



Event: Association of School Business Administrators National Conference (ASBA2025)

Date: 20-23 May 2025

Attendance: 1,160 delegates from Australia and internationally

Organiser: Encanta Event Management

Event theme: Resilience at the Top End

Who is the host organisation?

The Association of School Business Administrators (ASBA) is a leading industry body representing eight-chapter associations, comprising more than 1,500 business administrators and business managers from independent, non-government schools across Australia and New Zealand.

ASBA's role is to provide ongoing professional development, networking opportunities, and advocacy support for its members in the education sector. The association holds a biennial conference at different locations around Australia.

About the Association of School Business Administrators National Conference 2025

ASBA hosted its 23rd National Conference in Darwin, guided by the theme *Resilience at the Top End*, which highlighted the importance for adaptability and strength in overcoming the evolving challenges in the educational sector.

The conference was held 20-23 May, bringing together members and non-members, sponsors, exhibitors and industry guest speakers at the stunning location of the Darwin Waterfront Precinct in the tropical capital.

Over 750 conference attendees, including sponsors, and 287 exhibitors travelled from across Australia and internationally to participate in the four-day conference to connect and discuss the latest industry insights, current trends, and best practices in educational administration.

Welcome to ASBA2025: A tropical invitation to Darwin

In February 2024, a pre-launch event was held at the Darwin Convention Centre to announce ASBA2025. The visit coincided with a two-day ASBA National Board meeting and invited a select group of sponsors to explore the destination and conference venue.

Encanta Managing Director Renee Bennett, professional conference organiser (PCO) for ASBA2025 highlighted the role of the local launch in supporting the promotion of the conference, which included a Welcome to Country and sponsors' dinner.

"Holding the pre-launch event in Darwin meant the ASBA National Board and organising committee were able to experience the venue and the destination before the conference – so they could touch, feel and see how it all works and how it would come together," she said.

Another key element was the on-the-ground filming and release of a launch video themed 'Come to Darwin' featuring Larrakia woman and Senior Elder Dr. Bilawara Lee (Aunty B) OAM.

ASBA2025 MC, Will McDonald, introduced the conference destination, sharing tourism activities including riding a jet ski and cage diving experience at Crocosaurus Cove. Darwin Convention Centre General Manager Peter Savoff also spoke in the welcome video, creating a strong destination announcement with a compelling invitation addressed to ASBA's members.

An illuminating Welcome Celebration at the Darwin Waterfront Precinct

A high-energy Welcome Celebration marked the opening of the four-day conference held along the Harbour Boardwalk in a spectacular evening at the Darwin Convention Centre. The open-air market-style event showcased the region's local produce, including barramundi sliders, crocodile skewers, and tropical cocktails served on arrival.

Australian DJ and internationally acclaimed visual artist Hot Dub Time Machine, also known as DJ Tom Loud, entertained the audience with an energetic soundtrack that kept everyone dancing from sundown through to a sky-lit finale.



Australian DJ Hot Dub Time Machine performs (L) and a drone show (R) sets the scene for ASBA2025

A 9pm drone show, an innovative alternative to fireworks, illuminated the night sky over the Waterfront Lagoon – sharing a curated story of the NT created by Perth-based business Stellar Lights.

"The drone show took careful logistics planning, which involved 80 drones for the 15-minute choreographed performance – projecting a story of the Northern Territory, its seasons, rainfall, wildlife, and tying in with the conference theme of resilience," Renee said.

"A stand-up gathering was organised with seating available for approximately 200 attendees. The drone show ended with projections of the sponsors' logos, concluding an evening that perfectly captured the spirit of the Top End."

The opening night welcomed conference attendees and set the stage for a high-calibre Top End event.

Transforming a large-scale exhibition space into a thriving conference hub

The Darwin Convention Centre's 4,000-square-metre column-free exhibition space, covering four halls, was transformed into a bustling hub to encourage exchange and innovation throughout the conference.

The exhibition featured 120 booths, designed and constructed by Darwin-based event supplier Fusion Exhibitions, including the installation of bespoke stands for prominent interstate suppliers.

The expansive floor space was adorned with a tropical theme and lighting, fitted with meeting lounges, a pop-up café serving barista-quality coffee, and food stations were strategically placed close to picnic-style tables.

Exhibitors commended the exceptional support provided by Fusion and the Darwin Convention Centre team, from pre-planning to the event delivery and post event, with flexible logistical capabilities ensuring smooth day-to-day operations.



The tropical-themed exhibition hall featured 120 booths at the Darwin Convention Centre

Renee said the expo allowed for exhibitors to showcase their products and services in a space easily discoverable for delegates to learn about the latest innovations in the education sector.

