Lest we forget

History books have been largely silent on the role of Australian Indigenous soldiers in the First World War. Finally, their stories of courage and bravery are coming to light. page 5
Bridging the gap

A smartphone app could slash the cost of testing a timber bridge's condition, writes Wendy Frew.

Thousands of timber bridges criss-crossing rivers and creeks and linking isolated communities to the rest of Australia are in serious disrepair but local councils cannot afford to fix or replace them all.

Now, a simple low-cost procedure developed at an Australian university could help councils better manage their ageing infrastructure by providing reliable information about a structure’s condition and the loads it can carry safely.

Traditional load testing costs about $5000 for each bridge span, according to researchers at the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS). In contrast, a new procedure developed by UTS Professor of Structural Engineering Keith Crews and his team, which uses a technology based on measuring the vibration of a bridge deck, costs only $850 per span – and delivers more reliable information.

Originally requiring sophisticated electronic equipment, these vibrations can now be measured using apps on a smartphone.

“Public safety is managed better and public funds are used more efficiently,” says Professor Crews, adding that repairs could cost between 10 and 20 per cent of the price of building a new bridge.

Recent surveys indicate there are more than 40,000 bridges in Australia. About 27,000 of them are made of timber, most of which are at least 70 years old. Most of these timber bridges are on regional roads, owned and maintained by local authorities, which are often under-resourced and lack the engineering expertise to undertake strength testing of their bridges.

According to the NRMA, there is a $3.87 billion backlog of work needed to bring NSW council roads, including bridges, up to a “satisfactory condition.”

The UTS procedure relies on accelerometers (like those used in game apps for mobile phones) that measure vibration on a bridge. The vibration depends on the number of spans on the bridge and the dynamic stiffness of the bridge’s deck. Timber strength is also taken into account and specially developed algorithms are used to correlate stiffness properties to bridge strength.

For years, councils have done Baird-Had repairs on their wooden bridges, says Professor Crews.

“Some rural bridges might not carry anything heavier than a milk truck or a Rural Fire Service water tank. This technology can tell a council whether a bridge can withstand such loads,” he says.

“If councils erect signs limiting loads bridges can carry, it creates problems for local communities because trucks often have no other access to these communities and councils often can’t afford to repair bridges or build new ones.”

When researchers in the Faculty of Engineering and IT at UTS started this research about 10 years ago, they visited regional and rural areas with a “truckload of gear” and would spend about a week assessing a single-span bridge.

“Now we can often test six to eight spans in a day and, although we continue to use some specialist equipment, we can often get basic data with a mobile phone,” says Professor Crews.

“We want to develop this technology to a point where councils can do the work and we provide technical support and training to their staff and their consultants.”

To that end, Professor Crews and his team are talking to the Institute of Public Works Engineering, Australia about the best ways to train council staff to use the new procedure.

Engineers are often trained to build things, not to repair them, says Professor Crews.

“We need to make sure that engineers understand that infrastructure ages and we have to manage that.

“We want to build confidence and competence among local government to manage their ageing timber bridges and give them the back-up they need.”

Breakthrough brings new hope for Parkinson’s sufferers

BY ANGELO RISSO

Last year, when Billy Connolly learnt he had both prostate cancer and Parkinson’s disease, he dealt with the news with his usual comic aplomb: by blowing a raspberry.

To the British comedian is one of millions of people around the world suffering from Parkinson’s, a neurodegenerative condition that causes persistent shaking, gastrointestinal problems and a variety of other ailments.

Now, breakthrough research has brought us closer to understanding how to manage the condition.

Researchers at the University of Technology, Sydney led by Dr Dominic Hare and Professor Philip Doble, have produced the first empirical evidence that an imbalance of iron and dopamine in the substantia nigra pars compacta (SNc) region of the brain is the root cause of Parkinson’s.

Dr Hare’s findings finally validate the theory that iron and dopamine react to create free radicals in the brain that slowly destroy neuron pathways.

“When these two chemicals react, it forms a toxic species of dopamine that essentially reacts like bleach in the brain,” says Dr Hare.

