

Overlay co-founder Connor O'Rourke champions SA start-ups in AI race

Connor O'Rourke is turning cameras into AI “smart eyes” for big industry and he’s just landed a coveted global study grant. See who else made the cut.



Overlay co-founder Connor O'Rourke. Picture: Supplied

Serial entrepreneur Connor O'Rourke is tapping into the power of AI with his latest venture, turning mobile, drone and other cameras into “smart eyes” that help businesses manage and maintain their infrastructure and industrial assets in real-time.

Mr O'Rourke acquired a major stake and took over as chief executive of Overlay around 18 months ago, after it was spun out of immersive technology company Lumination in 2023.

It's emerged with an impressive list of blue chip clients, with applications in industries ranging from oil & gas to mining, renewables and utilities.

Mr O'Rourke said that while computer vision technology is becoming a crowded marketplace for new entrants, Overlay's platform was highly customisable, and that point of difference was winning over customers both locally and overseas.

“There's a lot of generic-type computer vision capability out there, where you'll buy a CCTV camera and it can do some simple bounding box things ... they might do a person counter or those types of things – but ours is highly composable,” he said.

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“Whether it’s a fixed camera, it’s a drone, it’s robotic, it’s wearable tech, or it’s a mobile-based camera – we can take that feed, bring intelligence about the asset we’re looking at and we connect that to sources of information in the customer environment.

“So that can be IoT sensors, the SCADA (supervisory control and data acquisition) network, it can be asset maintenance information about it, safety, training data. And we connect that to the image so when you scan the image, it links to the sources of information you have about that specific image in front of you.

“We usually work in heavy asset industry, so defence, utilities, oil and gas, transport, those are the main ones that we play in ... and it’s about assisting people in the field to get rid of the repetitive visual tasks so they can focus on their craft of servicing assets, staying safer in the field and those types of things.”

Early Overlay customers include oil & gas giant Beach Energy, which is using the technology to inspect and manage extraction infrastructure in the Cooper Basin, and logistics firm Northline to beef-up occupational health and safety across its depots.

Defence giant BAE Systems is also using Overlay to train apprentices, graduates and engineers across five sites in the UK.

Mr O’Rourke and his family are among the state’s most influential technology entrepreneurs, launching and successfully exiting a string of notable start-ups.

After relocating to Adelaide from the US in 1996, when Connor was nine years old, Mr O’Rourke’s father Mick acquired and grew computer reseller Centari Systems before striking a \$20m sale deal to Commander Communications in 2002.

O’Rourke senior and five former Centari employees later launched Datacom, which went on to become one of the state’s largest non-vendor suppliers of IT sales and services before its sale in 2012.

Four years later Connor and brother Brendon teamed up with a group of ex-Datacom employees to launch Nuago, an IT services and consulting firm that grew to become a \$25m-plus revenue business before its [sale to managed IT services powerhouse Brennan](#).

AI is firmly at the centre of Connor O’Rourke’s latest venture, and he is hoping to use his influence to champion the local start-up scene and ensure South Australia capitalises on the opportunities presented by the emerging technology.

Earlier this year Overlay launched an agentic AI practice to help customers “actualise on the AI transformation”, and Mr O’Rourke is hoping to play a part in the state government’s AI royal commission which begins next month.

“What I hope happens as a result of it is that they look at a South Australian ecosystem as a whole,” Mr O’Rourke said.

“Rather than just bringing an Anthropic or a large overseas firm and we get a rent roll because of a data centre ... I want to see local energy infrastructure providers, I want to see local build from a housing perspective, the infrastructure layer with all the GPU (graphics processing unit) that we require, and the application stuff that we build – if we can get a full stack where that’s South Australian-owned, operating companies, with profits getting created here, keeping jobs here, and moreover we create an ecosystem and a sandpit for entrepreneurial innovation to happen, I think that would be a really good outcome.”

Mr O’Rourke will head to Stanford Graduate School of Business in California next year after being named as one of nine scholars in this year’s Industry Leaders Fund program, which provides global study grants to industry leaders for the benefit of the South Australian economy.

Other recipients include third generation winemaker Tom Barry from Jim Barry Wines, Roseanne Healy from equity crowd-funding platform Swarmer and Clarke Energy commercial director Leanne McClurg.

ILF chief executive Richard Barrett said that over its 16 years the ILF had invested more than \$4m, entirely from private funding, in the development of 277 South Australian business leaders.

“This year we have identified nine grant winners which is a slightly smaller cohort than previous years and this is indicative of our approach and ethos. We select only the very best candidates who we feel can add the most tangible value to the South Australian economy,” he said.

“Our mission is to empower the best local business talent to build globally competitive businesses from South Australia.”

2026 Industry Leaders Fund grant winners

Power Group Distinguished Impact Award (\$25,000 grant recognising outstanding achievement of a previous scholar): Alf Ianniello – Codan

2026 Scholars:

Connor O’Rourke – Overlay

Stephen McKee – Oilpath

Heysen Siegfried – Saab Australia

Tom Barry – Jim Barry Wines

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