

The Top 20 influencers in general insurance

Our annual round-up of those who change people's minds, affect the industry and make things happen

The *Insurance News* Top 20 Most Influential People in Insurance began as a one-off feature in our December 2009 edition.

It doesn't pretend to be a scientific measurement of the people who either have the most impact on the industry or can potentially do so. The list is compiled each year by the Publisher of *Insurance News*, Terry McMullan, after some "asking around" of his journalist colleagues and some industry contacts.

There are no arguments by a co-opted jury examining masses of paper, and no submissions from potential listees. This list comprises the people who we know matter to the present and future direction of the industry, for good or for ill.

That original list was not intended to be repeated, but eight Decembers later here we are again. It's an eagerly awaited feature in *Insurance News*, and we have come to the conclusion that while our readers don't necessarily agree or disagree with our list and our reasons, they do enjoy an annual look at who's still there and – probably of greater interest – who isn't. Because this list changes, sometimes quite dramatically (see "gone from last year's list").

In previous years we've included organisations on the list, but this year we've decided that rather than list the entity we will list the person at the top of that organisation.

We have again encountered an issue that always raises some angst – the small number of women on our list. This year there's one – the same person as last year. Women are gradually emerging in the higher echelons of the industry and we continue to look forward to the day where at least 10 of the industry's most influential people are women.



1

Peter Harmer, Chief Executive and Managing Director, IAG Group

General insurance has never been as exciting as it is right now, but for the behemoths at the top end of the local industry it's also a struggle to balance the twin challenges of massive market change and profit-hungry investors. IAG is the biggest operator in the local market, and Harmer, a canny former Aon broker who earned his stripes in the hurly-burly of the London market, is moving quickly in his mission to turn the group inside-out. He understands consumers' increasingly restive mood for change and the competitive threats and opportunities available through technology. Having reshaped his management team – most obviously putting all IAG's Australian businesses under one trusted lieutenant – Harmer has given himself some elbow room so he can focus on the big picture. With so much change happening, it's wise for the captain of the ship to have his eyes on the horizon rather than buried in the day-to-day stuff.



2

Robert Kelly, Managing Director and Chief Executive, Steadfast

Leadership is the major quality most people associate with the dynamic co-founder of Steadfast. From a small broker cluster group launched in 1996 to a diversified insurance player that today is listed on the ASX 200, Steadfast's journey has always been masterminded by the avuncular and shrewd Robert Kelly. The group is now growing at a slightly less frenetic pace than formerly, adding 17 brokerages owned, partly owned or linked to its brand in the past year. Organic growth at 8% is now outpacing acqui-

sition growth (3%), which is a good sign. Steadfast now boasts 360 brokers in 1300 offices across Australia, New Zealand and its growing Singapore operation. This year it's looking for a net profit in the region of \$70 million.

Greatly admired for his business nous and his support for the industry and its institutions – he received the Rainmaker Award from global technology standards non-profit ACORD for an involvement few knew about – Kelly remains plain-speaking and approachable. Long may he reign.



3

Mark Milliner, Chief Executive Australian Division, IAG

Big things are happening at IAG at present, as Mark Milliner moves to make its Australian businesses more nimble, more efficient and more – well, practically everything.

The Australian Division comprises most of the businesses that make up IAG, so Milliner is a bigger player in the local market than he would have been had he stayed at No.2 player Suncorp.

Having moved across the street to IAG in 2016 and spent some 18 months as chief operating officer before being appointed in July this year by Peter Harmer, Milliner's

knowledge of the local market and his own businesses is unusually deep.

But that may not count for much if he can't force efficiencies into some of the more elephantine businesses that make up a big part of his new division. People are moving into new roles or out the door in significant numbers at present as Milliner reshapes his diverse businesses for a brave new customer-centric world driven by technology. It's significant that he also has under his command IAG's technology development arms. This is a big, bold and brave move by IAG, so expect some surprises.



4

Michael Cameron, Chief Executive and Managing Director, Suncorp

The insurance industry is traditionally viewed as conservative and cautious, yet the development strategies of the country's two largest insurers are anything but.

Michael Cameron's advocacy of the "Marketplace" strategy, which will see Suncorp move to sell more of its diverse financial services offerings through digital platforms and even via third party companies, required him to stare down the investment community this year when he pulled out \$100 million to speed up the strategy's implementation.

Thinking boldly and acting quickly is the name of the game at present, and Cameron, a former banker who took up the reins at Suncorp in October 2015, is confident Marketplace will

put Suncorp ahead of its rivals if it can be put together fast enough. The extra \$100 million was needed to complete the three-year strategy 18 months earlier. It's a complex plan that relies on Suncorp leveraging off its wide range of insurance, life insurance, investment and banking services to provide a single customer experience. Cameron is on record as saying that the day may come when Suncorp is a platform or marketplace and no longer manufactures products at all.

