

# Precious commodity

As office and industrial sustainability manager for the GPT Group, **Bruce Precious** is involved in some of the best-known buildings on the eastern seaboard.

## What does your job involve on a day-to-day basis?

GPT's portfolios are each leaders in their market sector. The office portfolio includes many of the best-known office buildings in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane. This prime office space demands the highest utility – that is, comfort and facility for the tenants, while maintaining the lowest environmental footprint.

Over 90 per cent of GPT's tenants nominate sustainability as being either important or very important to their business. The highest-priority factors are energy/greenhouse, water consumption and waste disposal, so the majority of the role is to bring about change to the way each property is run, managed and reported.

Indoor environment quality is also important but well managed in these properties. An exciting part of the role is the opportunity to work from the strategic level right down to the activity level on a daily basis with our property management teams.

Other parts of my role include working with suppliers, especially BMS teams, to ensure maximum benefit is gained from potentially smart systems; researching new ways to upgrade HVAC systems that will deliver the performance we need with the efficiency we need; and understanding new legislation, for example mandatory disclosure of NABERS energy ratings, and understanding how we can use it in the most positive way.

Providing ever more comprehensive and auditable reporting of environmental footprint is also an important facet of what I do.

It's easy to fill each day.

## What are you passionate about?

Seeing things work the way they should. Peak performance with peak efficiency, the elegant solution, is typically the result of clear thinking built on an understanding of the fundamentals.

As a mechanical engineer with a body of experience that includes building automation, project management, government program development, industry body involvement, sales and measurement and verification, much of my time is spent joining the dots. That means taking ideas or requirements that are seemingly created in isolation and fitting them into the context of office buildings.

## What's your finest professional hour?

Realising that NABERS Energy had truly generated a transformation of the office property sector.

Joining GPT and seeing first hand the genuine and absolute commitment to bringing the entire portfolio to an average 4.5 stars NABERS Energy confirms the real influence NABERS has had. Most days this makes me remember the launch of the predecessor program, Building Greenhouse Rating, in Sydney 10 years ago.

An extraordinary team of people had brought the program to the point of launch. So much hard work was completed – hundreds of hours of research and industry engagement resulted in a successful launch, with the broadest industry support. Yet the hard work of applying NABERS to the stock of existing buildings was just beginning.

A recent "eureka" moment was the result of again, joining the dots. Working on energy efficiency within the context of reducing greenhouse emissions means you are sometimes confronted with the sceptics' case: maybe mankind isn't responsible for climate change. It's an appealing idea, especially if you want to resist change, which is a normal human response.

But we can listen to the sceptics. Really, all they can advise us is that the science hasn't been proven and that any greenhouse mitigation strategy that negatively impacts on society may not be justified. In other words, don't do anything rash.



Bruce Precious

Keeping this in mind, we can take advice from the scientists that suggest we must act rapidly to lower greenhouse emissions, and this is where the property sector can contribute. Making our buildings run energy-efficiently and moving to Green Power can be achieved without breaking the bank.

So, we've listened to the sceptics, we've listened to the climate scientists, we can contribute to government and community reduction targets, we can achieve zero or next-to-zero emission buildings within quite short timeframes. We'll need everyone involved in the delivery and operation of buildings to contribute: design engineers, contractors, building managers, BMS contractors, energy companies – and that's the ongoing challenge. Greenhouse emissions can be cut without doing anything "rash".

## What important lessons have you learned in your career?

If it sounds too good to be true, keep asking questions until you arrive at the facts. Magic oils and super-efficient lamps all rely on well-understood physics.

"Faith – based" engineering rarely delivers good results. Good engineering relies on understanding the fundamental, research, analysis, testing, and measurement.

Bold target setting is required to drive innovation. "Doing the best that we can"

is self-limiting. Doing what we must do is challenging, liberating and encourages real innovation.

### Who do you consider professional mentors?

Lots and lots of people. Everyone has a view and experience and understandings that are unique. Harvesting the very best of these views and ideas is the best way I know of achieving success. Some people that I count myself lucky to have met and who have a continuing influence over things I do are listed below.

Cathy Zoi: founding executive director of SEDA, now Assistant secretary Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy, US Department of Energy. She's a dynamic and deep thinker with the biggest reserves of "can do".

Alan Pears: now Adjunct Professor RMIT. When consulting to SEDA he always returned to first principles and had a clear understanding of market transformation.

Sue Salmon: Consultant to SEDA; office bearer, Total Environment Centre; project manager for the Low Energy High Rise Project – for demonstrating that tenacity and persistence pays off.

Dr Paul Bannister: Consultant to NABERS Energy – for making the complex simple, using fundamental statistics, sound engineering, great analysis and real measurement.

Steve Hennessey: Steensen Varming – for his dedication to representing building services as a profession with integrity and good engineering practice, and for his willingness to share his knowledge always with great humour.

Peter Szental: owner/founder Energy Conservation Systems, past president Sustainable Energy Industry Association – for his vigour in pursuit of a role for new energy systems that don't break down, don't harm the environment, don't run out and are built around efficient use of energy.

And finally, my form 4 fitting and

machining teacher, who said at the end of year, "Precious, if it's true people learn from their mistakes you've learnt more than anyone else this year."

### What do you think is the best professional reading?

Everything. Ideas and tactics to achieving higher levels of sustainability are changing rapidly. Drawing on the widest information set is necessary to avoid dead-end strategies and hopefully to identify the fastest paths to success.

### What does AIRAH membership mean to you?

I think I've been a member of AIRAH now for over 20 years. AIRAH has proven to be a reliable source of information. Technical meetings and seminars often throw up interesting speakers, local people with real knowledge that can help. AIRAH's various guides provide a useful foundation to continue building knowledge around the fundamentals. ■