

NZ Bio and Sister City Brisbane

Two Auckland City Council-supported initiatives formed a productive backdrop for Mario Pennisi's visit to Auckland this month. Mr Pennisi, Chief Executive of Queensland Clinical Trials Network Inc., together with a dozen other Brisbane business people crossed the Tasman to attend the 2009 NZ Bio Conference (which is supported by Auckland City Council). Mario is also dedicated to the Lord Mayor of Brisbane's sister city committee set up to develop business with Auckland city – its sister since Expo 1988.

Over 350 people (including international delegates) attended this year's NZ Bio Conference held in Auckland 9-11 March. The conference was tailored to address the recession and bioscience's special contribution to a stronger future economy. The theme was "Bio Solutions for a Changing World".

"There's a big potential benefit to the sister city relationship Brisbane has with Auckland in the biotech industry," says Mr Pennisi. "There are a number of life sciences entities in Brisbane and Auckland. By collaborating, and bidding together for funds and business, we can win business our way. If you're an entity in either city, 20% of a contract is better than 100% of nothing."

He says that dancing with Auckland business when you're Brisbane is like dancing as a couple. "We fit. One is not an elephant. It won't step on the other's toes."

Mr Pennisi is also optimistic about the role biotech has in contributing to catalysing growth out of the recession.

"We will increasingly look at knowledge-based industries to find a way out," he says. "Even more so than before. We need to revive traditional industries like pharmaceuticals with innovation at this time. There's also climate change, new food based technologies, and dealing with our energy issues. These point to a way out and a way to grow."

"As far as Australia and New Zealand go, we're already innovators, and we're used to doing things without enough capital. We don't have deep/mature capital markets or venture capital markets. So for our innovators, nothing has really changed. This is not the time to hibernate with biotech. It's a time to be confident, take leadership and believe in ourselves. It's a time to engage and push forward."

Mr Pennisi also spoke at a networking event for Auckland-based bioscience businesses, organised by Auckland City Council during NZ Bio conference week.

"Just coming to Auckland to network at this event was worthwhile. There were kiwis in the room who identified opportunities just by talking with us. One of our people walked away with a large potential opportunity," he says.

The NZBIO conference featured an exhibition, partnering forums, discussion panels and technical sessions. Bradford Duft, Chief Executive Officer of CoDa Therapeutics was a keynote speaker at the conference. He commented on opportunities to leverage foreign capital for building research and development capability in New Zealand.

CoDa Therapeutics is a US owned and funded company based on New Zealand intellectual property. Phase one trials were successfully carried out last year in Auckland. Phase two trials of their wound healing compound will be carried out in Auckland and overseas.