

ENGINEERING

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THE **Warren** CENTRE
FOR ADVANCED ENGINEERING

INNOVATION IN FULL SAIL AT

BITS, BYTES & BOATS



There could be no better illustrations of innovation than the Incat and the Solar Sailor. The Solar Sailor, a solar and wind powered ferry, transported guests to the *Bits, Bytes & Boats* meeting held on board the Incat, a high speed wave piercing catamaran.

The Warren Centre presented this Olympic event that brought together over 200 leaders in business and government for a networking breakfast in September.

Special guest, the Senator the Hon Richard Alston, Federal Minister for Communication Information Technology and the Arts, gave the keynote address and acknowledged the need for policy changes to support the new economy. The Senator identified the need for tax reform and the development of a national innovation system, and highlighted the importance of support for incubators to encourage fresh competitive ideas. He also outlined his perception of how Australian companies can take advantage of global Information and Communication Technology (ICT) opportunities.

The Senator focused on three key areas:

- the problems with knowledge translation, rather than just knowledge creation



From left: Professor Trevor Cole, Executive Director, The Warren Centre; Hugh Ralston, Director, The Warren Centre; Senator Hon Richard Alston, Communications Minister; and Robert Clifford, Incat Australia Ltd.

- the need for an injection of funds into specific strategic areas of opportunity
- the importance of speed of innovation.

Dr Robert Clifford is the MD of Incat Australia, the world's leading producer of large high speed catamarans, one of which is the current holder of the coveted Hales Trophy for the fastest crossing of the Atlantic by a passenger vessel. Dr Clifford gave insights into his company and the importance of innovation generally in his vessels. No item is safe, from the vessel's escape slides to its information and communications technology that allows Incat's main computer in Hobart to 'visit' a ship's computer wherever it is based. The Hobart-based technicians are then able to communicate with the operator and update operational programs, saving ship operators considerable time and money.

The company has received accolades worldwide for its innovative high-speed ferries that make up almost half the high speed passenger ferry fleet currently in operation around the world.

The Solar Sailor, which was visiting Sydney during the Olympics, ferried guests to the meeting. The brain child of Dr Robert Dane, the idea for the ferry is based on insects that use their wings as sun collectors to power their flight. As guests noted, the ferry glides silently through the water, powered by sun and wind. There are no fumes, no vibrations, no wash. To harness solar and wind power, the vessel has metallic wings fitted with solar panels that can rotate.

Fittingly, Dr Dane's closing comments referred to Sydney Olympics 2000.

"Australians can be world leaders... and at present sportsmen are getting all the media attention... It's unfortunate that, in the main, the innovator whose human spirit continually pushes the envelope, goes unnoticed."

DIARY DATES

5 April 2001:

The 2001 Innovation Lecture will be delivered by Peter Fogarty, Chief Executive Officer, ERG Group. Peter has created over 40 per cent annual growth over 10 years. ERG Group is now an Australian world leader in the development and supply of automated fare collection equipment and software systems for the transit industry and technologically advanced smart card systems and services.

6pm at The Regent Hotel, Sydney. This event is an opportunity to network with a wide range of individuals and organisations active in the innovation industry and related fields.

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Late September 2001

An interactive session with an international panel of leading thinkers will discuss industrial transformation as a means to maximising the value of all Australia's resources in the global markets of the 21st century. Conducted in conjunction with the sesquicentenary of Sydney University.

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MENTORING PROGRAM LINKS

EXPERIENCE WITH POTENTIAL

Ideas, energy, creativity, knowledge and persistence. These are the drivers of the recently launched Mentoring Startups Program that aims to enhance the number and viability of startup companies and is already attracting strong support and sponsorship from industry and business.

The program is part of The Warren Centre's Enterprise Innovation 2000 project of which Michael Johnson is the champion. A joint initiative of the Centre and iiglobal Pty Ltd, the Mentoring Startups Program incorporates tiered layers of support for a very broad range of companies in the startup community.

