

# TFWA Presidential election looms at critical point in association's history

**FRANCE.** One of the most crucial Presidential elections in Tax Free World Association's long history takes place on 11 December.

With the association – like the travel retail channel in general – facing an uncertain future amid a still escalating global pandemic, multiple sources tell The Moodie Davitt Report that the decisions taken by the association over coming months, starting with this election, will be critical.

Incumbent President **Alain Maingreud** has confirmed to The Moodie Davitt Report that he is standing once again. Despite several names being touted (see below), it remains unclear whether anyone from within the Management Committee or an external candidate will challenge him for the responsibility of steering TFWA through the most testing period in its 36-year journey.

The backdrop to this year's election is one of sector turmoil as a result of the COVID-19 health crisis. TFWA was forced to cancel both its key events this year – the Asia Pacific Exhibition & Conference in Singapore in May and the World Exhibition (Cannes) in October – resulting in a big hit to its finances.



(Above and below) How will the industry view travel to and investment in the Cannes show next year?



Thanks to astute management over many years led by former President **Erik Juul-Mortensen** and his various **boards and Management Committees**, the association still enjoys substantial cash reserves, but will be anxious to minimise their further erosion. The Moodie Davitt Report has spoken to numerous sources close to the subject who feel that TFWA will need particularly strong leadership through what one industry veteran dubbed “a deep and sustained crisis”.

Another observer suggested that TFWA needs to become more proactive and up its response rate to fast-changing industry and events sector developments.

The Moodie Davitt Report might have had its occasional spirited differences with TFWA down the years, but “In that regard, and whether or not there is a change at the top of this election, it is TFWA that the event would help any candidate (and the Board and Management Committee) to think deeply about how to take the association forward.”

TFWA has announced the return of its Singapore show in 2021 (provisionally set at 9-13 May) but even that event is wracked by deep uncertainty due to the ongoing COVID-19 crisis and its impact on the meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions (MICE) sector.

The Singapore exhibition and conference will combine the best of physical and virtual to offer more flexibility and convenience to delegates, TFWA pledged. “It will provide something that only TFWA events can: a globally-respected forum to create and foster the business relationships which will be the lifeblood of our industry going forward,” Maingraud claimed in a statement last month.

But others (disclaimer: including The Moodie Davitt Report) have shown their ability to develop alternatives and one of TFWA’s key challenges is how to embrace the new virtual world – most likely in tandem with face-to-face events as the latter gradually become more feasible.

TFWA’s prospects for the Singapore event – and for the successful return of its flagship Cannes show – are not only challenged by the health crisis but also by budget constraints. The principal monetisation of both events (and of TFWA, therefore) comes from exhibitor fees. With most suppliers, travel retail business having been drastically affected in 2020 by the pandemic and the fact that would-be Singapore and Cannes exhibitors effectively pocketed the savings from the cancelled events, a big question mark hangs over the willingness of brands to invest in physical shows in 2021, especially amid such uncertainty over when and how fast various travel markets will recover.

As noted in the accompanying article, this is a difficult time for TFWA, as it is for most industry stakeholders. Whether it is the incumbent or a new comer (and may the best man or woman win), they will have a big job on their hands to guide the association through these trickiest of times and into a new and perhaps very different future.

## The election process

### Martin Moodie

The TFWA President is elected annually. Maingraud, formerly a long-time paid executive of the association, was first elected in 2018, succeeding Juul-Mortensen, who had stepped down after an outstanding 19-year tenure. Maingraud headed off competition from three experienced travel retail executives, **Gerry Munday**, **Thom Rankin** and **Andrew Ford** (who all confirmed to The Moodie Davitt Report that they would not be standing this year) and was subsequently re-elected unanimously in December 2019.

The new one-year mandate will run until December 2021. Any members of the Management Committee wishing to stand for election are requested to indicate their intentions to the TFWA Election Committee no later than the day prior to the meeting.

Any candidates from outside the Management Committee are requested to submit their candidacy no later than **Friday 20 November**, by recorded mail to the TFWA Election Committee, Tax Free World Association, 23-25 rue de Berri, 75008 Paris, France.

Asked by The Moodie Davitt Report about the job description, terms and conditions applicable to the role, a TFWA communications agency spokesperson said that any external candidate interested in the position should contact the association directly.

