



Media Release

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Collaborative approach to conferencing growth behind launch of West Coast Events Centre

A push to bid for more national conferences is part of the planning behind rebranding Shantytown Heritage Park's event and functions business, launching today as the West Coast Events Centre.

The West Coast Events Centre (WCEC,) at Shantytown Heritage Park (SHP) in Greymouth on South Island's West Coast, launched as a separate brand specifically to cater to the growing conference and event market. SHP has been hosting events since 1971 however the conference part of its business has steadily increased over the several years and the potential for future growth is looking positive for the WCEC as well as the Grey and Westland regions.

For the previous three years SHP has attended Convene South, the last two as WCEC in order to separate the new brand from its well-known South Island tourist attraction parent.

CEO Andrea Forrest says that with some focussed attention, conferencing could become a viable income stream, not just for the WCEC but for any conference capable West Coast business - be it accommodation, printing, photography, transport, activities, cafes & restaurants.

"Many New Zealand companies hold twice a year, annual or bi-annual conferences and these tend to take place in the third quarter of the year, traditionally a quieter period for many West Coast businesses. This could become a potential, and not insignificant, economic earner for the Grey and Westland regions as average spend per day by domestic conference delegates has recently been quoted at \$483.00 per day*."

"We are investing in research taking place in early 2016 to assess this market's potential for the WCEC and the region as we strongly believe that, in order for us to bid for more conferencing business than we are getting at present, it will take a collaborative West Coast approach" says Ms Forrest.

Ms Forrest says that conferences do not have to happen just in the one location. "For example, in 2015 two national conferences were held in multiple venues around the Grey & Westland regions. Frucor's national conference utilised the small historic township of Kumara plus 3 different Greymouth venues. While Minerals West Coast's primary event was held at SHP, the field trips, partner excursions and entertainment involved the wider region. This created a fantastic opportunity to showcase the best of the West Coast to these 'domestic business tourists' – a unique & off the beaten track offering."

She says “Our WCEC team are professional, experienced and keen to work collaboratively with other West Coast businesses so collectively we can bid for business that may traditionally be beyond a single venue capacity.”

The oldest WCEC building is the Gold Nugget Hotel Saloon Bar, styled on a late 1800s West Coast pub, which opened in 1971 along with the original Shantytown Heritage Park village. Alongside the historically protected 1866 No Town Church, it proved a popular and uniquely West Coast location for wedding receptions in the 70’s and 80’s.

Miners Hall was built in 1996 and increased total event capacity to 350 people. The need for more space to cater to growing tour group catering numbers and to have the flexibility of different sized spaces was behind the Welshmans Conference build in 2001. This increased capacity by a further 300 to a total of 650 pax.

**MBIE Sector Performance Convention Delegate Survey Dec 2014*



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