**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).

**Q and A Session**

DELEGATE: I was really, really fascinated about the data because in our New Zealand disability strategy we do not collect enough data to then provide the evidence that we need to support our arguments. So I'm really hoping you can pass this on to our lovely conference organisers that we can have some additional data, additional research to support the work we do. So that walk away pound research sounds fantastic.

MS SALLY CODDINGTON: About the data, there's not a lot out there. So I know ‑ I'm sure Paul has read the stuff that I quoted and I know that I've read the stuff that Paul quoted, so I think that we still need to keep creating data.

MR PAUL NUNNARI: Yes. And just to add to that quickly, I'm starting with events to incorporate accessibility questionnaires into their exit surveys, so that might be something you can do in your space if you're working in the event space or business space, any exit incorporate accessibility. We do it with New Year's Eve, we pose a question did you attend New Year's Eve festivities because accessibility considerations were provided for the event and over 85% of respondents ticked yes. It's clear if you provide the accessible experience, people will come to it. And likewise the opposite question was posed would you attend if it wasn't provided and 75% said no. So it's clear that the data is out there, it's just a matter of bringing it all together.

DELEGATE: Ro, I had a question about your role in Lendlease and I know in speaking to you at other times that you're clearly passionate about the topic and very keen to see more of this happening. I just wondered, do you have supporters at Lendlease or are you a lone voice, how does it work for you?

MS RO CORONEOS: Some days, yes. It's an idea and it shouldn't be an idea really, but it's a new way of looking at how we design places. So to go to say, an in‑house design team and say to a bunch of architects "Here's something I prepared earlier, what do you reckon", and for them to go "Oh, my God, we've been trying to get this off the ground for like five years and how is it that you've been able to do it". I have to say because I'm on a project and I'm a little bit isolated in that regard from, if you like, the machinery of an organisation, I do also in my role see it as a kind of product development type role where we do have to come up with new ideas and it shouldn't be like that. But I'm given the space to be creative and take it to the next level in terms of how we deliver our urban regeneration spaces. I've had that imprimatur, the approval, from our managing director on the project to do that. So that means then I can say "Really, are we really that world class in this space, or have you thought about this?" and go away and work something up. Then have that internal engagement and for folks to go "oh, yeah, okay, yes, let's adopt that". Then how do you integrate the principles and approaches into your standard operating procedure. It sounds a bit dry ‑ and there's a cultural change exercise in that because it means people are going to have to start being a bit more mindful about these additional elements or looking at how you design a space in a different way earlier on, and so on, as I've described.

Am I alone in that regard? No, but to embed it into retail projects or other commercial projects. I'm finding that there are other pockets of the organisation that are referring to the Design for Diversity guidelines and incorporating it into their design practice. I've even had the Green Building Council adopt the guidelines as a standard that would be used for the Green Star standard, which is how you design sustainable buildings. So in the social sustainability component, they're taking the guidelines and using that as a credit that you can get for innovation in a design in a building.

DELEGATE: Other than the obvious, how do you measure the social impact of universal design?

THE HON. KELLY VINCENT: I think that's a really good question. Because ‑ and I'm not a researcher, I'm not an expert in absolutely anything at all, but ‑ no, I'm deadly serious, don't laugh, but my feeling is that that we will have achieved it when there is nothing left to measure because think about what we measure at the moment ‑ complaints, things that are wrong, you know, everything that's wrong is basically what we're measuring. Everything that we're missing out on.

So it's basically I think when there's no specific research project left because people with disabilities aren't having to make their case all the time is when it will be succeeding. And that might be quite controversial to those of you in the room who are researchers and you can tell me if I'm right or wrong and we can go to an accessible pub and debate that, I'm looking forward to it, but that's my gut feeling, that when there's nothing wrong left to measure then we'll have succeeded.

DELEGATE: This is for all of you. With inclusion, universal design and everything, why can't we just get it legislated? What's holding it up? I think Kelly you probably have the most experience with this. What's stopping COAG from saying every new building has to be ‑ it's all simple for everyone in this room, but people outside aren't doing it.

