



Governance and Administration

The AAAC Executive met via teleconference in mid November and discussed a range of issues. The events performance for 2007 was reviewed – a total of some 154 members and others attended five workshops during the year and feedback from attendees has been such that a series of workshops will be run in 2008. AAAC is extremely grateful for the financial and in-kind support received from NAB Agribusiness throughout the 2007 series – we are hopeful that support will continue in 2008.

AAAC had held discussions with AIAST CEO Karin Schiller in August and that has been followed up with a further meeting between the CEO, AIAST President Claude Gauchat and Bob Hudson in Sydney on 12th December. Members might recall that AIAST and AAAC were proposing to enter into a Service Agreement – this concept has now been further developed by AIAST to the point where a draft Memorandum of Understanding has been developed and discussed. The Executive is now in the process of reviewing the draft and hopefully in early 2008, the MoU can be signed by AIAST and AAAC. The MoU sets out the obligations of both parties with particular emphasis on the service provision aspects from AIAST's perspective. During 2008 AIAST (and to a lesser extent AAAC) will monitor service inputs and outcomes so that by early 2009 the Executive will be much better informed as to costs and returns from the AIAST service provision. As AAAC is subject to operation within a budget, it is important that cost control is achieved.

The new AIAST website contains a new AAAC page – it can be accessed via www.aiast.com.au or www.agconsultants.com.au. We have proposed to AIAST that the Find a Consultant Register be located within the AAAC webpage as listing in the Register is only open to AAAC members who pay an additional fee for the service. The Find a Consultant selection criteria are in the process of being fine tuned and we will be asking members to re-define their specializations and priorities once the new categories are defined.

We are hoping to offer links to the Register to firms – details and fees and charges are being determined. Once those matters are cleared up, companies will be offered the opportunity to link to their own websites via the AAAC site for a fee.

On behalf of the Executive, I would like to take this opportunity to wish all AAAC members and their families a merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year. In some areas the season appears to be improving so let us hope we are heading out of the dry cycle which has been around since 2000. More 'normal' seasons, good commodity prices and happy clients – an agricultural consultant wish list and resolution for 2008.

Bob Hudson
President

Events

Review of 2007 Workshops

Five Professional Development Workshops have been held this year, starting with Wagga Wagga in March, Launceston (July), Melbourne (Sept.), Toowoomba (Oct.), and concluding with Adelaide in November. Around 175 attendees participated in these events. AAAC specifically acknowledges the generous sponsorship of the National Bank, which enabled us to engage the services of a facilitator, Ian Benjamin. AAAC also wishes to thank Skye Dixon, NAB Agribusiness economist, for her excellent presentations on the global market outlook for agricultural commodities.

The participants should also be thanked for providing important feedback from the evaluation sheets, which will help frame content for 2008 Workshops.

2008 Events

We are again planning to conduct a further 5 Workshops next year, the first scheduled for April 1st at Orange, combining with an AIAST Symposium, to be held on the preceding day. The Workshop will be similarly structured to this year's events, with Ian Benjamin as the facilitator.

Thereafter, we aim to focus on Shepparton (May), Launceston (July), Goondiwindi (October) again rounding off the year at Adelaide in November. AAAC is preparing another submission to the National Bank Agribusiness, which has indicated an interest in continuing its sponsorship.

The Executive hopes that the highlight for the year will be a Canberra based event in September, celebrating fifty years of the agricultural consulting profession. Many of our founding members have expressed keen interest in participating, at which we plan to present our history, and showcase some of the many achievements which consultants have contributed towards agriculture. How the profession is likely to progress over the next fifty years, will also be on the agenda. The proposed location will be Canberra, and it is likely that on the following day, we shall have a Symposium.

Tracking down former consultants will be a daunting task. If current members have contact details for past consultants, we shall seek your assistance in locating them in the new year.

National Agribusiness Reference Group (NARG)

Earlier in December Mark Harris (Wagga Wagga) and I attended the initial NARG meeting at Sydney airport. This meeting was convened by Gordon Stone on behalf of GRDC and was attended by agribusiness representatives from Elders, Wesfarmers, Ruralco, IHD, AAAC and AAAC WA Inc, NuFarm, DowAgro, Syngenta, Fertiliser Industry Association, Seed Federation and GRDC.

The **purpose of the meeting** was set down as :

- i. Open lines of Communication with agribusiness on key grains industry issues
- ii. Canvass effective methods of communication of RD&E outcomes to farmer levy payers of GRDC in collaboration with agribusiness
- iii. Establish key areas of collaboration between GRDC and the agribusiness sector, particularly in methods of delivery of RD&E outcomes
- iv. Define key strategies, actions and policies that are needed to develop then consolidate the GRDC-Agribusiness relationship.

Findings from the meeting are contained in the following summary :

The Value Proposition or reason for existence of NARG was agreed as:

- facilitate regional agribusiness links with GRDC – as these are where the real gains will be made
- define and collaborate on emerging industry issues and trends – and strategic issues like the 'talent pool'
- understand GRDC and agribusiness opportunities for joint and collaborative endeavours
- address public good issues
- define the customers and their information and other needs
- reduce duplication of R&D across organisations – through early collaboration in a timely manner on emerging priorities across organisations
- define how to address gaps in industry staff and personnel (the 'talent pool') – through reducing industry staff turnover, attracting young people and retaining skilled and innovative personnel through attractive terms of employment
- define how to create strategic industry 'information packages'
- focus on strong feedback processes
- important to hang in there when strong barriers arise as they will – this is a key process of engagement.

NARG will meet again in February 2008 and AAAC will be represented – we will inform members of progress, opportunities and prospects. Members who have a keen interest in the grains industry and its interaction with agribusiness and GRDC activities can contact Mark Harris in Wagga Wagga on 02 6921 3660, 0427 265 500 mob or mharris@rmsag.com.au or Bob Hudson on 02 6746 2212, 0428 46 22 12 or bob.hudson@bigpond.com.

Obituary – Ken Hayes

Earlier in 2007, Ken Hayes one of the early agricultural consultant pioneers with Bill Beattie, Paul McGowan, Jack Makeham and others died in Melbourne aged in his late 70's. An ex-RAN World War Two veteran then a University of Melbourne graduate around 1950, Ken and his wife Meredith went dairy farming until the late 50's when he registered the business name *Farm Management Consultants*. For some time Ken worked in association with Russell Hogg and Ian Aberdeen. When ACIL expanded to include Russell and others, Ken re-energised FMC and with inputs from Meredith, son Robert and Ian (Busho) Blair completed a range of consulting assignments with a particular emphasis on the Ash Wednesday fires which devastated large areas of Victoria. Ken was awarded an Order of Australia for services to conservation. He was well known for his environmental expertise and his keen interest in rural planning. A pioneer, a highly professional operator who contributed significantly to the development of the farm management profession is remembered with affection and respect by his professional colleagues.

Regards,
Bob Hudson
AAAC President