



# Media Release

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## “Making Every Vote Count at the AGM” Campaign wins major National PR award

Viv Hardy from CallidusPR has won a National Golden Target Award from the Public Relations Institute of Australia (PRIA) for the ‘Making Every Vote Count at the Annual General Meeting’ campaign. The Award was announced in front of a packed room of public relations professionals at the Annual PRIA Gala Dinner, which took place on 13 October in the Grand Ballroom, Esplanade Hotel, Fremantle, Western Australia.

The award in the “Public Affairs” category was devised on behalf of Chartered Secretaries Australia (CSA), who wanted to encourage ASX listed companies to change their constitution to allow shareholders to vote directly, claiming the system would be less open to abuse than the outdated and widely misunderstood system of appointing a proxy.

Research shows that many shareholders are confusing the term ‘appointing a proxy’ with ‘direct voting’. Appointing a proxy means transferring some of shareholder’s rights to another party over whom they have no control. Direct voting, however, gives a shareholder a choice and also ensures that their vote **will** be counted. This campaign raised the issue of direct voting on the public agenda and also explained how companies can implement it.

A comprehensive public process was initiated, which undertook extensive research and engaged key stakeholders on the issue, while conducting a strong media

campaign. By April 30 2008, 13 of the Top 200 ASX listed companies including Westpac, ANZ, Woolworths, Orica, Wesfarmers, Cochlear, Tassal Group Ltd, and ING had changed their constitution to allow their shareholders to vote directly.

The judges said, "This was a courageous campaign aimed at breaking new ground in corporate Australia. As such, it was a campaign which did everything possible to achieve its important goals. An excellent campaign all round."

"This campaign is testament to the positive role that public relations can play within the business sector. The program addressed a complex issue of great concern to shareholders, and its thorough efforts were rewarded with positive media coverage every step of the way," said Tracy Jones *FPRIA*, PRIA National President.

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For further information or for press access to the Awards contact Cathy Baker  
02 9331 3346 or [cathyb@pria.com.au](mailto:cathyb@pria.com.au).

## Notes:

### **About Making Every Vote Count at the Annual General Meeting**

The Chartered Secretaries of Australia is the peak professional body dedicated to advancing best practice in governance and administration. The CSA 2005 Benchmarking Survey found that attendance at ASX Top 200 Company Annual General Meetings was at a record low, and that absent retail shareholders were not confident that their proxy would be voted as directed.

CSA believed the most effective way to empower retail shareholders in the decision-making process was to allow direct voting at the AGMs for absent shareholders. The subsequent communications campaign involved comprehensive public relations and technical policy processes to convey the concept of direct voting, and the benefit of and challenges to implementation.

By April 30 2008, the campaign had influenced 13 of the Top 200 ASX listed companies including Westpac, ANZ, Woolworths, Orica, Wesfarmers, Cochlear, Tassal Group Ltd, and ING. These companies changed their constitution to allow their shareholders to vote directly. Furthermore, Computershare is conducting an ongoing investigation into the issue, following requests for advice on direct voting from a number of clients.

### **About the PRIA**

PRIA is the peak body for Public Relations and Communication professionals in Australia. PRIA represents and provides professional support and recognition to over 3,000 individual practitioners, and more than 150 consultancies, across the States and Territories.

### **About the Golden Target Awards (and State Awards for Excellence)**

The PRIA Golden Target Awards, now in their 32nd year, are Australia's premiere PR and Communication campaign awards. **The Awards recognise excellence, best practice and professionalism in public relations.** State Awards for Excellence (the local awards) are given locally in September and go on to compete in the National Awards which will be announced in the Grand Ballroom of The Esplanade Hotel Fremantle Western Australia at 7:00pm on Monday 13 October. The Awards cover 17 categories of campaign, across the range of PR and communication disciplines.

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