The logo for TFWA (The Free World Association) is displayed in a white box on a dark green background.The logo for the Asia Pacific Exhibition & Conference is displayed in a white box on a dark green background.

## THE DUTY FREE & TRAVEL RETAIL ASIA PACIFIC SUMMIT

09-13 MAY 2021



[Will the travel retail market recover in time to make for a successful Singapore show next May?](#)

Given the importance of TFWA to the travel retail industry – not simply as a convenor of key events but also as a source of funding, resources and advice for fellow associations such as MEADFA, ETRC and Duty Free World Council – this year’s election takes on added gravitas.

“The election goes beyond the existence of TFWA because over the years it has been a huge mover and supporter of various associations... and so the ripple effect is stronger than just TFWA,” said one observer.

Where is TFWA headed within an industry landscape that has fundamentally changed in the past 11 months? What is the association’s role within the travel retail community and how does it retain its relevance? How does it respond to the emergence of lower-cost, easily accessible digital events such as the successful Virtual Travel Retail Expo? How best to secure and ultimately enhance its finances – and existence – in a transformed world? What of the acclaimed CSR programme, TFWA Care?

All these questions will need to be addressed urgently by the new President and the incoming Management Committee and Board elected in October. Both bodies contain several new faces, including Brown Forman’s **Aude Bourdier** as Vice-President Marketing and JTI’s **Gemma Bateson** as Vice-President Conferences & Research on the Board.

“It needs really strong leadership,” said one source. “What’s been good in the past is somebody who doesn’t have an ego and only has the association at heart; is a good diplomat; somebody who works hard; but also somebody who has a strong brand background, understands the business inside out, and somebody with good financial knowhow. You have to be respected by your peers because it’s a brand association.”

The likeliest challengers to Maingraud are from within the Management Committee and Board, though the possibility of external applicants should not be excluded as we note below in our assessment of possible

candidates.

In speaking to multiple sources for this story, The Moodie Davitt Report heard several names put forward as preferred and/or potential candidates for the role. We have approached each of those mentioned but would emphasise that others could emerge from within the Management Committee or (by 20 November) from outside.

## **RECOMMENDED, LIKELY OR KNOWN CANDIDATES**

### **EXTERNAL**

**Sarah Branquinho:** The Duty Free World Council President and External Affairs Advisor for Dufry has outstanding industry, leadership and organisational credentials as well as years of commitment to TFWA both as an executive and through her marriage to long-term President Erik Juul-Mortensen. Touted by several sources as an excellent candidate and she would be. However, Ms Branquinho confirmed she is not putting her name forward.

**Current status:** Confirmed non-candidate



**Erik Juul-Mortensen:** Not prepared for a Presidential comeback but why not draw on his extensive experience?

**Erik Juul-Mortensen:** A return for the much-respected industry executive and association leader (he served on the Management Committee since TFWA's formation in 1984 and as its President from 1999 to 2018) was suggested by many as providing a steady hand at the helm as the association navigates the roughest seas it has ever encountered.

Given his reluctance to stand again (see below), however, there may be a neat formula that could help the elected President and the association. In recognition of his outstanding service to TFWA, the Dane was named an Honorary President when he stood down after 19 years in late 2018. That represents a wealth of experience that whoever is elected this year could surely draw on during these turbulent times.

**Current status:** Confirmed non-candidate

**Sunil Tuli:** The ebullient Group Chief Executive of Hong Kong-based King Power Group is another name that consistently cropped up when we sounded out the industry about possible candidates. The Singapore- and Hong

Kong-based retail veteran is a founding board member of the Asia Pacific Travel Retail Association (APTRA), and previously served for six years as APTRA President before once again being elected to that position in 2020. With Asia certain to drive travel retail's recovery in coming months, his expertise and reputation in the region would carry considerable weight.

**Current status:** Possible candidate. "As they say, there is no smoke without fire," Tuli told The Moodie Davitt Report in a statement. "I guess you are asking as you have obviously heard something. All I can say is that, yes, I have been approached by some people in Tax Free to stand for election, considering my experience of seven years of running APTRA, being an operator, a brand owner, and being in the most dynamic region in our industry. I can neither confirm nor deny whether I am standing or not."