“The findings were a revelation. Those particular cells (in the SNc) have what you could call an ‘anti-Goldilocks effect’. They have just the right amount of iron and just the right amount of dopamine to cause damage,” says Dr Hare.

“When we give mice a toxin that mimics the effects of Parkinson’s disease, these cells degenerate.”

He theorises that this effect is probably a natural result of ageing, when the brain’s ability to securely store iron diminishes and allows iron molecules to “leak” into critical areas such as the SNc.

Designing drugs that can get into the brain and eliminate surplus iron is the next step.

Dr Hare is also working on developing preventive measures to halt the build-up of iron in the brain.

“We might not necessarily find a cure, prevention is actually not that far away,” he says.

“So it’s a case where you can wake up and say, ‘oy Parkinson’s is flaring up again’, take a tablet and go about your business.”

Derisive ... Billy Connolly reacted to the double diagnosis with his usual aplomb. Photo supplied.
**A clash of co-existence**

Good science is leading the way to ethical decisions that allow humans to co-exist with wild animals, reports Fiona McGill.

**By motorist who has ventured into rural Australia is familiar with the road signs, commonly a stylised hopping marsupial with the words “KANGAROOS, NEXT 6km”.**

Dr Daniel Ramp, a conservation biologist at the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS), says the wording that would have been appropriate at the time of white settlement is “Kangaroos, next 6000 km”. The animals were ubiquitous when European settlers began to fan out across the continent. But in 2014, he says, they are not.

Kangaroos are front of mind for Dr Ramp who is trying to engineer a new approach to the relationship between man and macropod. At the core of his research lies an adoption of the principles of compassionate conservation, a growing international movement that incorporates the welfare of individuals with other factors in decision making.

“What compassionate conservation is arguing for is taking a step back to ask the question: is intervention really necessary? If it’s necessary, then first and foremost, do no harm.”

Dr Ramp’s starting point is Mount Panorama motor racing circuit, on the outskirts of Bathurst in the central west of NSW, where the presence of kangaroos on the track during races – and in collision with race cars on a couple of occasions – has led to heated debate and calls for a kangaroo cull.

Dr Ramp, the director of the internationally focused Centre for Compassionate Conservation at UTS, says good science is needed to lay the groundwork for ethical decisions that benefit all parties. “Most people who live in Bathurst want kangaroos to be a part of the landscape. They’re native to the area, they have a right to exist there,” Dr Ramp says.

“But we also want to go about our business, do our things and be unimpeded in the way we do that.

“So we need good science to understand where the kangaroos are and what their needs are. Then we need to look at what we need from a race perspective to reduce the risk to that event – to the people and to the kangaroos.”

He and his fellow researchers have devised a monitoring plan due to start soon. The initial data will be available by the end of the year. The project involves attaching wireless identification devices to 30 kangaroos to track their movements around Mount Panorama. Remote camera traps and GPS collars will also be used. Other measures include community engagement – one information meeting has been held and others are planned – as well as liaison with Bathurst Regional Council, Bathurst Local Aboriginal Land Council and race organisers.

Dr Ramp says it is not for him to prescribe how Bathurst deals with the Mount Panorama issue, but to provide data about the kangaroo population and propose peaceful ways in which humans and kangaroos can co-exist.

The Centre for Compassionate Conservation was set up in 2013 as an adoption of the principles of compassionate conservation, a growing international movement that incorporates the welfare of individuals with other factors in decision making.

“Most people don’t want to kill animals but the killing of animals has become entrenched in the approaches we take.”

## Bad rap for wild creatures

Australia has a poor record when it comes to co-existing with wild animals.

- The distinctive Thylacine, or Tasmanian Tiger – now extinct but popular with marketers of everything from beer to tourism – is perhaps the most maligned of Australian animals. It died out on mainland Australia about 2000 years ago but its extinction in Tasmania is directly due to human persecution.

- Dingoes are common in much of Australia and in many ways are icons of the outback. But many farmers believe the dogs attack livestock. Their image was further damaged by the death of baby Azaria Chamberlain at Uluru in 1980 and a series of attacks on children on Fraser Island in Queensland. Government culling is active across the country, including shooting and poisoning the dogs.

