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Balancing the books for a sustainable world

In the fight for a fairer world, few think of accountants as being on the front line.

But when it comes to balancing the social and environmental books and battling issues like modern slavery, accountants are crucial combatants.

Tasmania has long been an important voice in the always-evolving conversation about how accounting can help create a sustainable society. That continues today as the University of Tasmania hosts the 20th Australasian Centre for Social and Environmental Accounting Research (A-CSEAR) Conference.

University of Tasmania professors and plenary speakers Craig Deegan and Gary O'Donovan are founding members of the A-CSEAR and hosted the first conference in Melbourne 20 years ago.

“Accounting is vital to social and environmental sustainability because accountants provide information that influences consumer and business decisions. Without this information, sustainable development isn't achievable,” said Professor Deegan.

“In combating issues like modern slavery, accountants are essential for reporting on a business' risk of contributing to slavery through their operations and supply chains, and they help to identify the steps taken to respond to these risks, like using ethical suppliers.”

The theme for this year's conference, *Learning from the Past; Accounting for the Future*, focuses on the evolution of accounting and its potential to foster equity for current and future generations.

Held online, attendees from around the world will join industry speakers and panellists from Australia and New Zealand to discuss topics like abolishing modern slavery, sustainability accounting standards and ecological balance sheets.

“The A-CSEAR was established to build a supportive and inclusive community of current and emerging scholars researching the social and environmental aspects of accounting and to show that accounting can be a force for good,” said Professor O'Donovan.

For Dr Terese Fiedler and Dr Claire Horner, University of Tasmania lecturers and co-convenors of this year's conference, it is an opportunity to showcase Tasmania's contributions and highlight the transformative power of accounting to change lives for the better.

“We are thrilled to be hosting the 20th Anniversary Conference, and it's particularly significant given that the University of Tasmania also hosted A-CSEAR for its 10th Anniversary in 2011,” said Dr Horner.

“It's an exciting opportunity to showcase some of the important and innovative work being undertaken in industry and academia right here in Tasmania.”

“This year, we're reflecting on the power of accounting to create equity for disadvantaged or minority groups and to hold businesses to account,” Dr Fiedler said. “We can no longer measure an organisations performance solely in economic terms, and true performance requires an understanding of our impacts on society and the environment as well”.

There is a growing interest in examining how social and environmental issues can be addressed through accounting and how sustainability can be incorporated into research and teaching.

The A-CSEAR will continue to offer a space for early career researchers and experienced academics to share their research and provide knowledge for a more sustainable future.

Information released by:

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