



Brisbane to remain in the G20 spotlight



Forget the politics, Brisbane's hosting of the G20 from an event perspective was an unadulterated success. **BY BRAD FOSTER AT THE G20**

So there I was, a little fish in a big pond. With my just-acquired media accreditation badge firmly on, I entered the Brisbane Convention & Exhibition Centre like a young lad that had been given the keys to his dad's shiny new car for the first time.

Forget that I'd sweated my way from the air-conditioned cool of the Mantra South Bank on the hottest Brisbane day in 50 years and done a half lap of the convention centre to finally find my way in, this was the G20 and I felt privileged to be one of the 2000 journalists to actually be allowed to attend this high-profile meeting.

I was there, I told the G20 Taskforce, to write this event up from a logistical point of view. The policy making was secondary, although I have to admit I sat down and watched President Obama's University of Queensland address with the rest of the hacks on the Saturday afternoon. (I can imagine there were plenty of smiles from those working in the local business tourism sector when he described Brisbane as a "global city in a globalised world").

What I can report is that to me, a journalist who has been covering the business event sector for more than a decade now, this was one slickly run operation.

Some may say that with such a big budget – with media now claiming that in excess of \$400 million was spent on the event – any meeting would be a success. But those who understand this industry will tell you that money certainly doesn't guarantee anything. What made it appear to work so seamlessly was most definitely the planning that went into it, and I have to say, the convention centre and its staff, the South Bank precinct, and the city of Brisbane as a whole.

The convention centre's location, lauded at the best of times, was perfect for this event. It can and was in this instance cut off from the rest of the city with kilometres of barricades and checkpoints that ensured the safety of the world's leaders like nothing I had seen before.

Anybody entering the building (except the leaders no doubt), had to pass through security scanners like those at an airport,

along with their baggage. Once inside, they passed through another security scanner that checked their official name badge (that everybody was required to wear at all times). I was stopped once by a security guard when my badge didn't at first appear to match who I was.

All motor vehicles allowed into the centre's car park had to have prior approval, with the drivers requiring the requisite identification, and access was only allowed at certain times. This made it particularly challenging for the centre's executive chef Martin Latter and his team, especially considering they needed only the freshest produce that was befitting of the very special guests who were "in da house".

Equally as challenging was the technological requirements that the G20 Taskforce and their clients demanded the centre have. For the past six months the centre's 70-strong in-house audio-visual team were planning and then installing an incredibly complex array of equipment to ensure that every meeting and event could be captured and disseminated to all corners of the globe. Equipment included 300 x 40 inch television monitors installed, something like 100km of broadcast cable, and an incredible 18m x 5m LED screen that was composed of 324 individual LED panels carrying news feeds from a range of media companies as well as international time zone clocks.

On top of that there were computers with the highest internet speed possible, fast WiFi, and dozens of security cameras throughout the centre that were reportedly watching everything and everybody.

The International Media Centre was a hive of activity. Sometimes it appeared to be quite empty, but what you didn't see on television was that beyond where the bank of TV cameras were there was a series of offices for media organisations that obviously didn't want their counterparts to know what they were reporting on.

Also in this space was a large dining facility where breakfasts, lunches and dinners were served to the hungry throng. Like the



Around 6000 police were at the G20.



Brisbane lord mayor, Graham Quirk, is interviewed.

centre it was open 24 hours a day, serving up a variety of hot and cold dishes - pastas, salads, and sandwiches. Everything was free except the alcohol.

Just outside the media centre there were coffee carts, one sponsored by Tourism Australia, all of which were busy around the clock. The Byron Bay Cookies were also a hit.

As an Aussie I was particularly amused at the pandemonium that broke out when Dreamworld brought in a koala for a short period each day. Obama could have been announcing he was leaving office and I don't think it would have mattered right then, with the international media folk hell-bent on getting a selfie with our much-loved icon. Tourism Queensland also brought along a surfboard and a replica beach shack that were also popular photo props for the visiting journos.

The whole event space was tastefully styled in green and orange and blue and yellow, with everything custom-built, according to the BCEC, by ExpoNet. It looked slick and worked effectively.

Plants scattered throughout were, as you would expect, native Australian varieties.

Staff at the BCEC were friendly and helpful, as were the hundreds of volunteers who were busy handing out water to some of the 6000 police patrolling the city. Despite the sweltering conditions the police I spoke to as I arrived and departed the centre were extremely friendly. (One story I heard was that after a full day of protesting by the group of angels about coal, the police suggested they should go home or go to the pub and they would give them a lift to either. The angels reportedly took them up on the offer).

No go zones

At most times media representatives only had access to the media centre. Beyond that, about halfway down the original building of the BCEC, there was a checkpoint that could only be accessed by staff, security and the G20 leaders and their entourage. If media wanted to attend press conferences they had to apply, and were then escorted down to the room in a group.

Explains convention centre general manager, Bob O'Keeffe, every square inch of the centre was utilised for something.

In the exhibition halls beyond the media centre were custom-made offices for each of the leaders and their senior personnel and then other rooms – constructed from scratch – where bilateral and

trilateral meetings were held for between 10 and 30 delegates each.

Beyond these were the meeting rooms and the plenary space for the leaders, the area where the "family photo" was taken, the Welcome to Country, casual dining areas, and spaces for smaller, more informal gatherings. And in each and every one were high-end technological requirements.

Leading up to the G20 Mr O'Keeffe and his team had 186 meetings with delegations who travelled from everywhere to view and review the centre and their slice of it during their stay. Naturally, a major consideration was on security. The purpose-built offices on the exhibition floor, for example, had to be completely sound proofed.

During the two-day event there were plenty of last-minute changes and requests that all had to be managed quickly and effectively. On the Saturday, for example, security personnel announced with literally minutes before departure that the leaders' exit point from the centre was changing. Centre staff quickly ensured that that happened.

Beyond the G20, Mr O'Keeffe sees a long-term legacy for the centre and Brisbane.

"We always looked at this on a couple of levels. For the centre and the staff it has been very good. It's left a legacy for us of more confidence in what we do, or continued confidence in the staff and ability of the building and the group working here to provide the best possible event," he said.

"I have had nothing but praise for our staff – from the AV to the food and everything in-between. It's been extremely satisfying.

"I think the interest and knowledge of Brisbane and the centre has gone far beyond what I thought it would. The US President deciding to do an individual speech at the University of Queensland where he talked about the future with a focus on science and the Asia Pacific was incredible. A large number of our Convention Advocates are from UQ [University of Queensland]. Again it's another linkage to us.

"I think there are very good opportunities for us moving forward. We have already had one international conference confirmed because we were hosting the G20 and we are talking to many others who wanted to see how this event unfolded." **m**

Next edition *micenet AUSTRALIA* will examine other elements of the event and the reaction from the Brisbane business event community on what the G20 will mean for the city.