Like IAG, Suncorp is moving to meet the rise in consumer expectations and the challenges and opportunities brought by technology. Service, speed and functionality are Cameron's bywords as he battles to transform the way Suncorp sells.



5

Mark Searles, Managing Director and Chief Executive, AUB Group

AUB's emphasis on providing services to its brokers that will help them grow larger as they diversify their offerings to clients continues to be fascinating.

Rather than engage in the free-for-all of buying brokerages and authorised representative companies – AUB now has 135 "partner businesses" in 425 locations across Australia and New Zealand – Mark Searles is focused on building up rather than out. He says the group is no longer an acquisition-driven organisation – the mergers and acquisitions role now seems to be mostly carried out by individual member companies rather than the parent.

But if the pace of acquisitions has slowed to a trickle, the one-time Austbrokers business that began in 1985 and listed in 2005 remains a

major player in the broking space. Its joint venture with the Independent Insurance Brokers Association and its Sura underwriting agency businesses provide AUB with considerable flexibility, with the emphasis on organic growth helping to push net profit to a predicted \$40 million-plus for the current financial year.

Searles' handling of AUB is worth watching because in many ways he's pointing to an alternative future for broking, where the range of services he is building for the use of brokers is expanding. This means the broker can evolve as a true risk professional with expert advice available as back-up. Growth of more than 45% in use of the group's risk services by partner brokers indicates it's a strategy that's working.



6

Richard Enthoven, Chief Executive, Hollard Australia

He might be the newly elected President of the Insurance Council of Australia, but the measure of Richard Enthoven's influence in the industry doesn't need the benefit of that position.

The super-smart boss of the Hollard organisation in Australia is a major mover and shaker, with fingers in many insurance pies and a continuously growing portfolio of insurance-related businesses. Quite a few successful underwriting

agencies can thank Enthoven for his financial support when they started up. Today he operates across financial services, with powerful partner brands such as Woolworths, Australia Post, Medibank and Bupa. On top of that, there's the growing Real Insurance operation, 17 underwriting agencies and a swag of specialists. Enthoven is an innovator and an investor who's always ready to move with the market.



7

Kelly O'Dwyer, Minister for Revenue and Financial Services

In a political environment where she's wrestling with warring federal government factions, independent crossbenchers and an opposition that's focused on populist programs, you have to feel sorry for Kelly O'Dwyer. The Liberal Party, founded on a philosophy of small government and soft-touch business regulation, is being twisted in exactly the opposite direction. With their eyes fixed on the banks, the regulators are being told by their political masters to stop pussy-footing around financial services offenders. More emphasis on compliance,

enormous fines and increased intrusion by regulators will have their upside in controlling the errant instincts of our banks, but the insurance industry could find itself caught up in the backwash of any new "get tough" initiatives. The UK regulatory regime is an indicator of where added oversight and control could take insurance. O'Dwyer has her work cut out balancing demands for a full-on regulatory war against offenders with the need to give the overall financial services sector clear air in which to operate.



8

Gary Dransfield, Chief Executive Insurance, Suncorp

Last year Dransfield narrowly missed being included in our Top 20. At that time he was still putting together a new division as chief executive customer platforms as Suncorp made its first moves to a new interdependent customer-focused structure.

Earlier this year he became Chief Executive Insurance, replacing Anthony Day. Dransfield has the experience to hustle along the group's challenging and time-sensitive Marketplace strategy. Having worked in a series of transformation roles within IAG, St George Bank and Suncorp over the past 25 years, he has the

technical background Group Chief Executive Michael Cameron was obviously looking for when he sprung his surprise management reshuffle in October.

Suncorp is still adjusting to its new structure and market direction, so Dransfield has to continue the day-to-day work started by predecessor Day in a highly competitive insurance market while overseeing internal integration of the Marketplace strategy. Data, forward-looking analytics that spur product innovation and new ways to market products will keep this enthusiastic performer on his toes.



9

James Shipton, Chairman, Australian Securities and Investments Commission

Taking over the chairmanship of Australia's business regulator in February following Greg Medcraft's departure, Shipton is a bit of an unknown quantity. Formerly the executive director of studies in international finance systems at Harvard Law School, he has also served as a commissioner at the Hong Kong Securities and Futures Commission. The organisation he's taking over has a close and sensitive relationship with the insurance industry.