- Millions of Australians take to the surf every year with nary a thought about sharks. But on those rare occasions when an attack does happen, calls to cull so-called killer sharks come quickly. Most recently, the West Australian Government instituted a three-month cull of great white sharks after a fatal attack south of Perth by what was believed to be a great white. Of the 172 sharks caught during the trial, none was a great white.

Good science is leading the way to ethical decisions that allow humans to co-exist with wild animals, reports Fiona McGill.
Neptune’s kingdom

Australia is a surfing nation but few of us know much about the sea life that exists just beyond the breakers, writes Marea Martlew.

Cruising 160 metres above the shoreline isn’t Professor William Gladstone’s natural research environment. The Sydney marine biologist has spent most of his working life on, or under, the water. But a chance to swap a wetsuit for a bird’s eye view from a helicopter has given the researcher from the University of Technology, Sydney not only a unique scientific perspective but an opportunity to take photos that provide a fascinating insight into what beach users can’t see: marine diversity thrives only metres from them.

Professor Gladstone took this series of photos during aerial surveys of juvenile great white sharks between Newcastle and Seal Rocks, as part of research funded by CSIRO through the Australian Government’s National Environmental Research Program. Previous CSIRO research has found that this region acts as a nursery for sharks. At between one and five years old the juveniles migrate from Victoria and spend about 10 weeks moving among the deep offshore reefs and islands, and in the Port Stephens estuary. Sometimes, they inhabit shallower waters. “An individual juvenile spends 20 to 35 per cent of its time in the surf zone in water of only one to five metres in depth,” says Professor Gladstone. “It’s when the juveniles are swimming in the surf zone that they can be seen and counted from the helicopter.”

If this seems fanciful, one of Professor Gladstone’s images, taken on a calm summer’s day — perfect shark-spotting weather — shows a juvenile great white shark cruising about 50 metres from the beach, through billowing clouds of sand. The aerial surveys are a part of a larger collaborative research effort led by CSIRO that will, ultimately, give scientists and environmental managers better information about the success of years of protection for the east coast great white shark population. But for Professor Gladstone, the insights go deeper.

“The aerial surveys are also giving us a much better understanding of the surf zone ecosystem. The surf zone is iconic in Australian culture but, surprisingly, scientists have only a limited understanding of the animals that inhabit the surf zone and their ecology,” he says.

He says this is largely because of the practical challenges of undertaking research in an environment affected by waves, rips, foam and sand. Aerial surveys fill the gap in our knowledge about complex surf zone ecology.

The photographs capture the phenomenon of microscopic phytoplankton turning the shore red as they bloom and creating beautiful patterns reminiscent of an arid Australia. There are hammerhead sharks swimming just beyond the breakers, bottlenose dolphins body surfing, and shimmering, geometric displays of eagle rays sliding through the water in an almost impressionistic pose as the sunshine catches the edge of their pectoral fins.

Occasionally, a helicopter view gives the scientists a chance to witness behaviour rarely — if ever — seen before, such as that shown in Professor Gladstone’s photographs of longtail tuna swimming parallel to the beach, outside the surf zone, in an apparent co-ordinated hunting strategy.

“We have also observed them swimming in a line, one after the other,” he says. “The regular spacing between each fish suggests they are co-ordinating their behaviour in ways we haven’t observed before and don’t yet understand.”

Humans are there too — some, like the sunbathers and swimmers, oblivious to the marine life just beyond the breakers. Others, like the mullet haulers who cast their nets into the surf and the amateur fishermen who chance their luck with rod and reel, take advantage of the sea’s bounty.

“People are enjoying the surf and sharing this environment with a wonderful diversity of marine life,” Professor Gladstone says.

To see more of William Gladstone’s aerial photographs read Brink on the Sydney Morning Herald iPad app.

Regional NSW targets the tourism dollar

BY WENDY FREW

Despite the digital revolution, good old-fashioned travel guides and travel agents are still the tool of choice for overseas visitors making their way to NSW, according to new market research.

Tourists are reluctant to use their mobile phones to research their trip while on holiday and are more likely to carry a Fodor’s guide than read a travel blog, according to the preliminary research results on how to encourage tourists to get out of big cities and into regional areas.

