

# media release



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## Co-operatives urge new era of collaboration

The next phase of co-operative business development in Australia would be determined by the willingness of the sector to come together and speak with a unified voice, was a clear message coming out of last week's National Co-operatives Conference in Port Macquarie, the official closing event of the International Year of Co-operatives (IYC) in Australia.

In closing the two-day industry summit, Greg Wall, group CEO of Capricorn Society and chair of the Australian Secretariat for the International Year of Co-operatives, urged Australian co-operatives to push forward with plans for national-level industry representation.

"We have gained great momentum in this International Year, and we cannot afford to drop the ball at this stage in terms of the legacy outcomes that will take the sector forward beyond 2012. As we did at the beginning of this journey to the IYC, I am issuing a national call to action," said Mr Wall.

"I ask that you review within your organisations how you will participate in the developments and in the formation phase of a national body representing member owned business forms, or as part of the partnership that resources this organisation going forward."

Another important legacy activity, highlighted at the conference was the national mapping project on the size and scope of mutually owned co-operatives in Australia undertaken by The Australia Institute on behalf of the sector, titled *"Who knew Australians were so co-operative?"*

The research showed that despite 79% of people being members of a co-operative, only three in 10 Australians can name a co-operative or mutually owned enterprise, and only 16% were even aware they are a member of one. The discrepancy between co-op membership and co-op awareness was acknowledged at the conference as one of the key areas that needs tackling nationally.

As well as latest research, the 250 delegates and speakers came together to discuss issues ranging from Australia's agricultural future, regional economic development, market competition and what co-operatives can do to help the squeeze on public sector funding in essential areas such as health, housing and education. 30 youth delegates attended Australia's first national co-operative youth summit to discuss how the sector can better engage with the younger demographic. The findings of the summit will go to the United Nations as Australia's contribution to an International Youth Co-operative Statement being drafted at the official international close of the Year of Co-operatives at UN headquarters in New York on 19-20 November.

The conference hosted two other national events - the launch of the official commemorative year book, *"Building a better Australia: 50+ Stories of co-operation"* on Wednesday 24 October by the Nationals Federal Member for Cowper, the Hon. Luke Hartsuyker, and Australia's first national awards recognising outstanding leadership in co-operative business on Thursday 25 October with guest speaker and presenter Maggie Beer AM.



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"The year book and the awards have been important activities aimed at raising the level of awareness of co-operative businesses and to engender a sense of sector pride in our achievements and successes," said Melina Morrison, director of the IYC Secretariat.

The year book, supported by a unique partnership of more than 20 industry organisations is the maiden publication of its type showcasing the diversity and success of Australian co-operative businesses through best practice case studies. The year book is available exclusively through The Co-op Bookshop, Australia's largest member owned retailer.

"Our partnership with the Co-op Bookshop is an example of how we can strength co-operative to co-operative business ties," said Ms Morrison.

End.

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## Media Notes

### Australia – the land of co-operators

Australia has 1600 co-operatives and 108 mutual banking institutions

Industries with a co-operative presence in Australia include agriculture, consumer goods, financial services, purchasing and marketing, manufacture, automotive, childcare, renewable energy, housing, healthcare, transport, insurance and education

The top 100 co-ops, mutuals and credit unions in Australia turned over \$17.8 billion in 2012\*

Australian mutual banking institutions hold \$83b in assets and serve over 4.6 million Australians

\*Co-operatives Australia Top 100 List of Co-operatives, Credit Unions and Mutuals: [www.australia.coop](http://www.australia.coop)

International Year of Co-operatives 2012 - <http://social.un.org/coopsyear/>

