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Sustainable Business Network Members Remain Committed Despite Recession

For immediate Release

The economic downturn has created a growing sustainability divide, separating New Zealand businesses that understand and embrace sustainable business practices from those which see it as an “add-on”. That’s the key finding from a new survey on business sustainability practices conducted by researchers at the University of Waikato Management School.

The survey of more than 700 firms is the third in a series, making it one of the first studies in the world to track the impact of recession on sustainability practices with longitudinal data.

The previous surveys, conducted in 2003 and 2006, showed increasing uptake of sustainability practices, but the 2010 survey reveals a general decline - particularly among small businesses which make up the overwhelming majority of New Zealand firms.

However, a small but significant group of firms have actually increased their uptake of environmental sustainability practices, such as recycling, reducing energy and water use, and environmental awareness.

“The recession shook out firms which had sustainability as an ‘add-on’,” says Dr Eva Collins, who co-wrote the report “Business Sustainability Practices During The Recession: The Growing Sustainability Divide” with colleagues Professor Stewart Lawrence, Professor Juliet Roper and Associate Professor Jarrod Haar. “For those firms, sustainability wasn’t aligned with their core business, so when things got tough they let it go.

“But we found companies that were members of the Sustainable Business Network (SBN) went the other way, and even increased their uptake of environmental practices. These are firms that have embedded sustainability into their core business. So what we’re seeing here is the emergence of a sustainability divide.”

SBN CEO, Rachel Brown, is not surprised that SBN members have cranked up their effort in embedding sustainability, through this tough economic time.

“We’ve always known that SBN members represent a group of future-focused, innovative organisations. They understand the business value of integrating sustainable business practices into their product and service offerings, and throughout their operations. They are acutely aware that a narrow window of opportunity exists around retaining their current competitive advantage. So while the competition is distracted, they are pushing ahead, winning contracts, and generally outsmarting them. Sustainability is simply the future and if you are in business and not taking this on, you will be a laggard and fall behind.”

The 2010 NZI National Sustainable Business Network Awards will showcase some of these businesses and allow the public to vote in October for what they believe is the best sustainable NZ business.

The 2010 survey was sponsored by the UK-based Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (CIMA), and supported by long-term partner SBN and a new partner, the New Zealand Business Council for Sustainable Development (NZBCSD). The full report is available at www.management.ac.nz/sustainabilitydivide

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For further information contact:

Brenda Harkin
National Communications Manager - SBN
Ph: 021 686 443
Email: brenda@sustainable.org.nz

About Sustainable Business Network

The SBN is a business network of 700-plus members, with offices in Auckland, Tauranga, Wellington and Nelson. Sustainable businesses are cost-efficient and productive, attract and retain loyal customers, and offer a great place to work. SBN provides advice and support to help business succeed through sustainability. SBN supports its members year-round with networking opportunities, practical tools, training, and sustainability assessments. www.sustainable.org.nz

For more information on the 2010 NZI National Sustainable Business Network Awards, visit www.sustainableawards.org.nz

SBN is proud to be sponsored by NZI and EECA Business