Perhaps more importantly, the study by Dr Deborah Edwards and Anja Hergesell from the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS), shows people book most of their holiday before they leave home. “If we want to influence these decisions about where to visit, we have to reach overseas tourists before they leave home, not wait until they get here,” says Dr Edwards, a Senior Research Fellow in the Management Discipline Group in the UTS Business School.

The project is being funded by a partnership grant with Destination NSW. It aims to ascertain what encourages visitors to spend time in regional NSW and the barriers to such trips, in part by analysing tourists’ social media posts about their holidays.

Tourism is big business in NSW. Overseas visitors are a lucrative market that injects “new” money into the economy. But most of that money stays in Sydney.

Dr Edwards says tourism is not always recognised for the revenue it generates for an economy. “What we hope eventually to do is create a map of where people go in regional NSW. That would be a really powerful tool,” says Dr Edwards. To do this, two nationally renowned institutes – the Advanced Analytics Institute at UTS and the SMART Infrastructure Facility at the University of Wollongong – are collaborating with Professor Edwards and Hergesell.

“The tourism industry wants to know if people use their smartphones while travelling to research things they want to see and do,” says Dr Edwards. “But we found that traditional sources of information such as travel books and information centres are still very popular, she says.

“To use your phone overseas you need a local sim card, and you have to have lots of pages open.

“However, while travelling, some visitors use their phones for social networking and it is at this interface that AAI and SMART are assisting us.”

Interviews with overseas tourists after they returned from regional NSW found people had travelled out of Sydney mainly because they wanted to see more of the state and to experience nature and beaches.

Those overseas tourists who did not venture into regional areas said they did not have enough time, did not know what to see or had made other plans.

According to Dr Edwards, identifying patterns of behaviour, movement and the range of places tourists visit, as well as examining transport and trip planning, will help regional centres improve visitor experiences and attract a greater share of the tourism pie.
As a young woman growing up in north-western NSW in the 1930s, Isabel Flick couldn’t understand why her father had stopped attending the local Anzac Day parade.

Single and only 23 years of age when he enlisted, Michael Flick didn’t return to the family’s home town of Collarenebri until 1919. To understand why, new research explores how Indigenous soldiers were treated in the First World War and Isabel used to chide her father about his reluctance to take part in the one day in the year when the courage and sacrifice of returned soldiers was recognised.

As historian Professor Heather Goodall tells the story, one year, on Anzac Day, Michael did don his uniform and medals and head into town. But instead of joining the other veterans, he walked straight through the parade, in the opposite direction. Then he went down to the river to fish with his mates.

Like many other Indigenous Australians who served in the war, Flick returned from the front to discover that he was not only refused a Soldier Settlement block and membership of the local RSL club, but his children had been denied enrolment at the public school and were at risk of being taken away by the authorities.

Having proved themselves on the battlefield, Black Diggers had expected things to change for them and their families once they returned home, says Professor Goodall, who has researched and published extensively in the field of Indigenous history.

“These men had expected so much,” says Professor Goodall, an academic at the University of Technology, Sydney.

“When they came back from the war they were excluded from the things offered to white veterans … Mick had expected his sacrifice to be recognised. It wasn’t.”

In July, Professor Goodall delivered a paper at a Sydney seminar that examined how Indigenous women viewed their men’s service, through the eyes of two women – Isabel Flick and prominent Indigenous activist Pearl Gibbs.

“The More than Service seminar held at the State Library of NSW heard also from professors Mick Dodson and John Maynard. They head up a new project, Serving our Country, that aims to compile a historical picture, says Professor Dodson, the Director of the National Centre for Indigenous Studies.

“What has ended up as a four-year, $4 million project funded by the Australian Research Council, began with a review of the literature about Black Diggers. The review revealed that the story of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in the First World War is a story of contradiction: conflicts that Australia was involved in was relatively untold and some would argue, ignored, says Professor Dodson.

“We wanted to know why they enlisted, we wanted to know what happened while they were in the military … and we wanted to know what happened when they came home.”

Not only have these stories not been told to the broader Australian public but the descriptions of Indigenous communities in the years leading up to the First World War have painted a misleading picture, says Professor Maynard, Director of the Wollotuka Institute at the University of Newcastle.

