

THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



This year has been an exciting year for Sister Cities Australia.

Firstly, we produced two series of podcasts, one in February and the other in May. The idea was to share time with our members, supporters and friends in conversations on how Sister City relationships are managed, made special and sustained. We also wanted to find out what innovations and ideas are used to keep relationships alive and thriving.

The Cairns Council Ambassador talked about her unique role in the Sister City relationships; maintaining a relationship while in lockdown and having travel bans was the theme for the Frankston representative; while Blacktown spoke about its immensely diverse program, community involvement and youth engagement.

Our guest from Global Cities New Zealand articulated on all things Sister Cities in New Zealand; CLAIR, the Japan Local Government Centre representative outlined its role in maintaining or establishing sister

city relationships with Japan; and the South Korean Local & State Government Office reflected on its role in support of sister city relationships.

We look forward to continuing our Podcasts into the new year.

Secondly, we reviewed, revised and updated the Sister Cities Australia Constitution which was approved at the Annual General Meeting by all members.

Thirdly, we re-instated the Sister Cities Australia National Conference. Due to the generosity of Wyndham City Council in Victoria, we were able to stage the conference free of charge. I would like to take the opportunity to thank the Former Mayor of Wyndham Cr Susan McIntyre and the CEO Stephen Wall for their support.

The theme of the 2023 National Conference was "Sister Cities – Linking the World Together". We had some amazing speakers talking about a wide range of topics. The presentation papers are on our website at

<https://www.sistercitiesaustralia.org.au/conference-forums/2023-national-conference/>

During the Conference we had the announcement and presentations of our National Awards. As you would recall, we had not presented these for the last three years due to Covid. Although the number of nominations was not high, the standard was excellent.

We did not receive nominations for the Youth Project, New Affiliations, and Overall Program. The winner for the "Community Involvement" category was Blacktown; "Tourism & Trade Project" was Darwin; and "Special Program" equal winners were Belmont and Frankston. Congratulations to all involved.

To read more about the winners and their projects please go to

<https://www.sistercitiesaustralia.org.au/awards/awards-winners/>

Also, at the conference we had our Annual General Meeting. This year was an election year. I am happy to announce that our Executive Team was re-elected except for Mike Jakins our National Secretary, who did not nominate. I would like to thank Mike for his great work, his dedication and commitment to the role, his professionalism and of course his friendship. No job was too difficult for Mike, if he didn't know how to do something, he would persist till he got it right. Mike joined SCA in 2009, was elected to the Executive in 2015, and became its National Secretary in 2016. He will be missed.

Cr Dr Jennie Barrera, a Councillor with Wyndham City and a SCA Executive Member since 2021, was instrumental in the negotiations between Wyndham and SCA in relation to the organization of the conference. Not only was she elected Vice President of SCA at the conference but more recently she was elected Mayor of Wyndham City Council. Congratulations Jennie. I hope you have a very successful and fruitful Mayoral term.

I am very proud for what we have achieved this year.

Hopefully we may be able to attract new members to our organisations. It has been difficult to sustain membership numbers especially during Covid. We believe that by introducing the National Conference, and embarking on other projects during the year we may be able to attract new members. There seems

to be a renewed interest in sister city relationships recently. Let's see if we can maintain the momentum.

On a personal note, I would like to thank all the members of the Executive Team for their work. Over the last year, our team has accomplished so much

together. I want to thank them for their dedication and wish them a happy new year.

I believe we have had a very rewarding year at SCA. The National Conference was a great success and we managed to achieve quite a bit during the year. I am looking forward to a fabulous 2024.

This time of the year is full of joy, traditions and spending time with the family. Unfortunately, we still need to be careful and stay alert as the dreaded Covid is still lingering.

Enjoy the Festive Season everyone, take the opportunity to reflect on your achievements during the year and set some goals for yourself for the coming year. Also, think of all the things that are happening around the world and realise how lucky we are to live in such a harmonious, peaceful and safe country that is Australia.

I wish you joy, health and love this holiday season.

