

CASE STUDY



- Event:** National Housing Conference (NHC)
- Date:** 27-30 August, 2019
- Attendance:** 1,100 delegates
- Convenor:** Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI)

Event overview

The National Housing Conference (NHC) was held in Darwin for the first time in 2019, attracting the third largest delegation in the conference's history.

The conference is held every two years and is the largest gathering for the social and affordable housing sectors in Australasia.

The conference guides the national priorities for housing and homelessness and in 2019 explored the topic *Housing Future Communities*.

The 2019 conference shone a spotlight on national housing challenges with a program that focused on Indigenous housing. The conference location in Darwin drew delegates from around Australia and the world to meet Northern Territory practitioners working in the field and discuss remote and Indigenous housing.

Delegates forged new partnerships and worked towards innovative housing solutions, while hearing the experience of Indigenous Territorians.

Destination Darwin

This was the first visit to Darwin for many delegates of the 2019 NHC.

Growing from the seed of an idea planted eight years ago, AHURI's Head of Marketing and Communications Anthony Smeaton made the Darwin NHC a reality after touring the Centre's world-class facilities in 2016.

'When I came on the Meet Darwin familiarisation program in 2016, I fell in love with Darwin as a destination and knew it would deliver an amazing conference, but I was still concerned about delegates coming "all that way",' Anthony said.

The lure of the warm days and cool nights of Darwin's dry season proved a big attraction for the conference, with 1100 delegates flocking to the tropical city and smashing all expectations.

‘We were thrilled that our estimations were way off – with more than 1100 delegates attending – our third largest audience in the conference’s history,’ he said.

Anthony described the support from Northern Territory Business Events as ‘impressive’ and helped to secure Darwin as the successful conference destination.

Conference Objectives

The conference saw more than 1100 delegates and 190 speakers share their knowledge and expertise in the social and affordable housing sectors over three days.

Thirty-four sessions were delivered across four streams:

- **Impact** – highlighting examples of best practice nationally and internationally, as well as the research that has made a difference, including the future of social housing, collaborating with communities in Indigenous housing and supporting employment
- **Reform** – informing policy makers with the latest research and exploring policy development pathways, including domestic and family violence, culturally appropriate service design and building to rent
- **Connections** – fostering partnerships in practice, across sectors, research and all levels of government
- **Communities and Culture** – focusing on the unique lived experiences of Australia’s diverse communities, with special attention on Indigenous housing challenges and opportunities in the Northern Territory and nation-wide.

The conference’s 120 speakers from all states and territories across Australia, as well as Canada, New Zealand and Ireland, ensured a popular and successful event in Darwin.

‘Beyond the number we certainly feel the conference achieved our objectives in terms of the breadth of topics we were able to cover in the program and the high level debate and conversation that took place over the three days,’ Anthony said.

Darwin’s strategic location enabled AHURI to deliver a dedicated stream of content focused on Indigenous housing issues.

‘We were able to engage local Indigenous performers across the program, which added a rich cultural element,’ Anthony said. ‘The conference exceeded financial objectives as a result of these strong delegate numbers, and excellent sponsorship support.’

Conference Format

Conference convenor AHURI adjusted the format for the 2019 NHC to allow for travel time for interstate and international delegates.

Delegates had the option to register on the Tuesday afternoon before mingling at the cocktail function, making it a smoother and more relaxed start to the official proceedings on Wednesday.

The conference kicked off with a welcome cocktail function at Wharf One Food and Wine in the Darwin Waterfront Precinct on the Tuesday evening, followed by the Australian Housing Awards Australasian Gala Dinner at the Darwin Convention Centre.

The conference was officially opened by the Hon Gerald McCarthy MP, Minister for Local Government, Housing and Community Development for the Northern Territory and the Hon Luke Howarth MP, Assistant Minister for Community Housing, Homelessness and Community Services.



The conference program included several keynote speakers interchanged with several breakout sessions, including a Think Tank session, before a closing brunch gave delegates enough time to fly home.

The extended format enabled AHURI to add an additional social event to give delegates more opportunities to network.

‘This proved to be a big success with delegates loving the additional social functions – especially the fact they were outdoor (thank you Darwin weather!),’ Anthony said.

‘I was thrilled for the first time in my career to be able to plan and host a series of social events outdoors.’

As well as enjoying the Centre’s delicious and innovative catering, conference delegates were treated to some of Darwin’s signature food destinations and best sunset vistas at Pee Wees at the Point and the Mindil Beach Sunset Markets.

Darwin Convention Centre

The size and flexibility of the conference space at the Darwin Convention Centre more than met the needs of the 1100-strong conference.

With a large space for exhibitors, spacious auditorium and separate area to conduct a Think Tank session, the Centre and support from the Business Development Team ensured the success of the conference.

The Centre offered an exclusive event for conference delegates to ensure they could attend sessions across four streams running concurrently each day of the conference.

‘The venue was excellent – it is always great having a whole Convention Centre to yourself,’ Anthony said.

‘The Darwin Convention Centre Business Development Team were brilliant over the many years leading up to the conference, both before we signed on and after – their professionalism and enthusiasm for the destination went a long way in securing our business.’

Darwin and the NT

As a first time trip to Darwin for many delegates, the 2019 NHC created a ‘buzz’ for people taking part in Darwin.

‘There was a very different vibe to this conference,’ Anthony said. ‘Delegates were relaxed and really seemed to have a fantastic time.’

‘There was a buzz around Darwin about the big conference that was in town – I have never experienced that before.’

Darwin’s distance from our southern capitals enabled delegates to live and breathe the topics and challenges of the conference without distraction or having to head back to the office.

‘Hosting the conference in Darwin provided many benefits – being in a city so far away from the rest of the country meant delegates were more engaged with the conference.’