

UNDERSTANDING ISO20121: A GUIDE FOR THE EVENTS INDUSTRY AND INTERESTED STAKEHOLDERS

General

What is an ISO Standard?

An ISO Standard is document that has been developed by standards bodies from various participating countries. Standards can be a management systems standards or technical standards. Some standards are regulated as mandatory in each country (particularly where safety is involved). The standards document consists of 'normative text' (the main text) and annexes which generally include guidance for implementing the standard. The standard sets out specifications and procedures to ensure that a product, service or system is:

- Safe
- Reliable
- Performs consistently in the way they were intended to
- Attains established quality and safety criteria

ISO stands for the *International Organisation for Standardization* (<http://www.iso.org/iso/home.html>). It is comprised of a network of the national standards institutes of member countries. Australia is represented by **Standards Australia**, the country's peak non-government Standards organisation. International Standards are developed by ISO in response to identified needs by different sectors. In order for a Standard to be of international relevance it must meet certain criteria and be suitable for implementation on a broad worldwide basis.

What is the role of Standards Australia in the development of Standards?

Standards Australia is charged by the Commonwealth Government to lead the Standards development process in this country (www.standards.org.au): It;

- Coordinates information on national and international Standards
- Accredits other organizations, such as industry bodies, to develop Australian Standards
- Assists stakeholders to develop new Standards or update existing ones
- Operates a design assessment program (AIDA) that aims to foster a culture of design and innovation in Australia.

How did our industry get involved in this standard? Who facilitates it?

The Australian Industry got involved when the not for profit association the **Sustainable Event Alliance** (SEA www.sustainable-event-alliance.com) proposed to Standards Australia that we (events and meetings industry of Australia) needed to take an active role in the development of this standard as it would impact on us as a whole in the future. If we were not part of it there may be potential negative implications. The SEA facilitated an industry forum where it was voted upon in the positive. From there a mirror committee made up of industry sector representatives was formed.

What is a mirror committee?

Countries involved in the development of international standards will convene a national committee to mirror the structure of international technical committees and ensure the formulation of coherent national positions. In essence, the mirror committee represents the interests of stakeholders in its home country, has technical input on the development of the Standard and represents its home country at international meetings.

Who sits on the mirror committee?

The mirror committee is made up of Australian industry bodies that represent stakeholders in the events industry. Together, their role is to evaluate and comment on a draft standard for a sustainable events management system in Australia. The following organizations/bodies are represented on the Events standard mirror committee:

- Australian Centre of Event Management
- Business Events Sydney
- NSW Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water
- Exhibition and Events Association Australia
- Live Performance Australia
- Sustainable Event Alliance
- Local Government Shires Association
- Sydney Olympic Park Authority
- Venues Management Association
- Association of Australian Convention Bureau
- Standards Australia
- Meetings and Events Australia

Defining Sustainability and Sustainable Development

What is 'Sustainable Development' and 'Sustainability'?

By ISO definition. **'sustainability'** is the degree of sustainable development in the context of the organization. **'Sustainable Development'** is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It is the process of providing an enduring, balanced approach to economic activity, environmental responsibility and social progress. Sustainable development is about integrating the goals of a high quality of life, health and prosperity with social justice and maintaining the earth's capacity to support life in all its diversity. These social, economic and environmental goals are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. Sustainable development can be treated as a way of expressing the broader expectations of society as a whole. (ISO 2600).

Sustainability is the capacity to endure. In ecology the word describes how biological systems remain diverse and productive over time. Long-lived and healthy wetlands and forests are examples of sustainable biological systems. For humans, sustainability is the potential for long-term maintenance of well being, which has environmental, economic, and social dimensions.

Healthy ecosystems and environments provide vital goods and services to humans and other organisms. There are two major ways of reducing negative human impact and enhancing ecosystem services. The first is environmental management; this is based largely on information gained from earth science, environmental science, and conservation biology. The second approach is management of human consumption of resources, which is based largely on information gained from economics.