What we do know is that there's a move by the Government to shift ASIC away from its

comfortably reactive culture to one where it grows teeth and uses them. The Government is talking tough about promoting confidence in Australia's financial system and protecting consumer interests.

Whether that includes giving the regulator the money to use those teeth remains to be seen, however. Shipton has the knowledge and experience, but we'll have to wait and see how he manages the politicians and the rapidly developing, technology-driven insurance environment.



10

Pat Regan, incoming Group Chief Executive, QBE

Taking over from John Neal on January 1, Regan has impressed since moving from the group chief financial officer function and has gained some shop-floor experience fixing up glitches in the Australia and New Zealand Operations.

While much of his focus will now be on the group's global empire, as it has been with Neal, Regan has a clear idea of the sort of person he needs for the key local role, and is casting a wide net to find that person. Making that choice, rather than inheriting an incumbent, is a big advantage.

QBE is Australia's only truly global insurer, and it has always played a big part in the local industry's development and issues-management.

Regan was poached from UK insurer Aviva in 2015 for a reputed \$8.5 million sign-on bonus, and his accession to the top job has been relatively swift and assured, as *Insurance News* predicted. The investment community is his immediate challenge, but QBE's unique place in the local industry means he'll be at the forefront.



11

Vivek Bhatia, Chief Executive and Managing Director, Insurance & Care NSW

An insurance professional with an eye for doing things differently, Bhatia is forging new paths for statutory insurance in New South Wales that are doubtless being closely watched across Australia.

Insurance & Care, better known simply as icare, was formed by joining together NSW's statutory schemes and shifting the emphasis from adherence to strict procedures to a new era based on clients' needs.

His moves haven't been particularly welcomed by insurers, some of which lost valued

business when Bhatia took roles in-house. But there's no resisting the strategy put in place by this former McKinsey restructuring and business transformation expert.

With a \$30 billion asset base, he could well transform the way Australia's state and territory governments look at their own statutory insurance operations. Which could be bad news for the insurance industry, which is seeing its recent campaigns for a greater role in statutory business start to fizzle.



12

Chris Mackinnon, Lloyd's General Representative in Australia

Lloyd's might be having its difficulties dealing with such vexatious issues as Brexit and embracing technology, but its Australian representative has brought the market into the mainstream of the industry.

Underwriting agencies are increasingly skimming niche business off mainstream insurers, some of which now have stakes in agencies and are underwriting others. But the

Lloyd's market still carries enormous cachet with local brokers and their business clients.

Mackinnon has given the market a physical presence in Australia with the establishment of a "hub" in Sydney, where business can be done on the spot. He has also raised the profile of Lloyd's with the annual Dive In festival, promoting diversity and inclusion in an industry that's willing to change but sometimes slow to act.



13

Mark Senkevics, Managing Director and Head of Australia and New Zealand, Swiss Re

Times are tougher for reinsurers operating in the Australian industry, with the global group making a \$US468 million net loss for the nine months to September 30, with a significant contributor being Cyclone Debbie. Last year the Kaikoura earthquake in New Zealand also caused considerable pain.

But the local Swiss Re operation can afford to shrug off such setbacks thanks to a diversified portfolio that includes life and health, plus a growing focus on its Corporate Solutions arm.

In 2017 Corporate Solutions expanded into the primary Australian market for financial lines and casualty insurance, to fill gaps left by established insurers pulling back.

Senkevics has been heading up Swiss Re's local operation since 2010, building strong business relationships. He's a key player in promoting the benefits of technology and the need to build resilience into high-risk areas. And now Swiss Re has moved into the primary market, it will be interesting to see where he takes his diversification strategy next.



14

Ralph Ronnenberg, Managing Director Australasia, Munich Re

In the 16 months he's been running Munich Re's local branch, Ronnenberg has established himself as an influential player in the industry's bid to convince governments to concentrate more on natural disaster resilience. That's not surprising when you consider the beating the major reinsurers take when cyclones, floods and bushfires impose on their bottom lines.

He's a member of the powerful Australian Business Roundtable for Disaster Resilience & Safer Communities, which is pushing for a

government commitment of \$200 million a year invested in resilience programs.

Even as his rivals at Swiss Re are diversifying their business portfolio by moving into the local primary insurance market via their Corporate Solutions arm, Ronnenberg is dismantling Great Lakes Australia, Munich Re's ultimately unsuccessful foray into the primary field.

While the operation was profitable, it wasn't profitable enough, and Munich Re decided to stick to its knitting in Australia.



15

Rob Whelan, Executive Director and Chief Executive, Insurance Council of Australia

Whelan has been running the insurers' representative body since March 2010, taking over from a chaotic administration and returning stability to the organisation.

