

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:

