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Media Release | Strategic Leadership Redefined: Watermark's 2025 Interim Executive Survey

Watermark Search International has today released its 2025 Interim Executive Annual Survey, marking 15 years of continuous research into the evolution of Australia's Interim Executive market. With insights from nearly 900 senior professionals, this year's report not only captures the current state of interim leadership but also offers a forward-looking view of the next 15 years, informed by longitudinal data and emerging global trends.

The findings reflect a shift in how organisations are approaching leadership in an increasingly complex and fast-moving world. As technological disruption, demographic shifts and geopolitical uncertainty reshape the business landscape, the demand for agile, experienced and purpose-driven leadership has never been greater. Interim Executives are no longer brought in to fill gaps, they are deployed as strategic means for transformation, innovation and resilience. Their cross-sector experience and ability to operate across functions, geographies and technologies make them uniquely suited to lead in this new era.

"As the future of work accelerates, Interim Executives are the force behind adaptable organisations. With cross-sector experience, rapid decision-making skills and a bias for action, they embed transformation at pace. They're not just agile, they're architecting new models of leadership that are data-informed, tech-enabled and deeply human. Future-focused and values-led, these leaders shape what's next into something sustainable, purposeful and built for enduring impact," said Caroline McAuliffe, Senior Partner at Watermark Search International.

Five defining trends from the 2025 Interim Executive Survey and key statistics:

1. **The rise of strategic Interim leadership:** beyond crisis management to business transformation - 90% of Interim roles are now C-suite, with 31% focused on transformation.
2. **Self-agency is the top factor for success:** Interim Executives are in the driver seat of their own careers with these self-directed leaders driving outcomes, not just processes - 76% of executives emphasise the need to define clear value propositions.
3. **AI as a leadership amplifier:** automation enhancing rather than replacing executive judgement - 90% of Interim Executives use AI tools, while only 3% of respondents reported organisations have adopted AI extensively.
4. **The longevity advantage:** extended careers with exceptional leadership depth - one-third of Interim Executives are aged 60+.
5. **Leadership redefined for digital-first organisations:** human-centric skills matched with native digital capabilities to lead technologically-enhanced organisations - stakeholder engagement (64%) and problem solving (38%) were rated as the most vital leadership skills.

"We're seeing the Interim Executive role evolve from reactive to revolutionary. These leaders are not just bridging gaps, they're architecting change, shaping resilient cultures, and harnessing the pace of disruption. For many organisations, interim is now the strategy, not the contingency," said Jacinta Whelan, Lead Partner Melbourne at Watermark Search International.

“As Einstein said, ‘You can’t use an old map to explore a new world.’ Interim executive leadership is the compass - guiding organisations through ambiguity, pace, and possibility,” said Nicole Scoble-Williams, Global Future of Work Leader at Deloitte. “The question is no longer whether to use interim leadership. It’s whether you’re ready to compete without it.”

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