

APEN's Fiona Johnson excels at extension

GRDC/APEN award for excellence is well deserved

Darren Schmidt, *ExtensionNet* Editor

Fiona Johnson, deserving winner of the GRDC/APEN 2003 Award for Excellence in Extension, received her award aboard a cruise on the Derwent River before giving a polished presentation next day to delegates at the Forum.

Fiona, a manager of Practice Change with the Victorian DPI at Tatura, has been working in the extension field since 1979. Throughout that time, she has pushed the boundaries of what extension can achieve and has contributed a considerable body of thought to the question of 'what is extension?' and how extension can be practised more effectively.

Fiona's application showcased some of her more recent work in consolidating and managing the Community Surface Water Management Program in the Shepparton Irrigation Region of Victoria. Fiona has begun to apply a more strategic approach to the extension disciplines within her project to bring about some exciting adoption pathways through marrying advanced extension, research and community participation.

Forum delegates who heard Fiona's presentation on the Friday morning knew they were listening to an extension profes-



Fiona Johnson addresses the APEN Forum in Hobart. Fiona's 2003 Award for Excellence in Extension came in front of a very healthy field of expertly run extension projects and programs.

sional who has developed the happy knack of understanding both the limits and opportunities of extension and matching this understanding with practical, on-the-ground skills to bring about changes for the better in the community and the agricultural systems on which they depend.

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Merry Christmas and happy new year to all APEN members!



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Winner of the Young Achiever Award for Excellence in Extension went to Jess Jennings (story page 2).

APEN is pleased to acknowledge the support of:



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Extension Excellence Award winners (cont'd from p1)

APEN is thrilled that Tom McCue from GRDC was present to present the plaques to Fiona and Jess with John James during the dinner cruise at the Forum. GRDC kindly sponsored the awards which included travel to Hobart, registration and accommodation



Fiona's presentation asked the question: "Compared to the alternatives, how efficient is extension in delivering change on the ground?" Many delegates were probably struggling to think of what constituted an 'alternative' to extension, let alone how efficient it was, but Fiona drew on several examples borrowed from the world of policy to demonstrate that people could or would change in the face of legislation, self-regulation (eg. accreditation), taxes, incentives, quotas, training and community engagement. It was a fascinating comparison.

Fiona joined a growing band of extensionists in calling for a clear understanding of the difference between human capital (the empowerment, ownership, and skills of people to manage change) and social capital

(vibrant networks within a community). Extension has often comfortably aligned with the human capital sphere, but Fiona's presentation made a convincing argument for putting more energy into community well-being.

To conclude, Fiona made a plea for the extension profession to look beyond agriculture for ideas and to continue to seek higher levels of skills amongst practitioners. Her presentation was well thought out and clearly delivered, much like

her extension work! Congratulations, Fiona.



Winner of the Young Achiever Award for Excellence in Extension was **Jess Jennings** (NSW Ag / Uni of Western Sydney - Hawkesbury, pictured right) for his work in the Profitable Pastures Project in NSW. Jess detailed his rôle in overseeing a project in which farmers took charge of their own learning and research agendas to improve their pastures and overall farm management practices. Jess' action research project breathed new life into the word 'participation' and his presentation at the Hobart Forum left delegates in no doubt that Jess was committed in every way to seeing how a genuinely farmer-led project would proceed.

Jess is finishing his PhD at Hawkesbury (ask about proposed completion dates at your own peril) and has recently joined the APEN National Executive (NE). Congratulations on your win, Jess.

Congratulations also go to Gerard Hogan, whose poster was judged best during the poster session at the start of the conference.



I promise to change this photo soon. I'm not this much of an egghead, I assure you (though I can't do much about the hair)

From the editor

This is the eighth ExtensionNet I've edited and (I hope) you'll be happy to know I've 'signed on' for another eight. I must say I have lots of fun putting these newsletters together, and although I can live without the stress of more deadlines it feels wonderful every three months to produce another 12 pages full of good extension stories from around the regions. As editor, I'm also able to sit with the APEN National Executive and take part in some of the discussions about where APEN is headed. These discussions are very rewarding and I try to keep you informed about them on these pages.

Thanks to all those who provided feedback on ExtensionNet on the recent online members survey. I'm happy to see that many of you are pleased with the way APEN's newsletter is produced, and I'm equally grateful for the constructive criticism. We need to do a more formal evaluation of ExtensionNet soon, so keep an eye out for details and I encourage you to respond with your comments.

The vibe at Hobart was terrific. I didn't talk to anyone who didn't have a great time, and the organisers are to be congratulated.

Best wishes of the season to you and yours.

Darren Schmidt

2003 another great year for APEN

APEN President John James outlines APEN's 2003 successes

This has been a great year for APEN, especially with our reaching our 10th birthday! The recent Tassie forum was a great meeting of the minds and was significant in helping us move forward as an organisation. It was also a defining moment for extension as a discipline, where many of us re-embraced the E word.

