



**2026 INAUGURAL  
JOHN DEERE / K&B ADAMS**

# **COUNTRY CONFERENCE PROGRAM**

Presented by VGCSA & NSWGCSA

**3-5 AUGUST 2026**

Yarrowonga Mulwala Golf Club Resort

# CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

## MONDAY 3 AUGUST

- 7.15am \*Arrival & Registrations**  
AM Field: 4-ball Ambrose  
Light breakfast  
Proshop briefing
- 8am Shotgun Start**
- 12pm \*Arrival & Registrations**  
PM Field: 4-ball Ambrose  
Light lunch for morning & afternoon golfers  
Proshop briefing
- 12.45pm Shotgun Start**
- 6pm Pre-dinner drinks**
- 7pm Dinner & Prize Presentations**

\*REGISTRATIONS: Members will be assigned lanyards as a requirement to attend all conference activities. Late arrivals on the Monday are to report to the VGCSA/NSWGCSA registration desk in the clubhouse lounge from 4 - 5pm.

## TUESDAY 4 AUGUST

- 6.30am Buffet breakfast**
- 7.40am Arrival - Willow conference room**
- 8am Guest speaker Ben Gibson – Leadership, Confidence & Resilience**
- 9am Guest speakers John Neylan & Gary Beehag – ERI Patch Diseases in Couch Grass: Research update**
- 10am Trade presentations**  
Colin Campbell Chemicals  
Australian Seed & Turf Farm  
Living Turf
- 10.30am Morning Tea**  
Indoor | Outdoor Trade exhibitions
- 11.15am Guest speaker Scott McElroy - Maximising the Toolbox: Strategic weed control in an era of limited herbicide options**
- 12.30pm Trade presentations**  
John Deere  
K&B Adams  
Nano Bubble  
Husqvarna
- 1.15pm Lunch**  
Indoor | Outdoor Trade exhibitions
- 2pm Guest speaker Bob Farren – Pinehurst: The cradle of American golf**

- 3.15pm Guest speaker Micah Woods - Managing for Playability**
- 4.30pm Open Forum panel**  
With MC, Steve Smith & guest speakers of the day
- 5.30pm Day sessions end**
- 6pm Pre-dinner drinks**
- 7pm Dinner**

## WEDNESDAY 5 AUGUST

- 6.30am Buffet breakfast**
- 7.40am Arrival - Willow conference room**
- 8am Guest speaker Henk Smith - Practical AI for the Modern Superintendent: Demystifying & applying AI on course**
- 9am Guest speaker Bob Farren - Pinehurst: The revival & second golden age of golf**
- 10am Trade presentations**  
Syngenta  
Adama  
Greenway Turf Solutions
- 10.30am Morning Tea**  
Indoor | Outdoor Trade exhibitions
- 11.15am Guest speaker Micah Woods - Sand under the Microscope**
- 12.15pm Trade presentations**  
Environmental Golf Solutions  
Toro Australia  
Nuturf  
Ventrac
- 1pm Lunch**  
Indoor | Outdoor Trade exhibitions
- 1.45pm Guest speaker Scott McElroy - Reimagining Golf Course Management in the Age of Robotics**
- 2.45pm Guest speaker Matthew Stevens - Leadership & Lived Experience: A life in the SAS**
- 4pm Short break**
- 4.15pm Open Forum panel**  
With MC, Steve Smith, John Deere, K&B Adams & guest speakers of the day
- 5.30pm Day sessions end**  
Pre-dinner drinks
- 6.45pm Dinner**

# GUEST SPEAKERS & MC



**GARY BEEHAG** is a turf research specialist who has been involved in the Australian turf industry since the 1970s. Gary maintains many interests in turfgrass management, with a recent project co-investigating the group of root-infecting fungal pathogens with Dr Percy Wong and Andrew Daly (NSW). With college qualifications and broad experience,

Gary was awarded a NSW Churchill Fellowship in 1980 - investigating university courses and research in the USA. Gary has co-authored two textbooks - one by CSIRO and one by CABI. He has written numerous articles and has spoken at regional, state, national and international turfgrass conferences throughout Australia and in the USA, New Zealand, Singapore and Scotland.



