

BUSINESS COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA 2009 ANNUAL REVIEW: MANY CONNECTIONS. ONE FOCUS

Chief Executive's Message ***Katie Lahey***

In a year of great challenges for business and the economy, the Business Council of Australia continues to lead the debate on the nation's growth and future.

At times of change, the BCA must pursue its long-term reform agenda while also directing resources to address new developments. With the government responding to the global financial crisis and growing concern about Australia's economic growth, 2008–09 was just such a year.

The BCA was decisive in assessing and supporting the government's temporary fiscal stimulus packages. Likewise, we quickly turned our attention to responding to changes to the taxation of employee share plans announced in the Budget. Our aim was to highlight the adverse consequences of those changes for member companies and their employees and to present workable solutions. These and other issues were of immediate importance to our members.

At the same time, though, the BCA has continued to pursue and influence key longer-term structural reforms. For instance, through the year we engaged with the government and Opposition on the design of the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (CPRS). By showing how the initial design of the CPRS would adversely affect individual industries and operations, we created the imperative for a better scheme. We continue to pursue similar breakthroughs in areas including the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), regulation, health, fiscal and tax policy.

To ensure our work has maximum effect, we continued to strengthen relationships and channels of communication with ministers and their advisers, with Opposition members and their staff and with senior public servants. This will remain a priority over the year ahead.

Behind BCA advocacy stands detailed research. Our analysis of the 2009–10 Budget, for instance, was underpinned by a detailed analysis of Australia's fiscal needs in our budget submission. This year we have prepared no fewer than 40 reports and submissions, all available on our website at bca.com.au.

While these contributions have generally targeted government and policy audiences, many received substantial media commentary. A notable example is our submission to the Henry review of taxation, titled *Unrealised Gains*.

This brought corporate tax to the centre of the tax debate and forms the basis for our continuing advocacy to the Henry review, the government and the broader public. Our 2009–10 research will include a statement of the principles and priorities that should guide public policy in Australia up to and beyond the next federal election.

And we will devote substantial resources to benchmarking policy implementation against these principles and stated commitments.

More than ever, we flourish because our members commit time and effort to develop our agenda and to promote our policies. Our calendar of events continues to allow BCA members to have a direct and frank two-way dialogue with senior policymakers. In the past year, the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister, the Treasurer and other senior members of federal Cabinet and the Opposition have participated in BCA forums.

In a year in which BCA members could be forgiven for being distracted by challenges within their companies, they continue to find time to actively participate in our work. Many of our members attended a Parliament House discussion with the Prime Minister and members of his Cabinet, and other events and forums also attracted strong member engagement.

My special thanks go to those members who devote substantial time and effort through task forces, on advisory groups, in our public advocacy and particularly on the board. Remarkably, half of our members give of themselves in this way – a sign that we are pursuing the right issues. Without this contribution, the BCA's work would not receive the attention that it does.

Many of our members also very generously support our events by allowing us to use their offices and facilities, and we are grateful for their assistance.

On behalf of the president, the board and secretariat, I would like to thank each of our members for their ongoing commitment to the BCA.

I take this opportunity to thank my team of 16 staff for their energy, hard work and professionalism.

Finally, I thank our outgoing president, Greig Gailey. The BCA has frequently been fortunate over the years to have the president we need for the times. So it has proved with Greig. His willingness and ability to analyse detailed policy has added tremendously to the BCA's impact. His dedication and unflappable leadership has ensured the BCA thrives in a period of great change.

The complete version of the BCA 2009 Annual Review – ***Many Connections. One Focus*** – is available in hard copy. Contact us via bca.com.au to request a copy.