Happy Festive Season everyone.

Christina Despoteris OAM
President
Sister Cities Australia

2023 National Conference Sister Cities – Linking the World Together A Great Success

Wyndham Civic Centre in Werribee was the venue for the 2023 National Conference Sister Cities – Linking the World Together.

One hundred and twenty delegates, including Consuls-General from fifteen countries, Members of Parliament, Mayors, Councillors, Federal and State

representatives, business and community leaders, as well as interstate and international guests participated in the Conference.

The Conference covered a wide range of issues relating to sister city relationships such as the benefits of sister cities; the role of the consular

corps; engaging with youth; cultural aspects; international engagement; the past, present and future of relationships; creating a new relationship and much more.

This was the first National Conference since 2015. The last few years SCA has organized State Forums.

In her introductory remarks, Christina Despoteris OAM, President of SCA said, "I believe this Conference will go a long way in initiating discussion, at all levels, which will hopefully make people aware of the important benefits which sister city relationships bring."

The program included presentations from three Consuls-General - USA, Japan and Italy; the Hon John Brumby AO, Chancellor of La Trobe University and Former Premier of Victoria; George Shaw, Chairman of the Melbourne to Osaka Yacht Race; Russell Tulett, Assistant Director, Foreign Arrangements Branch, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade; Vivienne Nguyen AM Chairperson, Victorian Multicultural Commission; Traylor Marston, Youth Director, Global Cities New Zealand; Dr Xueli (Charlie) Huang Co-Director, Sustainable Global Business Operations and Development Research Group, RMIT; the Hon Bruce Atkinson, Former President of the Victorian Parliament; and representatives of four local councils who outlined their programs.

Please take time to read the presentations by the various speakers. They can be found by clicking on <https://www.sistercitiesaustralia.org.au/conference-forums/2023-national-conference/>

At the Conference we also announced the winners of this year's National Awards. Full details of the winners please click on

<https://www.sistercitiesaustralia.org.au/awards/awards-winners/>



2023 National Awards

This year saw the return of the Sister Cities Australia National Awards.

Each year an important feature of the Sister Cities Australia Annual Conference is the National Awards Program. This program aims to encourage excellence and innovation in sister city activities, to develop a permanent information resource for members and to provide a forum for information exchange.

The 2023 SCA National Awards covered the period from **2020 to 2023**, with a couple of changes that were for this year's Awards **ONLY**.

The normal 5 categories were retained and covered the period from **1 April 2022 until 31 March 2023**.

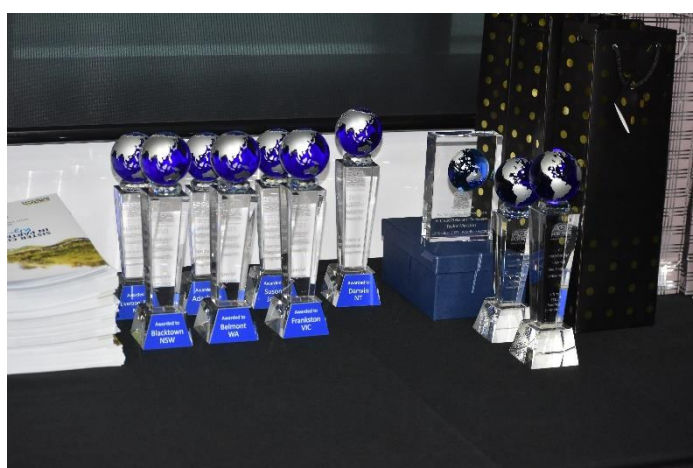
An additional *Category 6 – Special Program Award* was added to cover all activities held between **1 April 2020 and 31 March 2022** and focused on innovative ways that Members used to keep their relationships thriving.

Congratulations to all the winners.

Although SCA did not receive many nominations, the quality of the entries was excellent.

For information about the winners including a summary of the projects please go to

<https://www.sistercitiesaustralia.org.au/awards/awards-winners/>



Moka-Harvey Handshake: Shire of Harvey and City of Moka friendship grows

Western Australia's Shire of Harvey strengthened its Friendship City Agreement with the City of Moka in Japan last month during a Delegation visit to the Harvey Region.