**BOB FARREN (CGCS)** is the Director of Golf Course Maintenance & Ground Management at Pinehurst Resort & Country Club. A highly regarded leader in golf course management, Robert Farren Jr. began his storied 46-year career in golf course management in 1979. Three years later, he joined Pinehurst Resort & Country Club and advanced to his

current role as Director of Golf Course Management in 2001. Since that time, Farren has been a principal force to restore Pinehurst's historic course architecture while advancing the environmental and economic sustainability of its now eleven-course footprint.

Such achievements have included reducing more than 40 acres of irrigated turf in favour of signature sandscapes featuring native wiregrass; greens and fairways conversions to more drought-tolerant turfgrasses; and championing training for his team. He was also a principal founding partner of the Greenkeeper Apprenticeship Program, launched in the Pinehurst area in 2023. Through Farren's tenure, Pinehurst has become a beacon for innovation and a successful testing ground for advanced, data-driven maintenance practices and on-course learning for superintendents, agronomists and others.

Among the eleven USGA championships Farren has worked at Pinehurst, one of his team's most significant agronomic accomplishments was delivering a consistent playing experience for the unprecedented back-to-back 2014 US Open and US Women's Open in consecutive weeks on Pinehurst's iconic Course No. 2.

Over his career, Farren has been esteemed with the GCSAA President's Award for Environmental Stewardship (2007); the Golf Digest magazine's Green Star Award for outstanding environmental practices (2014); was inducted into the Carolinas Golf Hall of Fame (2019); appointed the first recipient of the GCSAA Col. John Morley Award (2022); and presented the USGA Section Award (2024), honouring his distinguished service to golf and innovative work with turfgrass.



**BEN GIBSON** is an experienced golf and sports turf industry leadership coach, systems specialist and presenter. Ben has worked with hundreds of turf managers and thousands of their staff across Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the US. He has used that knowledge and experience to build his business The Toolbox

Team; health and safety compliance software The Toolbox; and the Australia/NZ Sports Turf Leadership Forum Series. His vision is to create physically and psychologically safer work environments for teams across the industry. Ben appears regularly on industry podcasts, in state and national turf association magazines and has spoken at turf industry events in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Asia and the United States. He has spent his career building and leading teams and holds a Master's Degree in Business Leadership.



**SCOTT MCELROY (PHD)** is a Professor (Weed Science/Turf) Crop, Soil & Environmental Sciences at Auburn University. McElroy is an expert in turfgrass weed science and joined Auburn University in 2008 as a professor in the college of agriculture. His primary research areas include weed management in turfgrass systems; physiology and molecular

biology of herbicide resistant weed species; and he has authored and co-authored over 300 articles and publications across his career.

Dr Scott McElroy has been a Board member of the International Turfgrass Society since 2017 and served as Executive Board member for the European Turfgrass Society (International) from 2012-2016 and Southern Weed Science Society (2014-2016).



**JOHN NEYLAN (B. AGRICULTURAL SCIENCE - HONS)** is a senior turfgrass agronomist at SPORTENG. For over 40 years, John has worked extensively in the turf industry as a turfgrass agronomist and has expertise in soils, sports turf profile design, drainage, water management and turfgrass evaluation. He has comprehensive

experience in undertaking research and consultancy with a wide range of clients including golf, major sports stadiums, local government and racetracks. John has lectured in soils, drainage, irrigation management, environmental management and construction at several campuses. In addition, he has presented papers at numerous turf conferences and seminars and has written over 400 published papers and articles. In recent years, John has worked closely with the VGCSA on several research projects including: *Poa annua* control in couch grass, Bentgrass variety trials and study of ERI diseases in Victoria and southern NSW.



**HENK SMITH (PHD)** is a turf agronomy consultant, business strategist and digital project lead working at the intersection of sports turf, agribusiness and data-driven decision making. Over a business career spanning more than 30 years – including senior roles with multinational Syngenta and, more recently, Living Turf – Henk has developed a knack

for translating complex issues across commercial, technical, scientific and digital domains. He is known for cutting through complexity and designing practical, real-world solutions that teams can actually use on the ground.



**MATT STEVENS (DSC, CSC)** has led a unique career with over 36 years of service as an Infantry Soldier and Officer, commanding at every tactical level within Australia's Special Forces; SAS Patrol Commander through to Special Operations Task Group Commander. He has served in Bougainville, East Timor, Iraq and Afghanistan on multiple

tours. In addition, he has extensive experience in managing people and implementing organisational change and reform.