While he maintains a relatively low personal profile, Whelan has put together an organisation that has some significant technical runs on the board, including national flood mapping and a professional approach to post-disaster management. The Insurance Council

contains some highly effective specialists, and is the "go-to" organisation for insurance issues.

While Whelan's council represents a powerful and highly significant industry, its ability to use that weight to influence governments is hardly impressive. The New South Wales Government's unexpected and sudden backdown on its fire services levy initiative in May is an example of just how little politicians care about the insurance industry's ability to oppose them.



16

Dallas Booth, Chief Executive, National Insurance Brokers Association

In many ways NIBA is a shadow of its former self, having moved out of the professional training field and shifted most of its focus to representation. Booth is the right man for the job.

A lawyer with considerable experience in the government field, he has downsized the association over the past few years but upgraded its ability to push insurance intermediaries' views and aspirations to politicians and regulators.

A passionate and dedicated advocate for brokers, Booth and his organisation deserve more support from the wider broker community. The strong influence of the large international brokers, increasingly powerful cluster groups and a growing number of authorised representative companies mean the industry's view of NIBA as the cultural centre of broking has become a bit blurred.



17

Leon d'Apice, Managing Director, Ebix Australia

Interneceine struggles with Steadfast notwithstanding, the position of Ebix at the centre of insurance industry technology remains strong. D'Apice has been at the forefront of the industry's technology developments for some 25 years, which gives him a strong hand to play in an increasingly competitive sector of the industry.

Ebix continues to develop new products and platform refinements to stay ahead of the game, and its leadership in broking systems and the continuing popularity of its Sunrise and iClose platforms show no sign of easing. The urbane d'Apice knows the best way to stay ahead is to keep developing new and better solutions. Knowing everyone helps, of course.



18

Allan Manning, Managing Director, LMI Group

Over the past 10 or so years Manning has built an international loss management company with remarkable reach, got heavily involved in industry education and has still managed to carve out a reputation as a helpful and often acerbic commentator on industry issues.

Helpful because he's always willing to advise intermediaries and members of the public on open emails about the best way to approach technical problems that should be making him money, and acerbic because he tells it as he sees it.

His professional and occasionally public advocacy for claimants makes some industry leaders uncomfortable, and he's certainly not universally popular. But he is respected for his knowledge and his genuine desire to always see the industry doing the right thing.

Manning collaborated with *Insurance News* this year to stage the inaugural Mansfield Awards, the first industry event aimed solely at the claims sector. Its aim, of course, is to encourage excellence in claims performance.



19

Lyndon Turner, Chairman, Underwriting Agencies Council

The Chief Executive of NM Insurance runs a company that specialises in pleasurecraft and boating industry casualty and property lines, commercial marine insurance, caravans and motorcycles.

As Chairman of UAC he's also leading an organisation that can't be ignored for its lively promotion of members' interests.

With 113 members writing more than \$3.5 billion of premium and enjoying some hefty strategic partnerships with Lloyd's, QBE and Hollard, UAC's growing influence on brokers' buying decisions is clear.

Some of its members are major players in their own right – recognition that the council is effective in getting specialised products and expertise in front of the professionals who matter to them: intermediaries. It also offers a range of support services to keep agency directors and their staff technically adept and well informed.

As an industry organisation, UAC is relatively small and low-key in its approach. It tends to leave it to the big players to get involved in the wider issues that impact on the industry. But taken as a group, it's a significant part of the industry.



20

Chris Colahan, President Australasia, Berkshire Hathaway Specialty Insurance

Generation X is emerging in the top ranks of the industry as the Baby Boomers gradually shuffle off the scene. No one in the industry better exemplifies the qualities of the Xers than Colahan, a buttoned-down, highly professional market player who has grown Berkshire Hathaway's local specialty operation from a standing-start in 2015 to a

position where it's causing competitors significant pain. In the quarter to September 30 BHSI brought in \$30 million in gross earned premium and \$4 million net profit. As BHSI continues to expand its product range Colahan keeps adding insurance professionals to his team who are every bit as focused and capable as he is.

Gone from last year's list

Colin Fagen, president of the Insurance Council of Australia and QBE's chief operating officer: Dismissed for an undisclosed reason in February.

John Neal, QBE's Group Chief Executive: Will be replaced by Pat Regan on January 1.

Anthony Day, Chief Executive Insurance, Suncorp: Left the company in October after a reshuffle.

Niran Peiris, Managing Director, Allianz Australia: His appointment to the German group's central board was announced in March. His replacement will be Richard Feledy.

Mario Greco from Zurich. He was included last year in recognition of his work to change Zurich's direction, and its impact on the local company.