**Rajiv Bhatia:** A former, long-time Management Committee member, both with Inver House Distillers and William Grant & Sons, the drinks sector veteran is now working with French wine company Peuch & Besse as Advisor Business Development (as well as on other projects across domestic and duty free channels). A big believer in the association's value to the travel retail channel, and highly knowledgeable about the key Middle East and Asia Pacific markets, he is widely respected within both association and industry circles. A strong candidate if he decides to run.

**Current status:** Possible candidate. "My focus has been on the US elections across the Pond – so, for now, I am invoking the 5th amendment!" he told The Moodie Davitt Report.

## INTERNAL

**Alain Maingreud:** The Frenchman "knocked it out of the park" in the words of one insider, referring to Maingreud's short mandatory pitch before the Management Committee for the President's role in 2018. That supreme performance helped land him the job amid a widely held view that he was a safe pair of hands for an association that was well-financed and riding high within a buoyant industry climate. While 2019 went well, 2020 has been an altogether different story and a real test of leadership and the association's ability to pivot under pressure. Even sterner challenges may lie ahead.

While there is mounting chatter of at least one rival, Maingreud will not be easily ousted. His 25 years' involvement with TFWA, and his intimate knowledge of both its activities and its sometimes complex politics makes him a sound and credible candidate once again.

**Current status:** Confirmed candidate.

**Gemma Bateson:** Popular and respected in equal measure, the JTI Corporate Affairs & Communications Director WWDF Gemma Bateson was named time and again as an ideal candidate for the role by our sources. "She is extremely bright, works very hard and is very straight. She would be a great President," said one. "She has an acute grasp of complex subject matters and industry affairs, is intelligent, articulate and experienced," noted another. "She's also a woman and it would be no bad thing to see female leadership of the association." However, late last week Ms Bateson confirmed she had no intention to stand.

**Current status:** Confirmed non-candidate.



**Aude Bourdier: Initiative and drive**

**Aude Bourdier:** The highly experienced Brown-Forman Global Travel Retail Managing Director made a rapid return to the TFWA Management Committee and Board after her recent promotion at the US drinks company (she had been Marketing Director of Global Travel Retail and Developed APAC since 2018).

The Frenchwoman was considered a strong board member (Vice President Commercial) during her stint from 2016 and has worked in the drinks industry – much of it within travel retail – since 1991. “She would be a good President, I really do believe that,” noted one senior source. “She’s certainly got the brains, she’s got the power, and she’s also got the initiative and the drive. She doesn’t accept fools easily so I think she would be a good driver.”

“She’s got wide-ranging brand experience,” said another. “She’s very clear, sometimes too black and white perhaps but at least she puts her money where her mouth is and is not afraid to speak up. She’s good.”

**Current status:** Possible candidate though declined to comment when approached.

**Donatienne de Fontaines-Guillaume:** As a long-time Management Committee and Board member, Moët Hennessy’s Managing Director EMEA & Americas is as respected as they come, admired universally for her integrity and dedication. “She’s extremely straight and she has the interests of the association at heart,” said one source. However, those interests will continue to be served from a Board capacity, she confirmed to The Moodie Davitt Report.

**Current status:** Confirmed non-candidate.

**Francis Gros:** Another TFWA stalwart, having first been elected as a member of the TFWA Management Committee October 2012, and then as a Board Vice President in October 2016, in charge of Conferences & Research. Gros made a welcome return to the Management Committee after joining Ermenegildo Zegna to head the EMEA Region in 2018, overlooking all Distribution Channels (Retail, Wholesale, Outlets, Travel Retail & E-commerce). Known as a forward-thinker who puts industry rather than parochial interests to the forefront (he has been a key driving force in the successful multi-company Sunglasses Workshop & Awards). Strong French and Italian connections would be an advantage too.

**Current status:** Confirmed non-candidate this time around.

**Jaya Singh:** The Mondelez World Travel Retail, European Export & Switzerland Managing Director is another with strong credentials for a role that demands political nous, diplomacy, industry respect and sector awareness. As a long-time confectionery and travel retail specialist, a former APTRA President (2012-2016), Duty Free World Council board member (2014-2016), and incumbent TFWA Management Committee member, he ticks all those boxes and more. An outstanding orator and a people-centric, engaging character, he has both the internationalism and progressiveness that a TFWA President will need in these changing times.

**Current status:** Uncertain (we are awaiting a response)