Matt is a recipient of the Distinguished Service Cross (DSC), Conspicuous Service Cross (CSC) and the Commendation for Distinguished Service, and is also a recipient of the US Bronze Star for the Battle of Mosul. He has commanded, led, managed and trained high-performance teams over a lifetime of service in the Australian Army, including the building of new teams and capabilities in the most demanding and challenging of circumstances. Matt has also been responsible for the planning, management, coordination and oversight of 85% of the Australian Army's people capability, through his role as Director Personnel within Headquarters Forces Command



**MICAH WOODS (PHD)** established the Asian Turfgrass Center (ATC) in 2006 to develop and provide turfgrass information for the golf and sports turf industry. Through the ATC, he provides turfgrass advisory and soil testing services to golf clubs, sports facilities and select clients around the world. Since 2009, he has been an

Adjunct Professor in the Department of Plant Sciences at the University of Tennessee. Since 2022, he has been director of the PACE Turf information service.

Micah manages to keep his eyes on the ground, studying the turfgrass species wherever he is in the world. He remains well grounded in the practical aspects of the golf game and his writing has been praised for its accessible style. Author of over two hundred articles in publications such as *GOLF Magazine* and *Soil Science* as well as books with intriguing titles like *One Bucket at a Time* and *芝草科学とグリーンキーピング: マイカ的时间 The BOOK*, Micah enjoys spending time creating animated charts and graphs of the data he has collected while discovering unexpected statistics..



**STEVE SMITH (AKA THE GOLFING GREENKEEPER)** plays a vital role across the conference as MC host. Steve brings over 15 years of experience in greenkeeping and turf maintenance in the cool climate conditions of the Blue Mountains region, including nearly a decade serving as Golf Course Superintendent at Katoomba Golf Club, located within

the heritage listed Blue Mountains National Park. During his time as Superintendent, Steve supervised more than five years of golf course construction and redevelopment works, including bunker construction, irrigation installation, construction of USGA specification greens and a range of broader turf improvement projects. Working in such a unique environmental setting has shaped his strong appreciation for the role golf courses play in supporting local landscapes, biodiversity and sustainable land management.

In 2020, Steve introduced *The Golfing Greenkeeper* podcast to the Australian and New Zealand golf and greenkeeping industries and has hosted the show for the past five years with notable guests. Through the podcast, he has helped highlight the people behind course presentation, explored golf course architecture and construction, and shared insights into the evolving role golf courses play within their communities and environments. Steve is a trusted voice in the golf industry.

# GUEST SPEAKER SESSIONS

## TUESDAY

### **BEN GIBSON**

#### Leadership, Confidence & Resilience

Ben Gibson from The Toolbox Team has put together ideas and a number of case studies from across the industry to help all of us overcome adversity and be the best leader we can for our teams, clubs and importantly ourselves.

### **JOHN NEYLAN & GARY BEEHAG**

#### ERI Patch diseases in Couch Grass: Research update

ERI or Patch diseases have become the number one disease problem of warm season grasses over the past 10 - 15 years. This presentation will provide an update on the VGCSA ERI Research Project including disease control trials, small practical trials and disease identification. The presentation will provide several important considerations when managing the ERI group of pathogens.

### **SCOTT MCELROY**

#### Maximising the Toolbox: Strategic weed control in an era of limited herbicide options

With increasing herbicide resistance and regulatory pressure reducing available chemistries, effective weed management in turfgrass requires a more strategic and integrated approach. This seminar focuses on optimising current herbicide technologies through proper selection, timing, tank-mixing, and rotation strategies to preserve efficacy and delay resistance

Special attention will be given to managing complex turf systems with multiple grass species and differing tolerances. Attendees will leave with practical frameworks for decision-making that combine chemistry, cultural practices, and emerging precision application technologies to maintain high-quality playing surfaces under increasing constraints.

### **BOB FARREN**

#### Pinehurst: The cradle of American golf

Founded in 1895 by James Walker Tufts, Pinehurst quickly evolved from a health minded retreat into one of America's most influential golf destinations. The arrival of Donald Ross in 1900 ushered in decades of architectural innovation and growth that defined golf's Golden Age.

