

SUSTAINABLE PROCUREMENT DOWN UNDER

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I don't watch much TV these days, and I rarely watch films, so my impressions of places I have not visited tend to be shaped by my professional life or the experience of youth. For most of my life my impressions of Australia were heavily influenced by exposure to Rolf Harris as a child.

Despite strategies falling just short of counselling and hypnotic therapy, I can remember every word of *Two Little Boys* and I am still traumatised by his ritual murder of Led Zeppelin's *Stairway to Heaven*. Rolf actually lives in a posh suburb of the town where I live, I saw him in Homebase last week. A print of one of his excellent paintings hangs on my wall at home so I suppose I have achieved some sort of closure.

Last week I actually visited Australia for the first time, hosted by our partners [Net Balance](#) and I want to thank them for their hospitality and support. This is part of my plan to keep Action Sustainability small but to increase our influence and reach through like-minded partners (we have a similar partnership in Canada). Together we ran three excellent workshops in Sydney and Melbourne, two for the thriving infrastructure sector and one for the food and grocery sector. I met a variety of private sector clients, the excellent [Australian Green Infrastructure Council](#) (AGIC) and various state and national government bodies.

There was great enthusiasm for the new British Standard BS 8903, our new, [free diagnostic tool related to the standard](#) and our [publications on the subject](#).

In general, Australia is behind the UK in sustainable procurement. While there are some leading examples, most people wanted advice on how to engage senior executives with the business case for the concept. In the UK, clients are increasingly asking how to do it following ambitious pronouncements from their leaders, pressure from their clients or both. However, as Australians don't want to be beaten by the poms at anything, it is progressing fast. The AGIC green infrastructure evaluation tool is likely to represent an evolutionary step by addressing procurement in a much better way. Furthermore, environmental risks presented by the controversial carbon tax, proliferation of the mining industry and increasing NGO direct action (there were two Greenpeace protests in the week I was there) are likely to conspire to drive higher standards.

I will return to Australia, initially in a virtual sense in September. My colleague Cathy Berry and I have made a video contribution to the [first sustainable procurement conference in Australia](#). I will probably return in a more physical form before Christmas to help develop the sustainable procurement agenda in a country ready and willing to make progress.