



## History

Meetings & Events Australia can trace its roots to the formation of the Association of Conference Executives (ACE), which occurred in 1975 following an exploratory meeting of a small group who shared a common interest in the conference industry. People at the meeting included Sydney Hilton's Ulrich Wolfram, the ATC's, Ian Kennedy, Ansett Airlines' Wal Brander, with the convenors being Bob Westcott from Qantas and Rob Yoemans from The Convention magazine (now CIM).

They draw ideas about a new association from the British association ACE which had formed four years previously. The big drive of the day was to attract "buyers" into the association, and a seller/buyer ratio was institutionalized. The inaugural annual general meeting was held at Noah's Northside Gardens in Sydney on March 4 1976 . Keith Finney and Tony Boden (both meetings managers) were elected President & Vice-President respectively.

The first national conference was held in Sydney, July 1977 at the Hilton Hotel with the theme of "Profit through Communication. The delegates who attended this event rated it an outstanding success. The next conference in 1978 was held in Melbourne , opened by the Premier of the day Richard Hamer.

Over the next 10 years, there was a period of dissolution of the national structure (in 1979) and emergence of state entities. The various ACE state bodies built membership and ran events during a period of great change for the industry, as hotels and convention centres came on-line.

In the early 1980s, Ros McLeod was elected as NSW President and proceeded to concentrate the efforts of ACE NSW on rebuilding its by then poor financial base. After Victoria had run a small conference the previous year, ACE NSW ran a conference in 1983 which attracted 160 delegates and boosted the financial base of the association.

Elizabeth Rich joined ACE in 1987 and was soon elected to the Committee as Treasurer. Concerned at the state of the finances she issued a blunt warning to her colleagues that things had to change. Having established her own business, Agenda, Elizabeth became Executive Director of ACE NSW in 1988. In that same year, newly established ACE Queensland grew strongly under newly elected chairman Ray Shaw.

In April 1988 at ACE NSW's invitation, ACE President from around the country met informally in Melbourne, including Annabel Davis (NSW), Ray Shaw ( Queensland ), Robert Barnes ( Victoria ), Hank Duyverman (SA) and Don Pierce (WA).

In 1989, ACE NSW organized a conference in Terrigal which heard the voice for the first time of Jill Mason, from BOMA, who encouraged ACE to develop a strong professionally educated member base and coherent national voice.

Around this time, a state-based Who's Who in Conference Management published by ACE NSW since 1988, expanded to a national basis in 1990. For the first time, the meetings industry had a directory which illustrated how much the industry had expanded.

The ACE National Council re-formed in 1989, resulting in a name change to Meetings Industry Association of Australia in 1990. ACE NSW experienced extraordinary growth over the first part of the 1990s.

The industry's first accreditation scheme (Accredited member of MIAA) commenced in 1993.

A single national association was formed on 1 July 1995, ensuring uniform membership categories, regular communication with members nation-wide, more emphasis on education programs nation-wide, the establishment of MIAAnet for members. MIAA was one of the first industry associations with their own website.

A specialist competency based accreditation scheme for Meetings managers was commenced in 1997. In 1998, MIAA welcomed a newly formed Tasmania Branch to the fold.

By 1997, Rich had signalled that it was time for her to move on and a successor was found in Leonie Stanfield, who was appointed as Deputy CEO and then CEO in 1998. After a short stint, the Council in 1999 appointed Jenny Lambert, formally CEO of the Restaurant & Catering Association and a career association manager, to run the organization. Lambert's commencement coincided with at that stage the Association's most successful conference held in Melbourne in June 1999. At that conference, an Extraordinary General Meeting was held to vote on a company name change to Meetings & Business Events Australia. Although a majority supported the change, it lost as it failed to achieve the 75% majority needed for a company name change under the Companies Act.

In 2002, a Branch of the Northern Territory was established, ensuring that MIAA now had branches in every state and territory.

In 2003, the Constitution of MIAA was changed to put greater emphasis on the company as the member, rather than individuals. The corporate governance structure was also changed to establish a Board of Directors of six people who could meet more

regularly than the National Council, which through the establishment of the NT branch had grown to 16 – 8 branch chairs and 8 directly elected. Under the new structure, the 14-member council (8 chairs and 6 directly elected) elected the six directors, including the President, 1 st VP and 2 nd VP.

In 2005, MIAA announced in February that it was to now trade as Meetings & Events Australia. The new name embraced the broader industry, and reflected the changing mix of members. It also followed the pattern amongst Associations to make their brand more modern and relevant to the general public. The company name of MIAA remains unchanged.

The future of MEA, and indeed the industry it serves, looks bright. The association looks forward to continuing to serve its members for many years to come.

(With acknowledgement to the 20 Year History of MIAA written by Pamela Lloyd)