Officials from the City of Moka joined a student and teacher cohort from four Japanese schools on the international journey to the regional community, located approximately 90 minutes south of Perth.



City of Moka Council Chairman Takayuki Kushige, City of Moka Mayor Shinichi Ishizaka, Robyn Clarke MLA, Shire of Harvey President Cr Michelle Campbell, City of Moka Superintendent Takao Yamanaka and Consul General of Japan in Perth Yasushi Naito.

The Delegation was the first to visit the Harvey Region since the 2022 signing of the City of Moka and Shire of Harvey Friendship City Agreement.

The Agreement builds upon more than 20 years of friendship and learning championed by teachers and exchange programs at Harvey Region schools and sets goals for future cultural exchange and education opportunities.

While visiting in late October, City of Moka Mayor Shinichi Ishizaka and senior leaders in his local government explored the Harvey Region lifestyle with an Australian-themed barbecue, pub visits, winery tour, boat cruise and school visits.



The City of Moka Delegation tours Harvey Senior High School.

Highlights of the trip included a Tree Planting Ceremony at Apex Park featuring the Japanese zelkova – a culturally significant tree in Moka.

The Delegation visit to Harvey Administration Office to have scones and tea with Shire President Cr Michelle Campbell, Cr Wendy Dickinson and Chief Executive Officer Annie Riordan illuminated the different responsibilities institutions hold in Japan and Australia.

Delegates also enjoyed their visit to the WA College of Agriculture - Harvey and were shocked by the size.

The Shire of Harvey is more than 1,700 square kilometres in size, whereas the City of Moka is roughly 167 square kilometres in size.

Delegates were also introduced to their first Welcome to Country, Smoking Ceremony and Didgeridoo performance, courtesy of Harvey

Aboriginal Corporation and Woolkabunning Kiaka Aboriginal Corporation.

The Shire of Harvey provided delegates with Welcome Packs that included information on the significance of Welcome to Country and local Aboriginal customs. Students and officials engaged positively with Elders after these ceremonies to learn more.



City of Moka Mayor Shinichi Ishizaka enjoying lunch at Brugan Brewery.

In a formal activity, the Shire of Harvey hosted a Celebration Dinner that included VIP guests Consul General of Japan in Perth Yasushi Naito, Robyn Clarke MLA, The Hon. Nola Marino MP and The Hon. Dr Steven Thomas MLC.

This event showcased Harvey Region produce and Australian delicacies, as well as sharing local musical talent with delegates and taiko drumming – a performance significant in Japanese culture.

Perhaps most memorable for the City of Moka Delegation was the souvenirs and gifts they were given to remember their first time in the Harvey Region.

During a gift exchange, the Shire of Harvey received an incredible lantern and sake, while the City of Moka received locally-made Aboriginal artwork of the Red-tailed black cockatoo - the Korijekup or Karak, which was the original name for Harvey.

The colours depicted in the artwork represent strength and the symbols depicted represent Aboriginal people and ancestors supporting and healing the community.

The Delegation also received Akubra hats and were delighted by the iconic Australian headwear.



City of Moka interpreter Naomi Oka and Shire of Harvey interpreter Sachiko Pearce at Harvey icon The Big Orange.



The second largest city in Papua New Guinea, **Lae** shares a similar history to Cairns, being founded on gold mining and then agriculture.

Cairns and Lae enjoy a very strong sister city relationship. The “HEARTS for LAE KIDS Bike Program” has been a joint project conducted over the 2022-2023 period.

The Program was well received by the community of Lae and it brought many smiles especially to the Lae Kids and the prisoners and their families. For Buimo jail the bikes connected the inmates and their families.

The bikes were donated and collected in Cairns with the assistance of the Rotary Club and organisers.