THE HON. KELLY VINCENT: There is still so much misinformation out there which is exactly why we're up here having this discussion about the economics of inclusion. So much debate is still about the economics of it. We're still looking at that as a deficit, we're still looking at that money in deficit even though it could well be cost neutral rather than an investment. The more we bring our friends to parties, to venues, to concerts and the more we can bring ourselves there, it's an investment in getting that audience in to that venue. So we really need to flip that conversation around I think. It happens incredibly slowly because anyone who is involved in politics knows that people like developers have often an extraordinary amount of sway in these debates. I also think that part of talking about the economic side of it and flipping that around. We have disability groups and yes we're learning to collaborate a bit more across different types of disability and so on, but then we have single parent support groups and on and on and on it goes. I wonder what might happen if we all got into a room together and said "even though I don't have a wheelchair or a walker, I have my kids in the pram and I'm always lifting the pram up and down”.

Recently I had a very public stoush with the Adelaide City Council about a scheme they had for grants for the renovation of a shop front, things like new furniture and a lick of paint and that sort of thing. Dignity for Disability came out swinging and said you can enjoy the fresh lick of paint as long as you can get into the building. We were contacted by a number of parents saying thank you because I feel like even though you're talking about this from a disability perspective, it is about my kids and the pram and my nan or mum with the walker. So we all need to get over our own silos and work together to lobby. I know that's a far, far more complicated task than I'm making it sound, but I think it's something that we do need to consider very seriously. I don't know if that answers the question at all.

DELEGATE: Kelly, just following on from that last question, the birth of the NDIS ‑ I was one of the people who put through a cost benefit submission to them. There's a government report, the Productivity Commission Report, the government goes to all the time to look at expenditure and look at what's a good cost benefit spend. Obviously they've committed billions to the rollout of the NDIS. So just based on that last question, universal design should be borne out of the development of the NDIS if we're going to follow through with the argument from the start about why we're doing the NDIS.

THE HON. KELLY VINCENT: I think it's really important to remember that the NDIS was essentially conceptualised by a group of economists. Ultimately the NDIS is not about making people feel good, about oh, we’ll give Paul a nice new wheelchair so he can do whatever he wants to do. It is about enabling the economic empowerment of people with disabilities and family carers also, a lot of the research shows because of the independence of people with disabilities, family carers who might have had to surrender work commitments to support their family member, will be able to return to the work force.

MR NICK RUSHWORTH: One of my enormous responsibilities each and every year is to set the theme for National Brain Injury Awareness Week. The last theme for the Week was young stroke. So while the median age is around 75 years in this country, 1 in 4 strokes happens to a person of working age, 1 in 5 to a person less than 55 years of age. At the end this woman who was in her 60s, maybe 70s, came up to me and said, "That was really, really great, if not inspiring". But I went to exactly the same event in the 1970s. So what fascinates me is, what aren't builders, what aren't developers, architects, and economists hearing? What aren't they getting from advocates that can make this kind of change possible? What do they want to hear that they're not hearing?

MS RO CORONEOS: Wow, there's a diverse group of people in that. Look, my observation is ‑ and it's my personal opinion ‑ that they are quite siloed in the way that they look at issues at times and if you're looking at a development each comes to the table with a particular expertise and with a tendency to work in somewhat of a linear fashion. The other thing is a culture of compliance and what I've been talking about is actually going a step above that and actually embracing voluntarily and saying yes, we're going to embark on this. But it's about having that conversation not in techny-speak, but in human terms about this is how a design does or doesn't deliver.

The construction mindset is if you're the client, you just tell me, if you want a green box, I'll build a green box because it's a very cost‑focused sector. They're not going to voluntarily go "well, by the way I thought I might do this as well" because there's a cost to that. So there's no incentive from a builder's perspective to do anything over and above what the client has asked for. From a developer's perspective, their own lived experience can often be quite privileged and quite removed from understanding an everyday person's experience, an end user's experience. There's a cultural aspect to it. So someone has to bring that to the fore and say ‑ join the dots in effect and say "Do you realise that if your design or your building doesn't meet the needs of the end users, sure you've done it, you've delivered it, but is it the best outcome and what does that say about you in terms of your brand and your offering and your design because it's something that's there for a very long time". Advocates need to be more visible. The conversation has to come to the table. At the moment they're quite removed ‑ in short.

MS SALLY CODDINGTON: I don't think it's about what they're not hearing. It's not about us telling anyone anything. I think ultimately at the most basic level the difference between 1960 and now is that people are still not disability confident. People are still really uncomfortable with disability and they just don't want to prioritise it.

