

Communities united by drive to professionalise

The SMSF Association serves a range of constituents, but chief executive officer Andrea Slattery says there is a common theme.

The SMSF Association (SMSFA) represents a range of interests across both the wholesale and retail sectors of the SMSF industry, but the chief executive officer of the association, Andrea Slattery, says all members are united by a common commitment to professionalism.

“There’s a new profession, and there must be personal accountability and a movement of people towards their own profession,” Slattery says.

“There’s this new budding industry, with this new profession, and we need to get people committed to growing their own professionalism.

“Our professional membership is a range of different communities.

“But our professional membership is communities that are both wholesale and retail.”

In this context, Slattery says, the retail community provides advice and services to individuals – SMSF trustees – and the wholesale community provides advice and services to other businesses – usually the retail community.

Slattery says the 2015 SMSF Association National Conference has been structured so that irrespective of the nature of a member’s business – be it retail or wholesale – the topics will be relevant; but the conference streams are defined to match the level of personal experience and expertise of the individual delegate.

“You may be from an accounting background but moving into the licensing regime and you know you are going to have to look at aspects of licensing or limited licensing, [so there is] an opportunity to develop skills at a more general level compared to a specialty area, in a range of things,” she says.



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Slattery says the conference will also offer excellent networking opportunities across the three days – another important aspect of creating strong peer-to-peer relationships and helping to reinforce a sense of professional community. ■

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Peter Crump
chairman of the
SMSF Association

Representing SMSFs is a never-ending process

As one of the fastest-growing sectors of the superannuation industry, the voice of SMSFs must be heard in Canberra. That's a big job.

Representing the interests of the SMSF sector's professional practitioners and their clients is an open-ended, never-ending process, according to the chairman of the SMSF Association, Peter Crump.

"Members need to be aware that we can't sit back and feel confident with what has been achieved in relation to the SMSF regulation and consumer environment to date," Crump says.

"It remains a work in progress, and there are many issues afoot. There's the response to the Financial System Inquiry [FSI], the tax white paper, and the current federal budget situation, which are all critical issues on the horizon."

Crump says SMSFA's priority is to ensure that "appropriate representation and connections are made with people

THIS CONFERENCE GIVES MEMBERS AN OPPORTUNITY TO APPROACH THE BOARD, AND SENIOR EXECUTIVES, TO SAY, 'THIS IS WHERE I THINK YOU SHOULD BE GOING'

in Canberra, both in government and opposition, to as much as possible try to achieve a system that is sustainable for the long term and has durability for the long term".

Crump says a major challenge still facing the superannuation sector in general and SMSFs in particular is to do with consumer confidence. The 2015

SMSFA National Conference is an opportunity for the association to reinforce with members that it remains "the peak body they can look to for them to have their input to those policymakers".

"And all the time we welcome member input to what are the critical issues that they are seeing on a day-to-day basis," Crump says.

The event is also an opportunity for members to interact with the association.

"As we put in submissions to the respective inquiries we generally don't get members saying well done, thumbs up; we tend to get members saying they don't agree with that," Crump says.

"There's a silent happy group that we know we're looking after because the number of negative responses we get is relatively small.

"This conference gives members an opportunity to approach the board, and senior executives, to say, 'This is where I think you should be going'.

"This is the one event of the year when you get that intellect all in one place. This is a big event, when you get an opportunity to also hear the government and hear regulators – and one hopes that the message from regulators will be that SMSFs are working well." 

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Graeme Colley
head of technical
and professional standards,
SMSF Association

**All of the people, all
the of time: something
here for everyone**

Not all delegates come at key issues with equal levels of expertise or experience. The national conference caters to them all.

The structure of the SMSF Association National Conference in 2015 is different from past years, with sessions structured to cater to different levels of expertise.

In addition to departing from a job- or discipline-specific structure, the sessions will be pitched at different levels according to members' self-assessed levels of experience.

SMSFA's head of technical and professional standards, Graeme Colley, says the restructuring has been undertaken to address comments from previous years that the content of the event has "not been technical enough" for some participants.