Sustainability interfaces with economics through the social and ecological consequences of economic activity. Sustainability economics involves ecological economics where social, cultural, health-related and

monetary/financial aspects are integrated. Moving towards sustainability is also a social challenge that entails international and national law, urban and transport, local and individual lifestyles and ethical consumerism.

What are sustainable development principles?

Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It involves managing the impacts of activities so that outcomes, on balance, are beneficial in the long term.

The organization's governing principles of sustainable development regarding event management would include considerations for **stewardship, inclusivity, integrity** and **transparency**. The United Nations Global Compact describes 10 principles for sustainable development. [\[INSERT URL\]](#)

Principles of sustainable development by which an organisation is governed should be made in the form of a statement of purpose and values. This then provides a framework for setting its policies, objectives and targets as defined within the scope of its event sustainability management system.

What is a sustainable event management system?

A management system is set of interrelated or interacting elements of an organization to establish policies and objectives, and processes to achieve those objectives. A management system can address a single discipline or several disciplines. The system elements include the organization's structure, roles and responsibilities, planning, operation, etc. The scope of a management system may include the whole of the organization, specific and identified functions of the organization, specific and identified sections of the organization, or one or more functions across a group of organizations. (definition from ISO)

A Sustainable Event Management System (SEMS) is the process of managing sustainable development issues by an event organiser in the designing and organising their events. The organisation follows sustainable development principles in order to achieve strategic goals which serve the economic, environmental and social interests of organisers, and interested parties such as participants and host communities. Sustainably managed events bring positive results for local and global society through.

A SEMS is more than eliminating bottled water or offsetting the event-related carbon emissions. A SEMS is a strategic way for an event organiser to lead and operate their events. It includes strategies, policies, processes, systems and actions that intertwine to support and manage events more efficiently, effectively and professionally. Unlike the concept of just 'greening', sustainability is not something which can be just plugged into the event management function. Sustainability is a management competence which leads the integration of responsible business practices with a culture of values and principles that guide the organisation and its talent

Is there such thing as a sustainable event?

This term is an often used one and really does need to come with a caveat. One of the official definitions of sustainable development is: 'Sustainable development meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.' So a truly 'sustainable event' needs to have every element of procurement and operating logistics in line with this definition.

Development of ISO 20121

What is the purpose of the ISO 20121 Event Sustainability Management Systems?

The purpose of the Standard is to provide a framework on how to implement a management system to manage sustainable development issues. - taking into account social, economic and environmental factors. Rather than being a checklist, it requires a systematic approach to addressing sustainable development issues in relation to event planning. It is aimed at the event organiser, rather than a single event. Successful implementation of an event sustainability management system will ensure continual performance improvement and management of issues rather than an ad-hoc approach.

What has driven the need to develop this standard?

A rise in ecological and social consciousness in recent years has led to increased consumer and stakeholder interest in sustainable products and processes. The events sector is a multi-industry network of national and international stakeholders, social, cultural and business environments. It is well positioned to be a major driver and influencer in the global transition to organizational sustainability.

An international standard will harmonize the event industry's global efforts to demonstrate commitment to sustainable development through a recognised framework. It will allow the events industry to address its negative and positive social, economic and environmental issues, impacts and legacies in a systematic and transparent manner.

Why do we need it? Do we need it?

It goes without saying that addressing sustainable development issues in the event industry is a must, yes we need to.

But what about the standard? It is not mandatory, however it is envisaged that it will become minimum accepted practice. There is increasing pressure to address sustainability in all sectors of society, industry and commerce. Those with stakeholders to report CSR performance to, will certainly benefit from implementing the management system. Without a standard to follow, it will be incumbent on each event organiser to establish their own processes to achieve improved sustainability performance. Without an easy entry point, it is likely to be a long time coming until the critical mass of the event industry takes on sustainable development issues in depth, at length and with thorough success, as the effort required to go from a standing start is immense and may be a barrier to uptake.