MR PAUL NUNNARI: Can I add too in the political legislative context as well. It's about having a standard to tick against. When you go through Bills and ultimately law, it's all about guidelines and reference to something that people need to meet, convention to comply with, and as an observer, I think that's the universal design concepts greatest enemy. I don't think most people get what universal design means to be honest, and I think everyone's perspective is quite different. So it's hard to have ‑ when you've got a building code and you've got a width of a ramp or whatever, there's a clear measurement that you've got to meet. With universal design it's very different and I don't think government is there yet in that thinking. Kelly, correct me if I'm wrong, but government is quite risk aversive and if they get criticised for something, they need to say well, we did it and it was measured against this to this standard.

I believe it will come. I can use the example of flexible working hours. 10 years ago that was something that was completely foreign at least in government, but I think we're getting there and I think universal design is just building up momentum and it will keep happening. I think also, again as an observer, there's a bit of conflict between your traditional access consultants, who are that compliance based, with the philosophy of universal design. I think it's about those two groups getting together and saying we're actually all on the same page and then using Ro's point in regard to dignity of access, let's make it as inclusive and accessible as we can for everyone and I think when we get to that mindset, then hopefully other people actually get what the whole concept is about. But we're not there yet.

MS RO CORONEOS: It depends on what the client is asking for also. If the client is not aware or engaged about that, then it falls through the cracks. It will become a compliance item, but there's no push, there's no impetus to take it beyond that because the client's view of the world doesn't contemplate in the same way either.

DELEGATE: First, I think there's a gravitas issue. 20% of people identify with having disability, but still that's not the majority of people, but it will happen because we've got a rapidly ageing population. The baby boomers are the most wealthy, most educated and most cantankerous group of people who have probably lived in recent generations. They won't no accept that the environment has to change, so it will change, there's no doubt. It will change because they'll make it change, we'll make it change. But I think people like Kelly and other people who advocate in a very positive way, that's the other aspect of it.

To pick up on Paul about education, look at the Livable Housing Design Guidelines. One of the issues they had when dealing with that, they couldn't call it universal design because that wasn't universal design. They had to come up with a new term which was Livable Housing. So I think there is an issue of language, it's about people understanding what universal design is, but also how do we make it so natural that we don't even - to pick up on Kelly's point - we don't have to have this conference in 10 years' time because it's all embedded, there's no such thing as universal design in 10 years’ time. It will happen, but we have to get through this stage and we have to push on different fronts.

MS RO CORONEOS: I feel like this is where sustainability was about 15 years ago and it was all about trying to get people on board with the concept of why it was good business or the right thing to do and I think the landscape of social sustainability, and I characterise this as part of that landscape, is not that dissimilar to that sort of debate that used to happen. So I do feel that it will be mainstreamed and it will become business as usual, but I think it's about the discourse of getting  everybody on board with the concept of what needs to be done beyond just compliance and about the experience of inclusion and what that looks like and having examples of what that looks like that are very tangible.

DELEGATE: Just to shift it a little more to education and again commenting on your idea of sustainability, being an educator for 11 years of young university students, I found that they're becoming more receptive to the idea of designing for people with disability. There is quite a significant attitude change, that it is almost possible to teach empathy to these young students. I feel like a lot of our efforts are spent on educating adults, policy makers, lawyers, architects, builders, developers, and really the emphasis is not on educating the younger generations, but when you look at sustainability, for instance, in our primary schools and our high schools, it's embedded into the curriculum of State schools and private schools. So really if we want change and these young people are going to be the leaders of tomorrow, we really need to start to educate about universal design, inclusivity, thinking about differing embodiments, into our younger generations because again there seems to be a gap there.

MS RO CORONEOS: Totally agree. And actually it's funny, we did an e‑learning portal just on that point, but in the context of sustainability ‑ we did an e‑learning portal which was looking at the sustainability design principles, of which social sustainability sits within, and have that on our website. It is line with the year 9 and 10 geography curriculum. That is now being used as a resource for teachers and students in the New South Wales public school ‑ well, school system. This should be no different. So it's about people turning their minds to it and saying what does that mean, what does it look like, where are the voices that talk about that and then having those examples and having the sorts of activities for children to learn and understand the value of diversity.

DELEGATE. I just wanted to follow up on the comment about COAG, about why don't we just do it, and also on the issue of the client asking for it. Some of the research that I've done is when I hear the phrase "if the client asks for it we'll do it". My experience is that when the client asks for it, you're considered different and an outlier and when you're an outlier, a statistical outlier, you don't get listened to, which is the point you were making, Sally, that people aren't listening because it's not normal.

