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## **MANUFACTURING TAKES UP LEADERSHIP IN SUSTAINABILITY**

Manufacturing is positioning itself as one of the most important players in the new carbon economy as it grapples to engage a new paradigm of productivity which is intricately built upon a framework of sustainability.

Some of the top minds in Australia explored the how's and why's of sustainable manufacturing at Manufacturing Skills Australia's recent conference in Brisbane which left no doubt of the seriousness with which manufacturing is embracing the need for change.

MSA's CEO Bob Paton explains that the way forward for manufacturing in Australia is through a strategic approach to productivity which targets development of higher level skills and more efficient systems. "We need to think broadly about what a sustainable manufacturing industry means and how we can ensure Australia is well placed to compete internationally while addressing its carbon footprint," says Mr. Paton.

Manufacturing is indeed proving to have outgrown its image of low skilled, repetitive work as it takes on issues of eco-design, cradle to grave responsibilities, carbon mapping and engaging the entire workforce in generating sustainability improvements across social, economic and environmental outcomes.

Speakers explored issues of work redesign to accommodate work life transitions which feature so strongly in today's mobile workforce, and the need for leadership at all levels of the organisation in order to align individual and organisational values with sustainable objectives and practices.

A variety of models from around the globe were examined to assess what works in supporting industry to embed sustainability into work practices. Research commissioned by MSA highlighted the benefits of collaborating across industry stakeholders, the essential need for national leadership and the importance of targeting relevant, sector specific initiatives.

World population growth, with its accompanying hunger for basic commodities and industrial products was raised as one of the most pressing challenges for sustainable manufacturing in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and one that will demand creative solutions. The conference explored a range of strategies which included a user pays model used by some European companies whereby the supplier maintains product ownership and services, upgrades, reclaims and recycles the product components.

Calculating energy use and emissions generated across a product lifecycle will increasingly be required to determine the true cost of a product and to compare the performance of

alternatives. Outcomes of lifecycle analysis were used to illustrate the relative impact of resource acquisition, production, transportation, use and disposal.

Supply conditions such as use of renewable energy and type and quantity of raw materials weighted heavily on outcomes. Using local suppliers rated positively on overall findings, an encouraging result for Australian manufacturers.

Sustainable consumption was also listed as a central issue to the current sustainability dilemma. When Toyota conducted a lifecycle analysis of its new hybrid Camry to determine its carbon footprint, it identified that of 51.87 tonnes of carbon emitted from the entire car lifecycle, 44 tonnes, (approximately 80%) was attributable to the way the car was used, influenced by tyre pressure, speed etc.. This significant proportion illustrated the need for consumer education and behavioural change to improve sustainability outcomes and the responsibility that manufacturers have in ensuring that products are accompanied by sustainable use advice.

Determining the way forward should be based on statistical evidence and a carefully developed workforce strategy the conference heard. Employers need to properly understand who their workforce is, their needs and anticipated movements, to be able to identify where recruitment and retention strategies should be focused in order to meet work needs of the future. This strategic approach was seen as essential in order to avoid predicted skills shortages in the face of an aging workforce.

All in all, the conference concluded that we need to think ahead with a balanced view to each of the triple bottom line outcomes, social, economic and environmental, with an understanding of how each impacts the other and what will result in real gains for sustainability in manufacturing.

MSA is committed to taking leadership in sustainability and has engaged a range of initiatives to help manufacturing enterprises make progress on this important issue.

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**For further information about MSA's sustainability initiatives, any other issue raised in this release, or the suggested features listed below, please contact Bernadette Shiel.**

MSA also has a wide range of information and resources on its website [www.mskills.com.au](http://www.mskills.com.au) to support enterprises in their workforce development activity. Speaker presentations from the conference are also available on the MSA website.

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## **Suggested features:**

- How lean principles and practices are improving sustainability in manufacturing enterprises.
- Key issues of development and deployment of skills and how increased participation and efficient utilisation are central to increasing productivity.
- The importance of job redesign in attracting and retaining employees, ensuring efficient use of skills and aligning workplaces to sustainable values.
- The need for national workforce planning strategies to navigate issues of skills shortage, changing technologies and practices and sustainability.
- A call for revamping apprenticeships to make them more effective and appealing.

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