As the level of understanding of sustainable development increases in general society and in the events industry specifically, we will find an increasing need to formalize the processes in addressing it in our organisations. Taking a systematic approach to problem solving is the natural next step as the industry gains knowledge and understanding of sustainable development and its issues relating to event production. The establishment of a management system and guidance for use will enable those so interested, to track through the stages needed to address sustainable development issues without having to commence from a standing start. It provides a proven pathway to identifying and successfully managing sustainable development issues within the event industry and importantly, to embed those learnings into the event organisation for continued improved success.

How does it benefit us?

ISO 20121 requires an event organisation to implement an event sustainability management system. This process ensures systematic addressing of all the elements of event planning and production and organisational adherence to sustainable development principles. The benefits of working towards a

sustainable future for all are obvious. The benefits of implementing a management system around events for sustainability means you will not miss any important steps. It will facilitate or set up a higher likelihood or success in meeting sustainable development goals. It means you are not treating issues in an ad hoc way, rather you will track through the process in a systematic way, leaving no stone unturned...

How is the BS 8901 related to this Standard?

BS 8901 is the British Standard which has been developed specifically for the events industry. It defines the requirements for a sustainability event management system. It is the precursor and model on which ISO 20121 is based. Once ISO 20121 is launched globally, it is anticipated that the BS8901 will be upgraded to mirror the ISO 20121. In Australia, if the ISO 20121 is accepted, an identical Australian Standard will be established and therefore events in Australia complying with the standard will be achieving both Australian Standards and ISO compliance.

Is this Standard for the organization or the event?

This standard is designed for event organisers. An event organizer is an entity that produces and/or manages all or some aspects of an event. An entity can be a company, a body or an organization. The event organizer is not necessarily the owner of the event. (definition from ISO 20121). If an event is the sole activity of an event organisation then by consequence, the standard is just for 'the event'. However it is the event organisation that manages the event planning cycle and therefore it is still defined as the event organiser which is complying with the standard, rather than the event itself.

The standard may be used by organizations still in the process of forming sustainability protocols as well as those with existing organizational sustainable management systems in place.

Our standard is a management system, this differs from a technical standard, what does this mean?

Standards can be 'technical' or 'management system'. A technical standard prescribes detailed processes and procedures within an industry sector or activity. These generally apply to manufacturing, mining, production and scientific processes which will impact on the quality or performance of the final product or outcome. Technical standards are often regulated as compulsory, often enforced by that industry's association or regulatory body. Management System standards (of which ISO 20121 is), address the process and procedures of managing an operation, entity or activity. The other management system standards include ISO 9001 (Quality Assurance) and ISO 14001 (Environmental Management System). The management system standards are not always mandatory, although some industry sectors may mandate that their constituents must meet these standards in order to be endorsed or to meet minimum best practice.

Unlike ISO 14001 or 9001, ISO 20121 has been developed with a specific industry sector in mind (events industry). The former standards are cross-industry standards and are generic in that they can be applied to almost any industry.

How much does it cost? Is there a cost involved in participating?

There is no cost to participate, however the actual standard document must be purchased from Standards Australia. This is anticipated to be between \$100 and \$200 and is a one-off cost. The Standard is a guidance document and accessible to any interested party who pays for its purchase. It can be downloaded as a pdf or posted as a printed out hard copy.

Industry Participation

How will the implementation of the Standard affect the events industry?

A global standard will harmonise the efforts of the industry by providing a legitimate and recognized framework accessible to all. It is envisaged that it will accelerate the development of new sustainable practices, raise awareness within the industry and community and place more focus on chain supply management. As well, the introduction of a new Standard will often result in complementary certifications, services and products being introduced.

Who will be affected by this Standard? Who is it for? What additional expectations will my client have when this standard becomes integral to business practice?

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CEO's are defined in ISO 20121 as 'Top Management'. It requires commitment from Top Management through a declaration of values and a statement of guiding principles of sustainable development. It requires Top Management to delegate roles, ensure there is competence in the team, and to provide the necessary resources (time, knowledge, resources, money) to implement the management system. It requires Top Management to do a management review and to be part of the process which reviews performance, feeds back and sets improvement goals for the future.

