**Header:** Products, people, precast: 25 years of success

**Sub-header:** This year marks National Precast Concrete Association Australia’s 25th anniversary. To commemorate the occasion *Roads & Civil Works Magazine* looks at the organisation’s achievements and its key role within the Australian civil construction sector over the years.

This November the Sydney Opera House will be home to a very special celebration.

Individuals who have been part of the peak Australian precast concrete industry body for the past quarter of a century will gather at the Sydney icon to commemorate their achievements.

For 25 years, National Precast Concrete Association Australia has been a central driving force within the Australian precast concrete industry. Past and present members, old and new, will attend the prestigious dinner at the Sydney Opera House on 10 November this year.

*Roads & Civil Works Magazine* talks to Sarah Bachmann, the Association’s Chief Executive Officer, about the history of the organisation and how it has played a crucial role in the development of the Australian precast concrete industry.

**Sub-header:** Early beginnings

The organisation evolved out of a New South Wales-based group – the Precast Concrete Manufacturers’ Association – when it recognised the need to establish a national industry body.

Ivor Jones came on board as the Association’s first CEO in December of 1989. Mr. Jones was succeeded by Brian Mallon in 1998, who held the role until December 2003, when Ms. Bachmann took over as CEO.

Since its inception, National Precast has been an essential cog in raising the profile of the precast concrete industry and promoting precast products as a viable and cost-effective solution for many civil, construction and infrastructure projects around the country.

Ms. Bachmann says whilst there has been an increase in demand for precast concrete solutions in civil construction, there have been some hurdles to overcome these past 25 years.

“We’re constantly trying to encourage the construction industry to understand the benefits of using more precast, which is manufactured off-site in purpose-built factories,” she says. “In civil construction you will sometimes see major projects using a precast yard that’s been set up on site, but frankly, that’s not best practice.”

She explains that the benefits of a controlled factory environment far outweigh any production efficiencies of casting on site. .

“The manufacturing technology is constantly changing, the professionals are professionals for a reason – that’s all they do, they’ve perfected manufacturing practices in so many ways. It has benefits in cost-savings, risk management, scheduling, quality, durability and safety,” she says. “Those improved practices deliver a better end result.”

National Precast has been at the forefront in promoting the benefits of precast concrete manufacturing to the wider Australian construction sector. Part of its success comes down to the collective knowledge and experience it has accumulated and fostered over the years, much of which has been published in the Association’s exhaustive handbook on all things precast, *the Precast Concrete Handbook*.

“We also have an ongoing challenge to communicate to precasters who are not involved in the organisation that they need to be part of it so they can contribute and be involved with driving the industry. Together we can achieve so much more,” states Ms. Bachmann.

“When standards change, our members are up to speed and complying. We can’t say the same for other precasters who aren’t involved,” she says. “We all need to be working together to improve quality, efficiency and the regulations around what we do.”

**Sub-header:** A sustainable product

Sustainability has become a major driving force within this sector in the past quarter of a century, and National Precast has not shied away from pushing the sustainability message.

“We’ve been key in educating people about precast and promoting it as a sustainable solution. We’ve certainly raised the profile of precast among the broader construction and design industry in that context,” asserts Ms. Bachmann.

“Precast is relevant for all three facets of sustainability – society, economy and environment. Our members are delivering long lasting, durable products that are cost-effective and meeting environmental needs.”

“Over the past 25 years we’ve seen growth of concepts such as Green Star and a much bigger approach to replace cement with supplementary cementitious materials such as slag or fly ash. The concrete mixes used in today’s precast have become finely balanced high-tech recipes, to ensure quality, fit-for-purpose outcomes.

“All the advancements in manufacturing technology have resulted in precasters producing a quality product that uses less concrete and less steel. There is also heavy emphasis on recycling and no waste,” she says.

“We’ve seen fundamental changes in other areas as well, which have increased the design options that are available. There are now more alternatives to the traditional colours finishes available. Form liners and staining are two examples, both of which are now readily available in Australia and able to be easily applied in the factory before delivery to site. They offer a million possible combinations, so architects are spoiled for choice in delivering that bespoke result.

”Graphic concreteTM is another. It’s a technology where images are etched into the surface of the concrete.The Association and our members have played an integral role in communicating those changes and educating the industry,” says Ms. Bachmann.

Another technological milestone is hitting the market here - photocatalytic coatings.> Theseare coatings that use Titanium Dioxide to self-clean the concrete’s surface. They also have wide environmental benefit as they combat pollution and purify the air.

Ms. Bachmann says that advancements like these have enabled both the Association and its members to build a well-respected profile in the country.

Stable leadership plays a role

She says a major credit to the integrity and stability of the Association is the fact that only three individuals have held the position of CEO over the past 25 years. Further to that, two founding board members – Ian Coulter from Brisbane-based Precast Concrete Products and Matt Perrella from Delta Corporation in Western Australia – are still involved on the organisation’s Board today.

“It’s a big milestone for them. Along with a handful of other individuals including John Burke, Godfrey Smith, Athol Gudgeon, John Kehoe, Phil Hereen, Wrix Gasteen, David Lindsay and Ivor Jones as CEO, Mr. Perrella and Mr. Coulter were instrumental in kicking off what is now a national organisation for the Australian precast industry.”

During her almost 13 years as CEO, Ms. Bachman has seen the organisation evolve exponentially, and reflects that the achievements it has made within the industry need to be commended.

“I’m immensely proud of what we’ve all achieved and what we’re continuing to achieve. The biggest part of this is the depth and breadth of our work. Today, we are heavily involved in representing the industry across a lot of forums including the review and development of Australian Standards, we advocate for members to state and national authorities, andwe have a very big promotional agenda,” she says. “We’re absolutely punching about our weight and our resource base.”

“We’re about to ramp up our resources to do more for our members and the industry, which is only going to culminate in an even greater market share for the precast sector with some great sustainability benefits to the construction sector as a whole.”