There are many stories to be told, but these bikes are a gift that will motivate the children to take ownership and be responsible. Their mindset will change and they will start gearing up for the Rosso Mountain Bike Race challenge. This Program has created an interest in bike riding in the communities. Both boys and girls in the communities are now busy fixing and maintaining bikes thus negating peer pressure for involvement in negative activities.

The bike distribution to the settlement seems to have broken the barrier in the communities whereby more girls are riding bikes.

This Program could be the catalyst for change in promoting a safe environment for everyone.

The distributed of these bikes have created a lot of interest.

Children are keeping busy and are not getting involved in harmful activities within the settlement.

Congratulations to all involved.



The Lae Tourism Bureau under the Lae City Authority was responsible for the storage, distribution and monitoring of the Program. The Tourism Bureau organized a team of volunteers from the Local bike clubs to help asses maintenance and preparation of the bikes for distribution.

Kids in the settlement are now busy with bike maintenance, training and ridding activities preparing for the Rosso Mountain Bike Race in Lae City.

MEET YOUR EXECUTIVE MEMBERS



**Christina Despoteris OAM
President**

Christina is currently the President of Sister Cities Australia (SCA); the Vice President of the Lemnos Gallipoli Commemorative Committee; a Member of the Art, Craft & Cookery Committee of the Melbourne Royal; an Executive Member of the George Devine Treloar Memorial Committee; an Honorary Life Member of the Royal Agricultural Society of Victoria; and an Honorary Member of Merimna Oceania.

Her association with sister cities dates back to 1984 when she was the Publicity Officer of the Ethnic Affairs Commission and produced a concert at the Concert Hall to mark the of the twinning of Melbourne and Thessaloniki. Christina has been involved with this relationship for many years.

She has been with SCA since 2016, firstly as a Committee Member and then as its Vice President. She has been President since September 2022.

During her time with the Victorian Government, Christina worked in the Ethnic Affairs Commission, the Departments of Local Government, Employment

and Training, Arts, Health, Labour, Premier's and Gaming, where she developed extensive experience in event management, protocol, media, marketing and public relations.

In 2018, Christina was awarded the *"Victorian Government's – Award for Meritorious Service to the Community – For her leadership and dedication in engaging the community and promoting Greek culture through art, music, dance, history and the delivery of various initiatives"*.

In June 2022, Christina was awarded the *"Medal of the Order of Australia OAM – For her services to the Greek Community"*.



**Cr Dr Jennie Barrera
Vice President**

Jennie is currently the Mayor of Wyndham City Council and CEO of Wyndham Community & Education Centre Inc. She has worked in education and community services for more than forty years mostly in the not-for-profit sector.

She was elected to local government in 2020. Jennie has a PhD in Australian Colonial History, a Master of Education in Language, Literacy & Numeracy, and a Bachelor of Arts (English Literature/ History).

In 2009, she received a Victorian Multicultural Commission Award for services to multicultural communities and was a People of Australia Ambassador under the Gillard government from 2011-2013. In 2018, she received the Lynne Kosky Memorial Award for Lifetime Achievement in Education and a National Achievement Award in the same year for services to Education.

Jennie was appointed to the Executive Committee of Sister Cities Australia in 2021.



Gordon Allen
National Treasurer

Recently retired, Gordon has a history of employment in the private, commercial, not-for profit and local government sectors.

Between 2014-2021, Gordon was the Sister Cities Project Officer in either a permanent or joint part-time role for Blacktown Council in Sydney.

During this time, he managed 5 Sister City partnerships, worked closely with local community groups, hosted incoming delegations and identified opportunities for Blacktown Council to expand its International Links Program.

Gordon has a passion for sport and has been involved in sporting club committees and community radio around Australia for many years.

Gordon joined Sister Cities Australia in November 2019.



Greg McCallum JP CMC
Executive Member

Greg McCallum is a former School Deputy Principal and Rugby League Administrator and Referee, who is currently International Links & Sister Cities Co-ordinator at Blacktown City Council a position he has been in for seven years.

