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Media Release

Thursday 6 May 2010

For immediate release

Melbourne 'hard act to follow' after hosting inaugural international event on nature and health

Melbourne has hosted the world's first event of its kind to raise awareness of the impact parks have on your health, and will be 'a hard act to follow' according to key international delegates.

Held at the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre (MCEC), Healthy Parks, Healthy People was the brainchild of Parks Victoria, attracting more than 1,000 delegates from 35 countries from 11 – 16 April.

Parks Victoria chief executive Mark Stone says it chose to host the event at the MCEC because of its convenient central and attractive location, bike tracks, flexibility, the MCEC's willing, cooperative staff and its environmental standing.

As the first convention centre in the world to achieve a '6 Star Green Star' environmental rating for its innovative sustainable design and operational features, the environment is something the MCEC takes seriously and has translated into every aspect of its operations.

For the Healthy Parks, Healthy People gala dinner, the MCEC's in-house kitchen team created a menu which included some of the many sustainable Victorian producers and vineyards it partners with, including salmon and caviar from Yarra Valley Salmon, one of the only fresh water aquaculture farms in the world to use a completely natural method of rearing its salmon and harvesting the roe; Red Hill Cheese's Goat's Cheese, made using free-range goat's milk which is free from genetically modified organisms, artificial stabilisers and preservatives; and De Bortoli Rococo Blanc de Blanc sparkling wine, which follows strict environmental practices using biological farming in the Yarra Valley.

Parks Victoria project officer Elisia Dowling says the food was certainly one of the highlights for delegates "the food was fabulous and we have had many positive comments from various corners."

She says the building itself also set a great mood, with Parks Victoria also opting to use 'green power' one of the MCEC's many environmental initiatives for clients which sees equivalent power purchased from a renewable energy.

"The design of the building with lots of natural light and the large glass façade really helped the vibe and set the mood for those attending."

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Elisia says having the venue right on the river and surrounded by hotels, restaurants and bike trails was also good for the wellbeing of delegates.

“We had bikes right out the front, and because the venue is situated in such a great location, the bikes were well utilised.”

Her sentiments were echoed by key note speaker, Dr William Bird who is strategic health advisor to Natural England, and says verbatim comments from several delegates were that ‘it was the greatest conference they’ve ever been to’.

He says when you have discussions on obesity, it’s vital to have venues like the MCEC where delegates can easily walk to their hotel and any other facilities they may need.

Dr Bird is proposing to take the event to London in 2012 but says “it’ll be a hard act to follow”.

“I am in awe of what has been achieved here.”

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