This year there are three streams, broadly classified as "emerging" (for people with less than three years' experience); "experienced" (three to five years); and "expert" (five to 10 years and beyond).

In previous years the conference has been broadly divided into administration, legal and investment topics.

"What we have done is split it

[this year] into levels of experience," Colley says.

"We've gone more technical than we have in past years, because we used to have an investment stream, and we've got that down to two or three sessions, which are about investment theory... and they are the only real investment sessions we've got.

"The feedback we have had from previous conferences is that the content wasn't technical enough."

Colley says the theme of the conference is "lifecycle", and underlying its structure is "exactly that – how do you service your clients?"

He says the very broad theme of Day One is "getting people to understand what the market is like"; Day Two is "how do you service your clients"; and Day Three is "looking at the future".

Day Three features a "disruptor debate" between head of policy, technical and educational services for AMP SMSF, Peter Burgess; DBA Lawyers director Bryce Figot; and publisher of *The Dunn Thing*, Aaron Dunn. **■**

Self-assessment key to getting the most out of sessions

Help is at hand for delegates to work out how to get the most from what's available.

With about 1500 delegates registered for the 2015 SMSF Association National Conference, pitching a single session at the right level to satisfy everyone attending was clearly going to be impossible.

So the association has streamed sessions according to the individual expertise of delegates – emerging, experienced and expert – and mapped key areas of SMSF interest against those levels of experience.

The official conference app (available from the iTunes Store and Google Play) features a section enabling delegates to work out the best sessions to attend according to areas of interest, their actual occupation (financial planner, accountant, lawyer, and so on), and level of expertise.

This is designed to avoid a situation where content either goes over an emerging adviser's head, or is pitched well below the level of knowledge of an expert.

THE ASSOCIATION HAS STREAMED SESSIONS ACCORDING TO THE INDIVIDUAL EXPERTISE OF DELEGATES

"Usually, if [a session] is pitched well below them they get frustrated and shut down and start playing with their iPad," says Liz Ward, head of education services at SMSFA.

"And even if there's new content in the session, they have already shut down."

If a session is pitched over someone's head it can cause anxiety; but either way it diminishes the individual's ability to absorb information and to learn. Ward says delegates should assess their level of experience against specific topics.

"We're not saying an 'expert' needs to go to all the 'expert' sessions; there may be areas that they are new in," she says.

"We're not pitching it at the person, we're pitching it at the level of knowledge of a particular topic." **■**

Get involved!

Hashtag for the conference is **#SMSFassoc** and official Twitter handle is **@SMSFassoc**

Download the official conference app onto your handheld device from Google Play or the iTunes Store to use features such as Scheduling Assistant, Networking Tool, Delegate List, Presentation Downloads and CPD Evaluations as well as the most up-to-date program and speaker information.

Hungry for knowledge?

The eagle eyed will have noticed that *Professional Planner* is listed as an exhibitor here at the SMSFA conference. The especially observant will notice that when you turn up at Stand 26 you will instead find an organisation called The Hunger Project (THP). Obviously, that's not *Professional Planner*.

THP has a long-standing relationship with Conexus Financial, the company that publishes *Professional Planner* (and the Daily News you're currently reading). We share office space in the Sydney CBD, for example, and Conexus founder Colin Tate is a personal investor in what THP does.

We thought it would be good to introduce the SMSF sector to THP, so delegates can learn more about what it does and about opportunities to meet the philanthropic demands of clients.

In addition, if you drop off your business card at the stand, you could win a "Reimagining Business Leadership" workshop for your business, in which THP Australia's chief executive officer, Cathy Burke, will reveal unique insights for your business to inspire great leadership and effect long-lasting, systemic change.

Check it out – you won't be disappointed. ■

Sweet!

What would a national conference be without a couple of truly sweet special offers? Get over to the SMSF Association booth to:

- Claim two complimentary conference recordings of your choice (worth up to 6 CPD points).
- Register for Specialist Accreditation at the SMSF Association booth during the 3 days of the conference and save 20 per cent off the normal price of the program – plus you can choose to begin the program at any time during the 2015/16 membership year. ■

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