expenditure headache of having to retrofit. So there is this ‑ it's not uncommon to have that kind of response of well, it's going to cost a lot more money and why would I do it because it's not going to be affecting a lot of the population anyway. So there is that implied attitude there.

So in setting out to develop guidelines, we were extremely fortunate to have the Westpac group, who moved to the middle tower at Barangaroo South and they had been on their own journey as well in building in inclusive design features in their commercial office fit‑out, and we were able to showcase that. So I have to acknowledge Westpac for their collaboration in this as well and I think if you go to the AND website and look up design for dignity guidelines you'll see examples there and very much principles‑based sort of guidance around things to think about when you are designing inclusive spaces.

So we were able to showcase Westpac's fit‑out and that takes away that very technical language that's used around how you create the appropriate spaces. It was about showing visually and using more approachable language around what's possible. Actually if you do it early on and you take that principles‑based approach, and are a bit more thoughtful and mindful about the spectrum of conditions, not often complementary, sometimes in conflict, but to demonstrate that thoughtfulness, it really then resonates with people. Designers in particular are able to get that immediate appreciation of what's possible.

If you do it early enough, it doesn't really have to cost all that much more because you build it in as any other design requirement in a design briefing stage, and that was the big take‑out.

So now it has provoked a big conversation in our organisation. It means how do we use this companion to other standards and guidances when we design spaces? How do we have a top of mind discipline to make sure that when we are designing places that we are being more thoughtful about the small details? It's often the small touches, the type of door handle you use, the way you configure security barriers in a foyer, having counters that are not too high, and having those consciously built into the design phase.

Now economically why is that good for business? It's pretty obvious. Why would I go to a place where I don't have the level of amenity and I don't have the feeling of comfort and wellbeing and if I'm not going by myself, I'm going with an entourage, then of course we're all going to stay longer, we're going to spend more money and we're going to come back again. So if we talk about it from a retail perspective, you know, going to shops, to food court areas, higher foot traffic is good for business, it's good for your rental yields and it's good for your tenancy. So it makes sense that if I'm providing those amenities, then I know that people will have the confidence to come back again and patronise those spaces again.

So there isn’t anything particularly complex about that from a business perspective. I think it's just about being mindful in that early phase around thinking through who your end users are going to be, and it's not your own bias that should dictate that. It really needs to be a bit broader than that and a bit more mindful of the demographic that is changing already.