

Envisioning the industry's future

DREAMS and visions. We all have them at some time or the other. But when an industry that provides 14 percent of the nation's wealth has a collective vision, 16 years out into the future, it is time to sit up and take serious notice.

The Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) for Construction Innovation has finally unveiled the results of a major survey that began last year and to many, the results may not come as a surprise.

The Construction 2020 report details nine visions: environmentally sustainable construction; meeting client needs; improved business environment; welfare and improvement of the labour force; information and communication technologies for construction; virtual prototyping for design, manufacture and operation; off-site manufacture; improved process of manufacture of constructed products and the ninth, overarching vision, Australian leadership in research and innovation.

The CRC team has been touring the metros taking the message to the masses. I was fortunate to attend the Sydney session last month, hosted by the well-experienced, well-travelled Professor Peter Brandon of The University of Salford, UK and the energetic Dr Keith Hampson, CRC ceo.

The session threw up a few interesting observations such as stereotyping and the impact of popular home improvement TV programmes on the construction industry (see

page 6). The session would have benefited from a few more active participants from the city's large and booming construction industry. Dr Hampson may be a skilful driver but (in addition to contributing pithy comments like *dirt and danger replaced by decency and delight* and *Australia has the same attitude to construction performance as it does to sport performance*) to truly succeed, this initiative will need the industry to hop on board, en masse.

Perhaps the most challenging is vision four that hopes for a "computer literate highly skilled workforce showing mutual respect for each other through management and workers acting collaboratively with health and safety conditions on-site."

Most of the respondents viewed industrial relations as a critical barrier to change and are concerned about the ability to drive innovation where unionised labour is seen to limit the uptake of more advanced methods. The report outlines three yardsticks to assess progress on this front: top quality school leavers choose property and construction as their career of choice; OH&S statistics for the industry are on par with manufacturing; time lost through industrial disputes is on par with other industry sectors.

I fully agree with one of the participants who aptly commented to me "I wish this was a Construction 2010 report."

– Kevin Gomez