The other thing, as you said, it is the silo thing within the industry, no one person owns the whole process of a development or building a house or anything like that. So the only thing that glues the system together is actually regulation. Now, that being the case, you'd be thinking ‑ so where is COAG in all of this? If anybody heard Margaret Ward yesterday morning, you would know that COAG is still not listening in spite of the NDIS, in spite of a whole lot of other things, and it's because it's ‑ it's not because the arguments aren't there . We've got Landcom with their stuff as well, there's stuff out there but nobody is listening to it because even though we dispute the cost argument, they're still not listening because they don't want to know.

I'm off my soap box now and to my question. I people wanted to go away with some kind of argument, some kind of comment from you about what they could take back to their workplace: “so I went to this universal design conference and there was a panel at the end of the session and it was about the economics and this is the key message", I'm wondering if you have a key message that might be helpful for us to go away with to tell our bosses, if you like, or whoever it is that we work with.

MS SALLY CODDINGTON: So I would say some people have kind of inferred that 20% of the population identifying as having a disability is small. I actually think that's a lot of people and when you combine them with their friends and family, those people who are making choices depending on how accessible and how welcome they feel I would say that there's lots of people with a disability and they've got lots of money. That's the way I would sum it up.

THE HON. KELLY VINCENT: Going back to that comment about why don't we just do it? At the risk of sounding too positive, but it is happening, we are doing it, we are doing it by having this conference. All things in context and that doesn't mean we don't keep pushing and pushing and pushing, questioning, challenging, all the time. But to give you a quick example, Parliament House, it's not been that long we've had accessible toilets in Parliament House. It sounds outrageous, until you look at it in the context that it wasn't even that long ago that we didn't have female toilets at all because women just did not go into that building. So all things in context, we are doing it.

To bring it back to that question what would I say to a boss in an office is essentially which side of history do we want to be on. Paul's example of other businesses seeing that festival in Sydney on the front page of the paper and quickly getting their act together because they didn't want to end up in that situation shows that people don't want to end up on the same side of history that we are presently on.

So my point would be the client should be asking really. It is about ‑ when I go to an event organiser and they say "We want to incorporate access into our event" I can say "Well, we can do the basic stuff or we can do the best practice stuff and I say do you want to be a leader or do you want to be a follower? That's my comment. I know I automatics want to lead and I think we all do, but sometimes we just don't have the confidence or knowledge on how to, but if you've got that, then go to your boss and say I'll show you the way.

MS RO CORONEOS: Prove up an example to show what's possible and it will be on your watch.

DELEGATE: We're two‑thirds of the way through 2016. Where do we go from here to make a real difference or do we find ourselves sitting in the same space next year with the same arguments and the same topics.

MS RO CORONEOS: I can say we are working on a Design for Dignity retail guideline at the moment and hopefully by building awareness and having those conversations internally and having projects that are embedding those principles we will have examples of what's possible. That's where we're going as an organisation at the moment.

MR PAUL NUNNARI: I'm really happy to say I'm working Newcastle City Council and we're working on some highly innovative inclusive design for part of their precinct. So watch this space and hopefully that team will be presenting on it next year. It's happening. It is happening.

MS SALLY CODDINGTON: Changing Places. Just putting it out there, Newcastle Council. Nicky needs a changing place.

THE HON. KELLY VINCENT: Changing Places is actually a great example. This might be a frustrating answer, but I don't think there's any one thing that we can do next year or the year after exactly because as Paul and other speakers have said, universal design is not a destination, it's a journey that is always going to be, it's not a standard in terms of compliance, it's a thought process, and therefore it's always changing. So I don't think there's any one thing we can do to say yes, we have done universal design because by the time we meet again next year new technologies, new exciting technologies that we can't think about right now will have been invented. I really am being too positive today, aren't I?

So there is no one thing that we can do, but we can work on projects like Changing Places, and Dignity for Disability is this close to getting up, it's one we have very close. We can increase compliance through draft legislation we have to increase compliance with existing standards as well as pushing for universal design and all of these things add up to better understanding because as much as I understand we need to be educating younger people in getting that attitude flowing through, with all due respect a 5‑year‑old child can't build me an accessible house right now and I need that. So it needs to be coming from both ends absolutely, but we need to treat them both equally I think.

End of session.