If I am the event owner

Event owners can be event production organisations or the clients of event production companies. The event owner is the entity ultimately responsible for causing the event into action. It is therefore incumbent on the event owner to instigate an event sustainability management system and ensure it is implemented. If the event owner contracts an event production agency to produce the event on their behalf, it would be the event owner that instructs the event producer to adhere to or implement a management system on their behalf.

If I am an event practitioner

Although event practitioners will usually be middle management within an organisation, it is often those on the coal face that will recommend to top management that an event sustainability management system be instigated. Either way, it is the event practitioner that will need to put the system into action. The event practitioner will work according to the sustainable development principles and policy set down by the organisation, they will engage with and communicate to interested parties, identify and manage sustainable development issues, implement the sustainable procurement policy, do the measurement and reporting of impacts and implement any programs or other initiatives to reduce negative impacts and enhance positive legacies. They will work with Top Management on a management review to understand performance and to set new goals for future ongoing improvements.

If I am a supplier

Suppliers to the event industry will find increasing requirements for sustainability performance by their clients that are implementing event sustainability management systems. Suppliers need to have their own sustainability management systems in place, and they can follow the ISO 20121 so that they are also compliant and the products and services they supply the event help to meet the events sustainability goals. By 'having your house in order' you are able to pre-emptively offer solutions to your clients. Additionally you will better understand any contractual requirements for performance and impact reporting.

If I am a venue

Venues are part of the supply chain but can also produce events in their own right. For this reason, venues should implement a sustainable event management system and become compliant with ISO 20121. In one sense, a venue is an event owner, and in another it is a supplier. Read above for context.

If I am an industry association

One of the remits of industry associations is to compile and disseminate relevant event industry information and developments to its constituents. The ISO 20121 is an important standard to enter our industry and as such it is incumbent on industry associations to inform their members of the standard, how it will affect them and how to engage with it.

If I am a participant or attendee

Participants and attendees of an event are what is described in the standard as an 'interested party'. All interested parties have a role to play in the successful implementation of an event sustainability management system. Participants can include talent, speakers, performers, sporting competitors, sponsors and media. Attendees are generally audience or delegates. The event organisers will set up various communications and engagement programs for each group of interested parties to encourage their active participation. If you are a participant or attendee of an event and the event organiser shows no evidence of implementing an event sustainability management system, you can play your part to advance sustainable development by asking why not!

Training and Resources

How do I use it?

The ISO 20121 is a standard to comply with, rather than 'use'. However it does come with some guidance. A major part of the management system is to ensure the team implementing it has the skills, knowledge and competence to successfully implement it. Given that competence is in place, following the steps and stages of the management system detailed in the standard document (normative text and additional guidance) you will be able to implement the management system. It will become second nature, very quickly, and as it is simply a management system, it is very likely you will quickly recognise the steps that need to be taken are the same as other elements to your business operations.

How can I understand what it means?

It is advised you take the time to read through the standard once. Then read each clause or section in combination with the provided guidance. Undertake your own research into sustainable development issues. Access such projects as the UN Global Compact to understand sustainable development. Read case studies on events which have successfully implemented an event sustainability management system or achieved impressive sustainability outcomes. Bring in an external consultant to work through one cycle of implementing the standard and setting up your systems if you don't have the time or ability to understand and implement it unaided.

Do we need training?

Professional development

Many events practitioners will not have enough sustainability knowledge or events sustainability management system understanding to implement ISO 20121 from a standing start. Of course many countries are highly engaged with sustainable development and their inhabitants have an 'on the street' or 'domestic' understanding of the principles as they are part of their daily life (recycling, using organic, going green, saving water, using green energy etc). However a more detailed understanding of sustainable

development and its relationship to event planning is needed by event practitioners. What is relevant in one's domestic life may not be the same as an event's, particularly when an event is held in an area outside of the suburb the event practitioner lives in. Some event practitioners will 'not know what they don't know' and as such it is recommended that professional development training or 'top ups' is undertaken. This can be a short workshop on implementing the ISO 20121 or it can be a more detailed course which takes participants through identifying and managing issues, particularly focused on procurement/supply chain and event logistics and operations. (practical application of the tenants of the event sustainability management system).

