

17 September 2025

APESB CEO encourages firms to treat ethical culture as a strategic advantage at IESBA's inaugural global ethics conference

Lisbon, Portugal – Accounting Professional and Ethical Standards Board (APESB) CEO and Vice Chair of the International Ethics Standards Board for Accountants (IESBA), Channa Wijesinghe, has encouraged accounting and audit firms to move beyond a compliance mindset and embrace ethical culture as a strategic advantage during a keynote panel at the IESBA Global Ethics and Independence Conference.

Held in Lisbon and with over 1,000 registered participants from around 100 jurisdictions, of which 250 from 40+ jurisdictions attending in person, the conference brought together leading voices from the accounting profession, business, regulation, capital markets, government and standard setting to address how ethics can reinforce resilience and public trust in a rapidly evolving financial landscape.

Mr Wijesinghe's remarks come at a time when regulatory pushback in several major jurisdictions is gaining momentum. With competitiveness high on political agendas, some governments are moving to simplify oversight and reduce regulation, despite growing geopolitical tensions and economic uncertainty.

Speaking on the panel '*Ethical Culture and Governance: Reinforcing Resilience and Public Trust in Accounting Firms*,' Mr Wijesinghe stressed the importance of ethical leadership, governance with independent input, and the role of incentives and disincentives in embedding ethical values across accounting and audit firms – especially in a time of heightened expectations and scrutiny.

"Recent events have shown that a strong ethical culture could have been a tool that prevented reputational damage and costly regulatory penalties."

"Ethics must be front and centre in every strategic decision," Mr Wijesinghe said. "An effective ethical culture enables the delivery of quality professional services, strengthens public trust and positions firms for long-term success."

He emphasised that ethics needs to be championed by the firm's senior leadership, embedded into firm governance structures, and reinforced through performance management systems that align rewards with ethical conduct.

The panel explored practical methods for measuring ethical culture, including culture surveys and balanced scorecards. The panel noted that establishing confidential channels for raising concerns and ensuring whole-of-firm accountability were essential to reinforcing ethical behaviour and navigating issues such as AI and emerging regulatory risks. In this context, the panel also explored the role of audit committees.

APESB continues to contribute to global standard-setting by supporting IESBA's work on firm culture and governance.

- ENDS -

Media enquiries:

Please contact John Fulcher on 03 9600 0006 / 0412 978 263 or john.fulcher@fenton.com.au

Notes to Editors:

APESB is the national standard-setter responsible for developing the code of ethics and professional standards that members of Australia's three major professional accounting bodies – CPA Australia, Chartered Accountants Australia and New Zealand, and the Institute of Public Accountants – are required to follow.

Accounting Professional & Ethical Standards Board Limited. ABN 63 118 227 259

Level 11, 99 William Street, Melbourne, Victoria, 3000 T +61 (3) 9670 8911 F +61 (3) 9670 5611

E enquiries@apesb.org.au www.apesb.org.au