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PCB claims export savvy

AMANDA SAUNDERS

The Perth Convention Bureau is loving medical specialists, as it enhances its strategy to attract medical conferences with big spending delegates.

PCB chief executive Paul Beeson said one of the not-for-profit body's biggest challenges was attracting "the highest of the high-yield" delegates to Perth.

Typically, conference delegates spend five times more than leisure tourists. However, medical and resources industry delegates — mainly from the UK and Europe — spend even more.

"We know anecdotally that medical delegates travel more and use more cabs, restaurants and facilities," Mr Beeson said.

"Their pre and post-touring, and conference are generally part of a tax-deductible package they have bought from their association. It is coming out of a corporate pocket, not a personal one."

The bureau, established in 1972,

is a finalist in the WA Industry and Export Awards in the marketing and design excellence category.

The organisation has a wide-ranging membership of 230, including hotels, airlines, photographers and golf courses. It is 75 per cent funded by Tourism WA, with the balance drawn from the City of Perth and member fees.

Its brief is to market WA as a destination for business events, including conventions, exhibitions, corporate meetings and travel groups. It claims a bid success rate of 82 per cent, with its competition coming mainly from South-East Asia.

"The governments of south-east and north Asian countries underwrite conferences completely," Mr Beeson said. "We contribute some (funding) but not the gratuitous degree that they do. Our marketing strategies overcome our inability to just go out and buy conferences."

PCB's export success is measured by "direct delegate expenditure", or the money coming into WA through overseas delegates. It

is on track to next year surpass its \$395 million target for its current five-year contract with Tourism WA, including at least \$101 million from about 50,000 delegates, excluding CHOGM, expected in the current financial year.

Mr Beeson said PCB, which has 16 staff and an annual budget of \$4.8 million, recorded the highest return on investment in the country — \$30 for every \$1 spent.

Recent bid wins included the LNG 18 conference (2016) and the Alzheimer's Disease International Conference (2015). In the 2011-12 financial year, 91 conventions, exhibitions and corporate incentive programs are booked into WA.

PCB has secured a partnership with the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons and, two months ago, created a scholarship program to send members of the college overseas to pitch for conferences.

The WA Industry and Export Awards, co-sponsored by *The West Australian*, will be announced at the Hyatt Regency on October 14.



High returns: Perth Convention Bureau chief executive Paul Beeson.

Picture: Ian Munro