“Incredibly, up to this point [of the war], 84 per cent of Aboriginal people in NSW were self-sufficient and prospering on their own country,” he says.

“These were not the reserves of the 1930s when everyone was thrown together and every decision in your life was taken away. These were the independent farmers, on land they had cleared, fenced, cropped. They had livestock and homes they had built.”

Professor Maynard’s research shows the Indigenous Australians who served left little behind in their home towns.

“They might have been a farm hand; they might have been a stockman … there are some incredible revelations. There was a truck driver, there was a butcher, a musician, a journalist! We understood we were all on the reserves and missions accepting blankets, sugar, tea and flour. This was not the case. The history we have been told is completely wrong.”

Like the white community, Indigenous Australians held mixed views about the war. Some agitated against it and against conscription. Others displayed patriotic support for the war effort and the British Empire, raising funds for overseas refugees, holding fetes for the war effort or knitting socks for the Diggers in the trenches.

By studying official records, family diaries and letters, and talking to surviving relatives, professors Dodson and Maynard hope to tease out the reasons Indigenous Australians enlisted. What is clear is the lengths they went to do so. During the First World War, the Defence Act 1903 excluded people who were not substantially of European origin or descent from enlisting. Many recruitment officers ignored the rule but Professor Maynard says many Indigenous men claimed some other racial identity to get around the rule.

“They could be Maori, Islander, Jewish, Portuguese, they could be anything else,” he says, adding that historians have so far identified at least 1000 Indigenous First World War servicemen.

Once enlisted, Indigenous soldiers could be found breaking in horses for the Australian Light Horse, fighting in the trenches in France or risking capture in Palestine. Some were wounded; some died in action and were buried in mass graves. Others made it home. Some, like Harry Thorpe, were decorated for their actions. The citation for Thorpe’s Distinguished Conduct Medal reads: “During the attack south of Villers-Bretonneux on the night of 17–18 July, 1918, this soldier displayed great coolness and exceptional bravery under very heavy artillery fire. In company with Private Homan, he succeeded in carrying messages back under intense artillery and machine gun fire in the face of what seemed certain death. By his action, much needed assistance was secured, and the position held.”

Having served side by side with and earning pay equal to that received by their non-Indigenous comrades, it must have been galling for Black Diggers to return home to face discrimination on every front. In some instances, conditions had deteriorated. Indigenous children had been taken away during their fathers’ absence and Indigenous land given to white soldiers with no recompense for Aboriginal families, says Professor Maynard.

“It’s likely that one of the reasons Indigenous Australians enlisted was to escape the control of the protection boards. But historians now say that their anger at their treatment after the war helped sow the seeds for a wave of political activism in the mid- to late 1920s.”

Professor Goodall says many Indigenous civilians were proud of their men for serving in the war – but “then they became aware of their betrayal [by the government]”.

Michael Flick survived the war to raise a family, but his experience after the war changed his attitude towards the military, she says. When his sons were thinking of enlisting to serve in the Second World War he told them: “This is not your war. It is their war.”
**OPINION**

**Full circle: making products that go the distance**

About half the waste Australians generate is recycled, but a better answer is designing products that can be repaired, upgraded, reused or resold, write Suzanne Benn and Damien Giurco.

When the who’s who of business and world leaders met this year at the World Economic Forum in Davos, a different industrial model was on the agenda: the circular economy.

Many people might not have heard about it but the idea has changed little over the years. “Parents need to trust their own instincts and back their babies’ development at every stage,” says Professor Catherine Fowler of the University of Technology, Sydney. “Hello Baby! is full of practical, evidence-based advice on everything from preparing for parenthood to what to do when a baby is sick.”

In an era of “big data”, we know more about where resources are, which will make it easier to recover them profitably. New technologies such as 3D printing offer the potential to reduce materials and energy use by allowing products to be produced on demand rather than “just in case”.

Meanwhile, there is growing acceptance of economic models based on access rather than ownership and this “collaborative consumption” will also help unlock the untapped value of assets. For Australia, rethinking the productive life cycle of manufacturing offers significant opportunities for job creation and productivity gains.