The program was formally launched at the *Last Chance to Change* event by Richard Neville of New Oz Communications who symbolically linked experience and potential by bringing together an experienced mentor, Michael Quinn from Innovation Capital Associates, and a mentoree, Rebecca Voorn of startup company Dark Horizon.

It is planned to start the Mentoring Startups Program with a range of self-directed and self-help assistance tools and move to more focused and intense assistance for those needing it.

At the first level of support, needs are identified and clarified through self-help audits, assessment and on-line resources. The next level draws on the well-documented power of and enthusiasm for peer support. The program then moves to skilled facilitation



Howard Gwynne who developed the study, *Mentoring in Australia*.

and, when the intense use of resources is appropriate, to active intervention and startup.

The program is based on a key background study, *Mentoring in Australia*, written by Howard Gwynne. Four key points emerged from the study:

- there are a vast number of startup and potential startup companies that are not receiving help



Mentoring links experience and potential. MC Richard Neville, centre, brings together experienced mentor Michael Quinn and mentoree Rebecca Voorn.

- when there is support, it is ad hoc and very mixed quality
- although a lot is known about the startup process, even in the Australian context, very little is articulated in an accessible form
- large organisations have not developed connections with the startup sector, due mainly to culture and language issues.

"The Mentoring Startups Program is a broadly based and widely accessible facilitation process that works with and supports the operations of a wide range of existing partner organisations such as corporates, mentors, incubators, investors, startups and others already doing it," Howard Gwynne said.

Rather than bureaucratic, he sees the program as emulating Charles Handys' definition of innovation – different, passionate and persistent'.

"The currency of exchange between the constituent partners within the mentoring program would, therefore, not be related to quick money or control – rather the focus would be on ideas, energy, creativity and knowledge," he said.

Dominique Purcell of iiglobal drew parallels between the Finnish experience and what is happening in Australia. She said that the collapse of the USSR market provided the impetus for Finland to quickly develop a consistent and national program that included mentoring. Finland embraced a unique form of persistence, perseverance or guts, expressed as 'sisu' in Finnish, she said, implying that perhaps sisu is needed in Australia.

For more information on the project, contact Michael Johnson on (02) 9810 8107 or by email at michael@iiglobal.com

LAST CHANCE TO CHANGE

The opportunity to give feedback on the report of the Innovation Summit Implementation Group and the report of the Chief Scientist prompted robust debate and generated innovative ideas at a half-day workshop organised by The Warren Centre and iiglobal Pty Ltd. Both reports will heavily influence future innovation support programs of the Federal Government.

Chief Scientist Dr Robin Batterham stressed the need to devote additional funds into developing future opportunities and fulfilling skill needs, and emphasised the need for innovation incentives in new as well as existing companies. Another area of national concern he raised was the critical shortage in skills in professional science and engineering and technology, along with commercialisation skills.

Many supported the view of Narelle Kennedy from Australian Business Limited that the report is, in essence, a map that serves as a prelude to the Innovation Action Plan.

A broadly based tax concession was needed said Kris Gale of Michael Johnson & Associates. While his call for the cash-out option to small companies was received positively, there was concern that an incremental approach to expenditure on R&D could penalise high performers.

Attendees raised the need to focus on product innovation in the marketplace rather than just R&D and stressed that there should be significant contribution to the new economy rather than just sustaining the old economy. This will require support for product-led innovation through entrepreneurship, partnerships, skills upgrading, and the area of intellectual property.

Taking the role of devil's advocate, Denis Wade from Johnson & Johnson, asked if innovation is so good, why aren't companies investing in it. For his company, 100 per cent of growth in profits comes from products less than five years old.

"We must innovate, or perish and be taken over. I cannot think of a single good idea that failed because of finance," he said.

The Warren Centre thanks sponsors of the workshop that was attended by nearly 100 representatives from a wide range of industries, professions and agencies: AusIndustry, Griffith Hack, Michael Johnson and Associates, Johnson & Johnson Research Pty Ltd, Macquarie Bank, Thomson Marconi Sonar, and the Australian Technology Park.

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