Greg brings a vast educational, sporting and cultural perspective to the long-established Sister Cities program for Blacktown City and its relationships with Suseong-Gu (Korea), Liaocheng (China), Porirua (New Zealand), Liverpool Plains (NSW) and the League of Cities (Philippines). Greg understands the high-level protocols that exist within these relationships.

Having worked and lived in England for seven years within a peak sporting body and travelled throughout much of Europe, Greg has a broad but also a deep appreciation of cultural diversity and community, is an experienced events manager and holds a degree in Human Resource Management.

Greg was appointed to the Executive Committee of Sister Cities Australia in 2021.

Greg is also an experienced Civil Marriage Celebrant and MC.



Peter Filmer OAM
Executive Member

Peter is a recently retired Manager in Local Government. He retired in July this year after 45 years of consecutive service both at Blacktown and Penrith Councils.

Commencing in finance Peter changed his career direction in the nineties and was appointed to the Community Relations Officer position which first introduced him to Sister Cities. From there he made Sister Cities one of his passions ultimately achieving Life Membership of Sister Cities Australia. Peter had stewardship of Council's Sister Cities program for over 25 years partnering with cities in New Zealand, South Korea, China, The Philippines, and Liverpool Plains in rural New South Wales. This program has delivered some wonderful commensurate benefits and outcomes.

"I am sure that like so many of us, Sister Cities was a very foreign (no pun intended)

concept to me until I inherited our programme at Blacktown. I was on a very steep learning curve but it didn't take much for me to generate great enthusiasm for the movement that is Sister Cities. I was fortunate to have a highly supportive Council that not only pursued the one agreement we had, but also sought to form new partnerships. I was so, pleased to be a part of forming partnerships in South Korea, China, The Philippines & Liverpool Plains. The latter has been quite a brilliant partnership.

In terms of community, Peter was responsible for Council's extensive events program including iconic celebrations for Australia Day, Blacktown City Festival, Blacktown Medieval Fayre, Cities Marathon and more recently developed Council's Central Business District Activation Strategy.

Peter also has a passion for sport being a former NRL first grade referee, A grade cricketer and average B trade golfer. Peter has been President of a number of sporting organisations and is currently serving on the Boards of both the NSW Rugby League Referee's Association and Springwood Golf Club.

In 2014 Peter was awarded the Order of Australia for service to sport and the community and upon retirement from Council was awarded the Key to the City of Blacktown.

Considering all of the above Peter's most important achievement is the love of his family, 3 kids and 3 grand children.

SCA Affiliation Directory and Links Update



site search

home sca events awards media gallery links



Does your Sister City Association or Committee have a webpage?

Do you have a Facebook Page?

Do you have a presence on Social Media?

Would you like to share those links with SCA members and friends?

If you would like your website, Facebook page, LinkedIn page, Instagram account, or other social media pages added to the list please let me know by clicking on the link below. Thank you for your help and support with this SCA initiative, which I hope will be a useful resource for all.

Click [HERE](#) to send your link details to SCA.

Have you checked out the Affiliation Directory recently? It has been meticulously updated to reflect all of the Council amalgamations that have occurred in all of the Australian States.

Is there information missing? Is there incorrect data? This Directory is the definitive document on Australian Sister City and Friendship City links and your help is needed to ensure that it remains as up-to-date and accurate as possible.

Sister Cities Australia

Sister Cities Australia Inc. (SCA) is an association of cities, towns, shires, ports and even states that have a Sister City relationship. SCA also takes a role in matching cities and towns in Australia with cities and towns both from overseas and within Australia seeking a sister city relationship. SCA is also the link between an Australian sister city or town and the many projects and ideas that have been experienced here and abroad.

Many cities, municipalities and shires in Australia have at least one sister city relationship with a city or town overseas, or within Australia with many have multiple affiliations.

The objective of **Sister Cities Australia** is to provide an umbrella of support and to promote these affiliations. SCA also aims to provide a forum for cultural, economic and educational interchange between communities and to encourage friendship, co-operation and understanding to improve peaceful co-existence worldwide.

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More Photos from the Conference





NEWSLETTER

December 2023