Tools

There are some tools available (generally live online tools) which assist in managing, monitoring, measuring and reporting event sustainability management systems. These guide the user through the process and as you answer the questions and input information, you uncover what you didn't know you didn't know! It is a training process by proxy. For those with an understanding of sustainable development principles and an understanding of implementing a management system, using these tools will be simple. For those going from a standing start, coupled with professional development training, you will quickly find your feet and understand not only the elements to a management system and sustainable development principles, but how to implement them in action at your event and in your organisation. See the [Sustainable Event Alliance](#) for details of tools available.

Resources

Implementing sustainability initiatives in event management and implementing an events sustainability management system is supported by plenty of resources available on the internet and through various organisations and associations. The Sustainable Event Alliance hold many resources, how-to guides and links to other resources. Join up to the SEA to have full access to resources, including a supplier database. Contact the industry association you are a member of and ask if they have resources to help you. The SEA is continuing on an engagement program to set up partnerships with industry associations so that members of the association will get automatic membership to the SEA. Ask your industry association if this has been set up, before joining the SEA as an individual. To talk to your peers around the world on these issues, join the LinkedIn discussion groups. You can find a link to this on the SEA website.

Tertiary institutions

Event management degrees and diplomas are only just starting to address sustainability in their course content. Over the next couple of years more comprehensive information will be included in courses as the lecturers and course content writers become competent in this information and have implemented event sustainability management systems in the field and are able to teach from experience. Once this is set, we will see graduates entering the workforce with knowledge which they can then put into action. Some tertiary institutions run professional development short courses, so look out for these. Ensure those teaching the courses have 'real-life' experiences in implementing event sustainability management systems so you can benefit from their toolbox of stories and examples rather than theoretical knowledge.

Using ISO20121

What is a sustainable event policy? Do I need one?

Like any policy, having specifically addressing sustainability in events will help to guide and direct all actions of event planning. It is something to refer back to when making buying, building and logistical decisions. It will have the organisation's overarching commitment to sustainable development principles laid

out and how they can be interpreted in the event planning cycle. It is advised that all event organisations and event owners take the time to formally develop an events sustainability policy.

Can I save money?

Being resource efficient invariably means saving money. There may be some trade off with higher labour demands or storage fees, however it is very likely that a resource efficient event will mean a cost efficient event.

Successful integration of sustainable development principles brings bottom line benefit when company leadership develops a long term strategic commitment supported by investment of time and money. Leaders who have realised success from sustainable systems have learned that positive business returns are the result. For this reason sustainable business practices should be integrated as a general management competency.

Will this take additional resources?

In order to successfully integrate sustainable development in a systematic way into your organisation and event (event sustainability management system) you must ensure you have allocated the time, have the knowledge, and resources to do so. If you don't have the time, knowledge or resources it may require a budgetary outlay in order to set the systems up. You may need to bring in a consultant if there is not the time or knowledge in the existing team to get you where you need to be, and importantly, to work with your supply chain. You may need to invest in professional development training to get the required knowledge embedded into your team. You may need to invest in infrastructure, equipment, processes and systems to set your sustainability plans in action.

What expectations will be expected of me when I submit a tender or a bid?

As the standard's implementation becomes more common place, it will likely that event producers will require elements of compliance with and support of the standard be included in tender submissions. The London 2012 Olympics has this requirement in place already.

What happens if I take no notice?

Once seen by some as a fad or fashion, sustainability is now understood to be required for successful business in the long term. Failure to act is not an option. Sustainability is now a solid part of a brand's competitive positioning and value proposition.

Compliance, Certification and making claims

Is the Standard an accreditation program/system?

The standard will be able to be 'certified' as 'first party', 'second party' and 'third party'. In the short term after the standard is launched (first one or two years) it is likely that the standard will only be first or second party verified. That is because the industry needs to become familiar with the standard and the processes and procedures to implement it. Also, the 'third party' certifiers will need time to gain the skills and competencies required to adequately audit against it standard. As the standard's uptake matures, it is likely it will progress into third party certification.