"The location of the Darwin Convention Centre also meant delegates immersed themselves in the conference experience while being surrounded by the beautiful views of the waterfront during breaks," she said.

"The resort wear dress code – smart and casual – in line with the laid-back lifestyle of Darwin, encouraged delegates to interact with each other, the exhibitors and create opportunities in a relaxed setting."

Additionally, the convention centre's catering team was recognised for their incredible day-to-day support, providing a variety of food options within the exhibition hall that allowed for further mingling with other delegates and time to engage with the exhibitors.

Delivering an exceptional conference program at the Darwin Convention Centre

The Darwin Convention Centre's state-of-the-art facilities and flexible meeting spaces contributed to an exceptional program, from the conference rooms through to the exhibition hall and on-site events.

Masterclasses were held in the Centre's stunning Waterfront Rooms, while plenary sessions were delivered in the Auditorium.

Speaker highlights included thought-provoking and energising deliveries by The Hon Julie Bishop, Chancellor of the Australian National University, Kieren Perkins OAM, and Professor Arnold Dix, who received a standing ovation.

As part of the conference program, a 45-minute live cooking demonstration was activated in the Auditorium with state teams competing in a fun challenge, igniting lively discussions about the importance of healthy food choices in school canteens.

The Culinary Clash, inspired by the cook-off MasterChef concept, involved teams from across the association, including participants from Western Australia, Victoria, and New Zealand. Australian hospitality provider Trippas White Group (TWP) held a key role in facilitating the group activity.



ASBA members participating in the Culinary Clash – an education session held in the Auditorium

Reflecting on the activation, Renee said the event logistics was a team effort that involved everyone on deck.

"Dreamedia provided audiovisual support, along with the setup assistance from the Darwin Convention Centre. The stage was arranged within a 30-minute preparation time and then reconfigured for the next plenary session with 20 minutes to clean up."

"Overall, the logistics and vision were executed seamlessly, bringing the activation to life and then successfully moving on with the program," she said.

"We never felt like there were any moments where the event was understaffed throughout the entirety of the conference – from the cleaning staff to the floor staff and Darwin Convention Centre organising team."

A captivating destination with a Top End difference

ASBA2025 delivered in style, from the innovative drone display inspired by the Top End's seasons to the Territory-inspired networking opportunities, all of which fostered new and more meaningful connections.

Off-site networking events were interweaved throughout the program, including the Crocodile Rock Social Night held at Crocosaurus Cove, which brought together a lively gathering of 800 delegates.

During the evening, First Nations artist Odette Pearson produced a stunning artwork, which was auctioned with the proceeds donated to the non-profit organisation headspace.

Karibu Creative welcomed and entertained guests, followed by a rhythmic performance by Territory musician eMDee, who skilfully blended didgeridoo sounds with drum and bass.

The conference program culminated with a breathtaking Darwin Sunset Dinner and Gala After Party at Mindil Beach Casino Resort. During the dinner event, Australian music sensation Jessica Mauboy, hailing from Darwin, surprised the audience with an on-stage appearance.



Sunset at Mindil Beach Casino Resort (L) and Jessica Mauboy's surprise on-stage performance (R)

Renee said the performance by Jessica Mauboy was carefully kept a secret in the lead up to the night, with Mauboy's band playing the lead-in set, unbeknown to delegates, and they loved it.

"The gala is a major highlight of the program and the client wanted to leave on a high and create a 'wow factor'. In this instance, we let the destination speak for itself and leaned into the venue's beach-side setting and organised the surprise performance from a local star," Renee said.

"The catering was also highly praise, contributing to the overall success of the Territory-inspired celebration."

The program offered an engaging experience for delegates, with the majority travelling directly from interstate and opting to extend their stay to further explore the region with family and friends.

"ASBA2025 demonstrated that you can get good quality services in Darwin, whether it be the expo build, the signage elements, the audio visual, or the quality of the catering – there's something to be said about that."

Image credit: David Broadway Photography

In their words

– Kathy Dickson, Chief Executive Officer, ASBA

"The ASBA 2025 Darwin Conference was an outstanding experience. The program offered a powerful mix of strategic insights, practical tools and thought-provoking sessions, tailored to the evolving needs of our ASBA members. From the keynote session to the masterclasses, every element was designed to challenge, connect and empower. The opportunity to network in such a vibrant and welcoming setting at the Darwin Convention Centre was invaluable."

– ASBA 2025 delegate, feedback survey

"ASBA 2025 was undoubtedly the best ASBA conference I have attended, from the exhilarating kick-off to the final day's wrap up. The relaxed atmosphere generated easy networking among exhibitors, sponsors, and delegates, creating the perfect environment for friendly catchups and meaningful conversations. It was evident that the organisers put a lot of effort into ensuring a fantastic experience for both sponsors and delegates."