**BOOKS**

**Taking the battle out of parenting**

Everyone has an opinion on how to raise babies and many insist on sharing their views with new parents.

As political journalist Annabel Crabb describes in the foreword to a new parenting book, the bombardment of information from everywhere can leave parents “confused and unable to distinguish wise counsel from utter guff.”

In her book, Crabb, a mother herself, says that after a few years, parenting becomes second nature. “But in the meantime, there’s nothing quite like a good, honest, instruction manual,” she writes of the Tresillian Family Care Centres’ latest parenting guide, Hello Baby!

Written by Professor Cathrine Fowler of the University of Technology, Sydney, Hello Baby! is the third parenting book from Australia’s largest child and family health organisation. Professor Fowler is Professor of the Tresillian Chair in Child and Family Health, and a child and family health nurse, with extensive clinical and education experience.

She says young parents can easily be overwhelmed by other people’s advice but often what they think is the right thing to do, is the right thing to do. “Parents need to trust themselves and think about how their babies would feel in various circumstances … we want people to think about what the baby is experiencing, then what the parent is experiencing and tease that apart.”

Hello Baby! is full of practical, evidence-based advice on everything from preparing for parenthood to what to do when a baby is sick.

Professor Fowler says advice about how to care for a baby has changed little over the years. However, she thinks there has probably always been a need in Australia for parenting books, in part because of the geographic and social isolation of many families.

One of the key aims of the book is to help keep parents and babies safe, to make parenting less like a battlefield, while offering practical rather than judgmental advice.

“Think very little evidence that supports the idea of a maternal instinct, in the way we generally talk about it,” she says. “It can be reassuring for parents to hear they can learn how to care for their child and that not everything comes naturally.”

A longer version of this article was published on The Conversation on February 25, 2014. Suzanne Benn is Professor of Sustainable Enterprise at the University of Technology, Sydney [UTS] Business School and Damien Giurco is Research Director for the Institute for Sustainable Futures at UTS.

Hello Baby! is published by Tresillian Family Care Centres. Go to tresillian.net for details.
Breaking bad in North Korea

The Hermit Kingdom’s tiger grip on its people is slipping as pop culture and drugs feed the growth of black market capitalism, reports Amanda Woodard.

Who would go to North Korea for a holiday? A dreary, militarised country rife with hunger and oppression, the Hermit Kingdom isn’t at the top of most people’s travel list. But some Chinese tourists, perhaps nostalgic for the days of Mao Tse-tung, regularly make the trip across the border. It’s not the only traffic, says North Korea expert, Dr Bronwen Dalton. “There is a steady flow of information and pop-culture crossing the Chinese border into North Korea while drugs and defectors also make the trip back the other way.”

The growth of these black markets and the elderly exodus from North Korea over the past few years is evidence of deep-mantle changes in a totalitarian society, says Dr Dalton, Director of the Cosmopolitan Civil Societies Research Centre at the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS). “It’s the beginning of the end for North Korea,” says Dr Dalton, who has organised a photo exhibition that opens today of rarely seen images of the world’s most secret country, along with a seminar teasingly titled: North Korea: Sex, Drugs and Rock ‘n’ Roll.

“The whole society is based on a big lie – that they are a workers’ paradise and the envy of the world.”

But the drugs trade with China, “used to call [ice] ‘medicine’ and it was a status symbol” has fuelled an economic burden whereas girls have a greater capacity to contribute to the family economic unit,” she says. “This hasn’t affected the male-dominated culture where women are still expected to do all the housework – as well as run a business. But it has allowed women greater unregulated social interaction and increased exposure to information from outside the country. That information has come mainly from an illegal drug trade in imports, largely controlled by women. The rise of a new rich class in North Korea has fuelled an appetite for pop-culture: DVDs of TV dramas and pop music from South Korea, fashion and make-up industries is the private manufacture and sale of drugs. Methamphetamine or ‘ice’ was once produced by the government for export – along with other drugs that are illegal in the West. But according to Los Angeles Times Beijing Bureau Chief Barbara Demick – who has been interviewing North Koreans about their lives since 2001 – in the past few years, North Koreans have set up small businesses, raiding defunct pharmaceutical and chemical factories for supplies and producing ice on a small scale. As a result, there has been a huge rise in ice addiction, says Dr Dalton. “A word for ‘adict’ has entered the lexicon in North Korea for the first time,” she says. “They used to call [ice] ‘medicene’ and it helped people cope with hunger. But the drugs trade with China, where addiction has also increased, is making some North Koreans relatively rich.”