At the outset, if an event organiser has implemented a management system for events sustainability, and has gathered the required documentation to prove to any interested parties that it has done so, then it will be able to be 'First Party' certified. The next step will be for an outside entity to independently review the

documentary evidence and actions of the organisation, and this entity verifies that what the organiser says they have done, they have done!

As the uptake of the standard matures, Third Party certification will be in place. This is where 'accredited auditing organisations' (authorised/accredited by JASANZ in Australia) are charged with the authority to independently assess and certify compliance with the standard. Their auditors will have required competencies in auditing, sustainable development and event management and will be equipped to assess compliance (including successful outcomes) of implementing the management system.

How is the Standard different from a certification, labeling or accreditation program?

The Standard provides guidance on how to implement an event sustainability management system through process management; it is really about managing an event, or aspects of an event through a series of processes that aim to achieve the sustainability objectives of your event.

The Standard can be first, second or third party certified. The event organiser can claim that they have complied with the Standards. The event, or aspects of it, can be audited by a second or third party. A second party may be one of your suppliers or stakeholders and a third party is when you pay an accredited auditing company to audit and certify that your event complies with the requirements of the Standard.

Are there any green or sustainable event certifications or eco logo's currently available?

There are currently no sustainable event certifications in Australia. It is expected that, once the Standard is published, existing certification organisations will step in and create a certification scheme that complies with ISO 20121.

Can I get my organization or event verified against ISO 20121?

Yes, the implementation of ISO 20121 is by the event organisation, and therefore it is the event organiser (and its activities/events) which are compliant with the standard, rather than the single event. If the event organiser has an event sustainability management system in place then it is likely that that organisation's activities/event will be planned, managed and produced with consideration for sustainable development.

How do I become an ISO 20121 verifier?

Any event organiser can be a first party verifier of their own organisation.

Organizations and individuals can become Second Party verifiers if they meet prescribed competencies set down by industry. Precedents in other auditing/verifying systems show that a minimum of four years documented and proven practical experience in the sector being audited must be held. Additionally, it is likely the industry (and particularly the Sustainable Event Alliance) will set down parameters for this and potentially also a competency exam. This will prevent people or organisations with limited demonstrated experience in events, sustainable development, applied sustainability and management systems, from setting themselves up as verifiers.

Unless your organisation is already an accredited auditing/certifier against ISO standards it is unlikely you will look at becoming a third party verifier as this is an arduous process and the potential number of clients in Australia would not warrant the effort.

Will this standard become regulated by government?

It is unlikely that this standard will be regulated to such a degree that compliance will be compulsory. However, as various aspects of logistics and operations and event impacts are regulated, it will mean that compliance with the standard is an easy route to compliance with regulations. (think Environment Agency and local government regulations for such things as sound, lighting, traffic, waste and localized pollution regulation). As an industry we need to keep an eye on regulations around CO2 emissions and reporting of those emissions. At some point in the future it is possible that our industry will be required to report emissions and to take action to reduce them. This however, is just another element of event logistics which is monitored and regulated.

What about carbon offsetting?

This standard does not address carbon offsetting directly. Offsetting could be one of the tools to meet objectives if one of the issues identified is creation of CO2 emissions and if one of your objectives is to mitigate CO2 emissions. Rather, the standard is a guide for minimizing the potential negative sustainable development impacts of the event and enhancing positive legacies. An event planner or organisation may choose to offset in conjunction with application of the event sustainability management system if it is relevant and appropriate. Please seek guidance on what to measure to calculate your event's CO2 emissions, and appropriate schemes to support with your offsetting dollars.

Is a carbon neutral event a sustainable event?

A carbon neutral event is not really a possibility. Carbon neutrality infers a complete carbon footprint has been assessed and within an event, this is not a practical undertaking.

