

# Make an impression, leave no trace.

BUCHAN

## Buchan Hotels forum puts focus on ESG performance.

**A forum in Sydney hosted by global architecture design studio Buchan has kick-started a critical conversation about ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance) in the hotel industry in Australia.**

'Make an impression, leave no trace' gathered a panel of influential hoteliers, asset owners, developers, designers and consultants to talk about the ESG drivers, opportunities and challenges facing the sector. Their insights provided a snapshot of where the industry sits and where it wants to be, referencing global trends and emerging technologies.

**Richard Boele**, Chief Purpose Officer at KPMG, moderated the discussion between expert panellists: **Phillipa le Roux**, Design & Project Director – Architecture, Design & Construction at Hilton; **Ian Devereux**, Group Head of Development at Salter Brothers; **Margit Robertson**, Consultant, Circular Economy & Sustainable Tourism Development; and **Valerie Mack**, Principal and Sector Leader, Buchan.

The panellists started by acknowledging that whilst Covid was a major setback to the industry, it also provided the time to stop, take stock and think about what can be done better.

### What's driving change?

Higher levels of institutional investment are placing hotels under increasing scrutiny, as investors look for the ESG accountability they expect across other asset classes. Devereaux noted that hotels must keep up with the market to avoid ending up as stranded assets.

Pressure from above is matched by pressure from below, as guests, keen to travel in the wake of the pandemic, seek out sustainable and value-aligned options. Robertson quoted a Booking.com sustainability report that said 81% of travellers want to stay in sustainable accommodation. This puts pressure on operators to balance the guest experience with better ESG performance.<sup>1</sup>

### Carbon counting

Circular economies and net zero are the holy grails in a world where reducing carbon emissions has become the number one sustainability goal.

The imperative to work with existing building stock to retain embodied energy is gaining rapid momentum in every sector. Le Roux noted that hotels are good at re-purposing buildings, often to the benefit of guest experience. Mack pointed to a recently opened hotel in a 1950s building in the US that has achieved Passive House and LEEDS certification, proving that with considered design, re-purposed and renovated buildings can meet high environmental performance ratings.

Robertson is excited by the potential of net zero concrete, believing it will be the biggest contributor to reducing carbon emissions. Another major theme for hotels is electrification, something that Devereaux said is being implemented as a decarbonisation strategy across several new hotels he is involved in.

<sup>1</sup> Booking.com 2021 Sustainable Travel Report  
<https://globalnews.booking.com/bookingcoms-2021-sustainable-travel-report-affirms-potential-watershed-moment-for-industry-and-consumers/>

## Specify right

Le Roux said specifying a high-quality fit out at the start pays dividends. She used the example of a Hilton renovation that found the hotel's 12-year-old bathrooms were so well built that they didn't need to be replaced, and said she champions a robust design process.

Mack drew attention to the multiple benefits of specifying locally made products, which include cutting transport costs and carbon emissions; reducing lead times (important in the hospitality industry); and demonstrating social responsibility by supporting local businesses.

## Putting people first

All panellists noted an increased focus in the hotel industry on creating better work environments and empowering staff. Robertson pointed to the importance of education to ensuring that hotel staff understand what's happening around ESG and what they should be doing, giving people permission to drive change and innovate.

## Looking ahead

The panellists agreed that a greater sense of responsibility across the board has emerged in the hotel sector. Robertson noted that circular economies require collaboration across every aspect of the supply chain, removing the notion that any one business can do it alone.

Buchan has committed to hosting quarterly panels to continue the conversation, to support industry collaboration and knowledge sharing and benefit people, planet and prosperity.