The whole society is based on a big lie – that it is a workers’ paradise and the envy of the world.

Dr Dalton. “In a deeply patriarchal society where men, in particular, are monitored and constrained, it has allowed women the opportunity to be more entrepreneurial and engage in black market trade.”

Surveys of female defectors have found that as many as 75 per cent of them involved in black markets were women before defecting. Consequently, women are now more valued in North Korean society. “Reports from refugees indicate the traditional preference for women to bear sons has declined and that the ratio of boys to girls is evening out. Boys are seen as an economic burden whereas girls have a greater capacity to contribute to the family economic unit,” she says. “This hasn’t affected the male-dominated culture where women are still expected to do all the housework – as well as run a business. But it has allowed women greater unregulated social interaction and increased exposure to information from outside the country. That information has come mainly from an illegal drug trade in imports, largely controlled by women. The rise of a new rich class in North Korea has fuelled an appetite for pop-culture: DVDs of TV dramas and pop music from South Korea, fashion and make-up industries is the private manufacture and sale of drugs. Methamphetamine or ‘ice’ was once produced by the government for export – along with other drugs that are illegal in the West. But according to Los Angeles Times Beijing Bureau Chief Barbara Demick – who has been interviewing North Koreans about their lives since 2001 – in the past few years, North Koreans have set up small businesses, raiding defunct pharmaceutical and chemical factories for supplies and producing ice on a small scale. As a result, there has been a huge rise in ice addiction, says Dr Dalton. “A word for ‘adict’ has entered the lexicon in North Korea for the first time,” she says. “They used to call [ice] ‘medicene’ and it helped people cope with hunger. But the drugs trade with China, where addiction has also increased, is making some North Koreans relatively rich.”

Uncovering the true value of events

State governments compete aggressively to attract major business events in the hope of boosting tourism coffers. Now, researchers have devised a method to measure the true value of such events to host cities – one that doesn’t inflate results by using generous definitions of event spend.

Developed by University of Technology, Sydney (UTS) Business School researchers in partnership with Business Events Sydney (BESydney), the new “inscope” expenditure methodology is believed to be the first to accurately measure the value of new money generated by business events.

Inscope measures first-round expenditure directly linked to a business event. “Expenditure studies are notorious for inflating the economic impact of events on host destinations,” says Dr Deborah Edwards, a Senior Research Fellow at UTS Business School. “The inscope expenditure calculation we use are conservative and no economic multipliers are applied.”

The method excludes spending on things such as airfares and conference registration fees and spending by delegates who were coming to the destination anyway. If the industry adopts this methodology as its standard it will allow fair and true comparisons, says Dr Carmel Fokely, a Research Associate of the Australian Centre for Event Management at UTS Business School. “It will allow useful comparisons between business events by governments and funding agencies.”

Robust information allows a deeper understanding of the business events industry and its commercial context, says BESydney Chief Executive Officer Lyn Lewis-Smith. “We must be accountable. We must be accurate. We must be transparent,” she says. “Above all, we must not be afraid to ask questions, to challenge the way things have always been done.”

Applying the methodology to recent business events in NSW, the UTS researchers found that international delegates spend an average of $694 per day during an event, interstate delegates $493 and local delegates $319. The data was drawn from 12 international conferences held in Sydney between 2011 and 2013. Governments are interested in the bottom line, says Dr Edwards, but events are not just about short-term dollar gains. “It’s also about the less tangible benefits – the long-tail benefits of business events that can lead to sustained economic development.”
The UTS Executive MBA program redefined the MBA in Australia when it was launched over a decade ago. Discover how our Executive MBA has evolved to challenge you to meet the business opportunities of tomorrow, designed and delivered with the business leaders of today.