Following ownership transitions and challenges in the 1970s, Pinehurst continued to develop into the expansive operation it is today - recognised for its scale, staffing, environmental stewardship, and industry leading approach to golf course maintenance and water management. From its historical arc to a modern snapshot of the systems that keep an iconic golf destination thriving, Bob will reflect on his extensive career and current role as Pinehurst continues to invest in its infrastructure and turf management practices to enhance the business model and remain one of the world's greatest golf destinations.

### **MICAH WOODS**

#### Managing for Playability

I'll explain how to use playability measurements, clipping volume, nutrient input assessment, and OM246 measurements to develop a putting green management system designed to maximise the number of days in the year with the desired conditions. This isn't about fertiliser schedules, topdressing calendars, verti-cutting programs, and that sort of proactive maintenance. Instead, I'll use case studies from around the world to show the types of conditions, and day to day consistency, that can be achieved by using this system based on adjusting to current conditions.

# GUEST SPEAKER SESSIONS

## WEDNESDAY

### **HENK SMITH**

#### Practical AI for the Modern Superintendent: Demystifying & applying AI on course

In this session, Henk breaks AI down into clear, practical applications for the modern superintendent – no jargon, no hype. We'll explore how tools you already have access to can help you plan programs, communicate with committees, and make faster, more confident decisions from the data you're already collecting on course.

### **BOB FARREN**

#### Pinehurst: The revival & second Golden Age of golf

Pinehurst's modern revival began in 1984 when ClubCorp and the Dedman family embraced the property not merely as owners, but as its dedicated stewards. Their long-term vision elevated championship golf at the resort, leading to major USGA events and a renewed global profile. Central to this renaissance was the celebrated restoration of Pinehurst No. 2 by Coore & Crenshaw, re-establishing its natural Sandhills character and strategic essence. The momentum continued with the development and redesign of courses including No. 8, The Cradle, No. 4, No. 10, and No. 11 - each contributing to a vibrant new era defined by innovation, authenticity, and thoughtful growth. This session will delve deeper into Pinehurst's course maintenance practices, time and staff management, investments in technology and overall industry challenges in the US today. Bob reflects that it is vitally important to preserve what is special about Pinehurst yet continue to invest in its future, with a mantra of 'Always Pinehurst but always better'.

### **MICAH WOODS**

#### Sand under the Microscope

Do we look carefully enough at the sands we use and at the properties these sands have? In this seminar, I'll take a close look at chemical and physical properties of sands, and at the amount of sand used as topdressing. The USGA particle size recommendation is well known, but I estimate that about 25% of sands used on golf courses are finer than the recommendation. Sand rootzones naturally have a low nutrient content, and this has important implications for nutrient management. Sand topdressing recommendations vary widely, and I'll explain how to use change in soil organic material over time as a method to find the optimum topdressing rate for your location.

### **SCOTT MCELROY**

#### Reimagining Golf Course Management in the Age of Robotics

This seminar explores how autonomous technologies are rapidly transforming golf course management, from daily mowing operations to data-driven decision-making. Attendees will gain insight into the current capabilities of robotic mowers, GPS-RTK navigation systems, and integrated sensor platforms, as well as the economic tradeoffs compared to traditional equipment. The session will also address labour challenges, operational scalability, and how autonomous systems can improve consistency, sustainability, and overall course conditions. Real-world case studies and adoption strategies will help superintendents evaluate where and how to integrate automation into their own operations.

### **MATTHEW STEVENS**

#### Leadership & Lived Experience: A life in the SAS

Matt Stevens traces his career in the SAS through the lens of leadership under pressure, drawing on operational experiences in Bougainville, East Timor, Afghanistan, and Iraq. It explores how leadership evolves across different types of conflict – from peacekeeping and stabilisation to high-intensity combat – highlighting decision-making in uncertainty, the moral complexities of command, and the importance of trust, adaptability, resilience and accountability. Through personal reflections, the talk examines how effective leaders balance mission success with the welfare of their people, and how lessons forged in conflict translate into leadership beyond the battlefield.

# THIS EVENT IS PROUDLY SPONSORED BY

## PLATINUM SPONSORS



## GOLD SPONSORS



## SILVER SPONSORS



## BRONZE SPONSORS