It is not enough to simply buy offset in order to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions of your event. There are many facets and complexities to an event. Using the calculators provided by many offset providers may be easy, however can also be highly inaccurate. It is much more effective to take an integrated approach to address sustainability impacts, with the option of using offsets to balance greenhouse gas emission that cannot be avoided.

Seek guidance on what are industry accepted norms for calculating CO2 emissions. Don't take guidance from offsetting retailers! Read PAS 2060 which sets protocols on the processes around claiming carbon neutrality. Read the GHG Protocol to understand Scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions and read event industry guidance on how this applies in our sector. It is generally accepted that measuring CO2 impacts from direct and indirect electricity and some travel and transport is appropriate for events. PAS 2060 says that anything that is predicted to be more than 5% of possible GHG emissions should be measured, if practical. The 'if practical' is the important part. It is often impractical to try and measure, for example, freight impacts for every delivery to an event site, or even more impossible and impractical for most events, the embedded energy in materials and supplies (including food and beverage). As the measurement of CO2 emissions in our industry matures, more research and benchmarking projects will be undertaken and we will all be able to draw on this to predict what various elements of our event causes what percentage of emissions. It is not practical for each event to undergo such detailed measurement and analysis.

It must be noted though, that there is a lot of information which can be gleaned from detailed CO2 emissions analysis as it is an enlightening thing to understand where your big hits are coming from, and where reductions are possible. Focus on understanding your event's CO2 emissions profile in order to manage reductions, rather than using it as a communications and marketing device to claim neutrality!

So you can see that it is not appropriate to claim your event is 'carbon neutral' without heavily underscoring it with your process and what is measured. It is bordering on greenwashing if you measure energy used, offset it and then claim carbon neutrality. Be very careful using these terms.

What is greenwashing?

Greenwashing is where misleading or vague claims are used to imply 'environmental sustainability' but are not solid when investigated in detail. Look at the terrific 'XXXX Sins of Greenwashing' by Terrachoice here. [\[insert URL\]](#)

Who checks I am not greenwashing?

The ACCC is the body which regulates this in Australia. Greenwashing is 'false advertising' and you are under the obligation of the laws of the country not to do so! Much greenwashing will happen innocently through inexperienced producers and communications staff making general claims without the technical expertise to support the claims. Make sure you can back up what you say!

Event Planners

Will it cost more to organise an event that is consistent with the standard?

In order to successfully integrate sustainable development in a systematic way into your organisation and event (event sustainability management system) you must ensure you have allocated the time, have the knowledge, and resources to do so. If you don't have the time, knowledge or resources it may require a budgetary outlay in order to set the systems up. You may need to bring in a consultant if there is not the time or knowledge in the existing team to get you where you need to be, and importantly, to work with your supply chain. You may need to invest in professional development training to get the required knowledge embedded into your team. You may need to invest in infrastructure, equipment, processes and systems to set your sustainability plans in action.

Once you have introduced the management system, you may find either costs savings or investment required, depending on what actions you have to take to improve your sustainability performance.

Will I save money?

Being resource efficient invariably means saving money. There may be some trade off with higher labour demands or storage fees, however it is very likely that a resource efficient event will mean a cost efficient event.

Successful integration of sustainable development principles brings bottom line benefit when company leadership develops a long term strategic commitment supported by investment of time and money. Leaders who have realised success from sustainable systems have learned that positive business returns are the result. For this reason sustainable business practices should be integrated as a general management competency.

Do I have to be experienced in sustainability?

You will need someone in your team that understands sustainable development principles and the practical application of initiatives to meet these goals. Top Management need to be comfortable with the principles of sustainable development in order to activate and embed these principles into the organisation. The people that make procurement and production logistics decisions need to understand the most sustainable options, and importantly, what to ask of their supply chain. Those workers that are implementing activities

on the ground at the event need to be inducted so they understand the role they play in success. Promotions, marketing and communications staff need an understanding in sustainability in order to use the right language and understand how to engage with key stakeholders.

Do my staff need training?

