MEDIA RELEASE

Globally-impacting business philanthropist named top NSW business woman

25 September, 2012 – A woman who manages million-dollar deals for big business and gives away millions to the poor of Nepal and Uganda has been named the 2012 Telstra NSW Business Woman of the Year.

New Zealand-born Audette Exel is founder of the globally-operating ISIS Group which comprises a boutique capital raising business dealing with international institutional investors that puts its profits into funding a non-profit foundation.

Ms Exel says establishing a business in the corporate financial services sector solely to support people in extreme poverty was a huge challenge and a completely new approach. She also won the Commonwealth Bank Business Owner Award in Sydney today.

After university in Melbourne and a legal career in Sydney and Hong Kong specialising in international finance, Ms Exel became CEO of the Bermuda Commercial Bank in 1993 – at 30 she was one of the youngest women in the world to head a publicly-trading bank – and later Chair of the Bermuda Stock Exchange.

Named a Global Leader of the Future by the World Economic Forum, she launched the ISIS businesses in Bermuda in 1998. Returning to Australia in 2007, she is CEO of Rozelle-based ISIS (Asia Pacific) Pty Ltd which has directed more than $7 million to the ISIS Foundation over the past 14 years to spend in support and emergency funding for about 20,000 people in extreme poverty each year.

Ms Exel admits to a passion for extreme sports and adventure in her younger days, making almost 1000 skydives as a member of a Hong Kong parachuting team, and travelling through Europe in the 1990s for two years on a bicycle.

Appointed to the Suncorp Board in 2012, Ms Exel says setting up the ISIS Group “and having the world of business hold hands with the world of development is the fulfilment of my dream of using my business skills to help others in need and affect social change.”

Other winners of the Telstra Awards are Cynthia Whelan, CEO and the first woman to head Barclay Bank’s Australian operations, Lee de Winton, Commander of one of the Defence Force’s most prestigious capabilities of expeditionary air bases, Liesl Capper, CEO of MyCyberTwin, a world leader in artificial intelligence-based conversational robots, and Naomi Barber, a Disability Services Australia manager who leads a team that supports 2000 people with a disability to find or keep employment.

Kate McKenzie, Group Managing Director Telstra Innovation, Products & Marketing and Telstra Business Women’s Awards Ambassador, said the NSW winners were inspirational business women and leaders in their fields. “They have displayed amazing innovation in their business or community that influences and motivates others and their achievements are quite frankly a cause for celebration,” she said.

“Audette Exel in particular has an extraordinary story and the potential for her partnership between business and social responsibility is enormous. The Telstra Awards judges called her a most inspirational person who uses all her money to fund the ISIS Foundation. They said she is a very good role model for leaders – the full package - and her business model has stood the test of time,” she said.

Karen James, General Manager Affiliate Business Banking and Women in Focus at CommBank said: “I’d like to congratulate Audette Exel on her success in business and the non-profit sector and for her contribution to the Australian economy, the business community, and society. We look forward to further sharing Audette’s story and expertise with the womeninfocus.com.au community.”

Ms James said the number of women entrepreneurs was growing faster than men, with role models like Audette Exel and the other women coming through the Telstra Business Women’s Awards playing a critical part in paving the way forward for the next generation of female innovators.

Winners of the 2012 Telstra New South Wales Business Women’s Awards are:
MEDIA RELEASE

Commonwealth Bank Business Owner Award
Audette Exel
ISIS (Asia Pacific) Pty Ltd, Rozelle

Hudson Private and Corporate Sector Award
Cynthia Whelan
Barclays Bank PLC, Sydney

Cynthia Whelan studied finance at university and worked with industry giants Merrill Lynch and UBS before joining Barclays in 2004 where she established the institution’s debt capital market business in Australia. Returning from Hong Kong in 2009, she was appointed CEO for Australia and New Zealand in 2011. Judges said the investment banker was an incredibly well-rounded individual and a determined, intelligent, courageous CEO without ego who leads with humility who has fostered a culture of accountability and ownership.

White Pages® Community & Government Award
Lee de Winton
Royal Australian Air Force, Williamtown

As Commanding Officer of Number 381 Expeditionary Combat Support Squadron, Wing Commander Lee de Winton is responsible for management of support capabilities at RAAF Williamtown, the Defence Force’s busiest airfield. Her squadron has the capability to set up a base nationally or internationally at a moment’s notice to help with a national emergency or humanitarian disaster. Judges said Ms de Winton was a very humble yet highly capable leader and advocate for advancing women in the Defence Forces. She was motivated to make a difference with accomplishments including negotiating bilateral airspace agreements.

Nokia Business Innovation Award
Liesl Capper
MyCyberTwin Pty Ltd, Chatswood

Liesl Capper forged a successful career in ICT before her latest role growing a research and development company into a world leader in artificial intelligence robots that are capable of conversing with people via sophisticated brain technology. Judges said Zimbabwe-born Ms Capper combined software and her background in psychology to create MyCyberTwin, They described her as an expert in artificial intelligence who breathed life into cyber-bots and a futurist who was working with Fortune 100 companies.

marie claire Young Business Women’s Award
Naomi Barber
Disability Services Australia, Bankstown

After careers in retail management and the music industry, Naomi Barber joined the Deaf Society of NSW and later Disability Services Australia, where she is Manager Access and Transition and manages teams across NSW that deliver employment support to school leavers with a disability. Telstra judges said she was passionate and professional with a vision for her organisation. She was respected by her team for her energy, consistency, accountability, positive nature and for always treating others with respect and dignity.

Telstra New South Wales Business Woman of the Year
Audette Exel
ISIS (Asia Pacific) Pty Ltd, Rozelle

The NSW winners proceed to the national finals of the Telstra Business Women’s Awards that will be announced in Sydney on 21 November. The winners share in $200,000 in cash and prizes split amongst the state/territory and national winners, and become part of an exclusive national business alumni with wide networking opportunities.

More information on the Telstra Business Women’s Awards can be found at www.telstrabusinesswomensawards.com

Media contacts:
Jane de Gault 0419 818 956 Telstra
Rod Bruem 0438 288 010 Telstra
Reference: 268/201