If your staff do not already understand Sustainable Development and how that can be translated to the event planning cycle, yes they will need to be trained. There are different aspects for different staff members, depending on their role. The person that is charged with the task of setting up the events sustainability management system will need to have a thorough understanding of management systems, event planning and sustainability. Others, such as a site manager, production manager, waste manager etc, will need to understand the practical application of the goals and objectives of the management system as it relates to the aspect of the event they are in control of. Induction may be enough training for some staff, others may need to attend a course, alternatively a consultant could be brought in during a live event planning cycle to walk the team through the options. This is not brain surgery, it is just setting up a way of thinking and ensuring the team have access to the relevant and up to date information on sustainability in event management.

Do I need a sustainable development policy? What is that?

This is one of the first things that an organisation needs to do. The policy will state the sustainable development principles to which the organisation subscribes, and it will lay down its goals and objectives, along with strategies and actions to achieve them. It is likely that the policy will be developed at the outset through a circular research process as the organisation begins to identify potential issues, especially through communication and engagement with interested parties (stakeholders). The sustainable development policy may either outline specific issues that have been identified and how they will be addressed (for event organisers with a single type of event with the same parameters) or it will outline the process through which issues will be identified for each event it produces.

What if my client doesn't care?

The event organiser can have a policy which could include as an issue – highlighting the need for a sustainable event management system to be activated in association with a client's event. If that client will not provide any required resources to successfully implement a management system in relation to the event, then as long as the event organiser details and reports this, the event organiser will still be in compliance with the standard.

However, it is the actual implementation of the actions needed to deliver the most sustainable event which is important! The drivers for embracing sustainability in event management if not from within the event owner's organisation, then can only come from external pressure from interested parties. Until an event owner feels the need to be responsible, there is not much an event organiser contracted to that client can do. Continue to chip away, lead by example and highlight the benefits in keeping up with industry best practice. Look to the client's CSR reporting requirements and remind the client that producing an event sustainably will meet those goals. (if they have them!)

Suppliers

What will be expected of me when I submit a tender or a bid?

As more event organisers implement a sustainable event management system / ISO 20121, the supply chain will see increasing requests to demonstrate how they can help the event meet its sustainable

development goals. Suppliers will be well placed if they have an organisational sustainability policy, relevant independent certifications for their industry sector and importantly, can show how their products or services will help meet the event organiser's sustainable development goals.

What if I can't afford to buy the latest most sustainable products?

This is a common problem and one that is society-wide, not just restricted to the event industry. Of course a trade off or compromise may be needed to ensure that the event is financially viable (sustainable!) and as long as you can justify your reasoning for not choosing the most sustainable products, and have a plan in place to work towards it, then you are on the pathway. That is more than anyone can ask! For example an event may be placing some of its financial viability on the sale of bottled water but the sustainability objectives will be met if bottled water is not sold! This is a quandary that will have the accountants and sustainability people at odds. The event needs to look at other ways the income could be earned without the sale of waste in waiting. Get creative! It may take some more effort to bring in bulk water dispensers, staff them, and arrange for branded reusable water bottles or water bottle holders, but the figures at the end may pan out....If going 'organic' or to 100% biofuel or buying RECs or installing mobile solar, or a full LED lighting rig, or 100 waste staff rather than 50 is more expensive but it can be proven to have significant impacts on the overall sustainability performance, see if you can get a greening sponsor, grant funding, or even research with your customers/audience/delegates if they would be willing to absorb a small increase in ticket price to help the event be more sustainable. Obviously that angle will work with an entertainment event, rather than one that is trying to sell something to the attendees (like and expo)! Paying more for healthy organic and local food is one that you can pass the cost onto event participants if they are buying their food at the event and if you are have the opportunity to pre-promote it, and to shout loudly about it during show days.

Do I need a sustainable development policy? What is that?

Suppliers will be well placed if they have an organisational sustainable development policy which details the principles to which the organisation subscribes. This will show to event organisers that you take sustainability seriously and ensure that your own business operations are managed with consideration for sustainable development. You should also highlight any relevant independent certifications for your industry sector and importantly, can show how your products or services will help meet the event organiser's own sustainable development goals.