Much has happened since our last AGM at Tatura in Victoria, immediately after the successful APEN/AAAC joint workshop on "Managing in a time of climate and landscape change". For me, some of the highlights ...

Achievements

In my mind the main achievements for this year were:

1. The National Executive (NE) better communicating and engaging with its members. As a result of our new marketing plan, we introduced quarterly eBulletins, using an informal communication style to highlight items of importance to members. We also surveyed members to gauge their support of the cluster model, and again recently to undertake our biennial members satisfaction survey. Many have commented that have appreciated the apparent closer contact to the NE and the engagement this has brought.
2. We took a significant step forward in entering the policy arena by conducting a workshop with key stakeholders in July at Sydney. This has allowed us to map the territory and we are now moving towards a national policy summit mid 2004.
3. Funding from the Cooperative Venture allowed the NE to better develop its strategic plan (from which the cluster model emerged) and to conduct the policy workshop. The remainder of the \$20,000 funding will go towards the policy summit.



APEN President John James addresses the happy board aboard the good ship Cartela during the APEN cruise

Chapter activities

There has been some good activity occurring in some Chapters, as detailed below.

The **WA Chapter** ran three events:

1. Australian Journal of Agriculture road show at Bunbury in April 2003.
2. AGM and a talk by Neil Drew at Perth on 4 April 2003.
3. Commodity focused extension: Advantage or disadvantage? with Dr Kathy Hurly at Perth on 17 July 2003.

The **Melbourne/ Gippsland Chapter** ran three events:

1. Informing extension into the future with Kate Roberts at Melbourne on 27 November 2002.
2. Community engagement in the developing world with Ted Hayes at Melbourne on 28 August 2003 (combined with AGM).
3. Environmental Education Extension and Evaluation in the Land of the Thunder Dragon - an experience of living and working in Bhutan, with Penny Richards and John Weiss at Melbourne on 13 November 2003.

The **SE Qld/ N NSW Chapter** ran four events:

1. Dynamic Groups at Toowoomba on 21 Nov 2002.
2. Information Resources at Eumundi on 12 Feb 2003.
3. How Sweet It Is - Extension in the Sugar Industry at Kingscliff on 3 July 2003.
4. AGM at Brisbane on 5 November 2003.

The **NZ Chapter** ran a seminar on Extension Approaches and Management in Hamilton on 16 July 2003.

Of course the **Tassie Chapter** has been busy with the organising of this Forum. While it is good that these Chapters have been offering activities for members, it is a continuing concern that the rest are rather quiet.

Other activities

I have invested quite a bit of time and effort into the "cluster model" which I hope will lead our organisation into an even more effective and viable future. We will talk more about this later on.

ExtensionNet continues to go from strength to strength with Darren Schmidt at the helm. He has done a great job sourcing relevant articles and increasing the people focus of the newsletter.

The joint AAAC/APEN accreditation project progressed this year with Project Manager Mike Young spending six months assessing the demand for a National Accreditation Scheme for advisors in agriculture, NRM and related sectors.

The **National Executive** has met by teleconference every second month to progress a range of issues, all under the umbrella of the Business plan. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank each of the members... Greg Cock (vice-president), Heather Shaw (secretary), Jon Warren (treasurer), Darren Schmidt (editor), Paul Ainsworth, Neels Botha, Liz Kellaway, Greg Leach, Cynthia Mahoney and Jane Weatherley. I would also like to specially thank our Secretariat, Rosemary Currie, who enables most of the work to actually happen.

In all of this exciting activity the focus is people, and I take this chance to wish you all a very memorable Christmas and a peaceful New Year.



Happy 10th birthday, APEN!



“There was a real buzz and a real feeling about it back then because for the first time you had this group of passionate people together in the one place and founding a community of practice”

It's true! Ten short years have elapsed since a group of extension professionals met 'way back last century (1993) on Queensland's Gold Coast to put together the best and biggest extension organisation in this part of the world: APEN.

Terry Makin (still an APEN member) had the chair from the outset and he was assisted by Ian Simpson and Bob Macadam as Interim Joint Secretaries, Peter Van Beek as Interim Editor and Warren Straw as Interim Treasurer. At the first AGM in 1995, Terry was elected the Inaugural President and he was joined on the committee by Peter Davies (Vice President), Jane Fisher (Secretary), Warren Straw (Treasurer), Dale Williams and Elwin Turnbull (Joint Editors) and John Bourne and Joanne Millar. See the APEN Honour board on the APEN website: www.apen.org.au to see who else has helped get APEN where it is today.

In 1993, the world of extension was somewhat less complex than it is today. Warren Straw, now Manager of Sustainable Development with DPI Victoria, remembers that there was a great sense of professional urgency to get extension on the map and get it recognised as a legitimate network.

“There was a real buzz and a real feeling about it back then because for the first time you had this group of passionate people together in the one place and founding a community of practice,” Warren says.

“We knew it would be tough and we knew it would be a challenge to extend the network beyond the tradition realms of agricultural extension, but we felt that we were the right people to do it,” he says.

“By expanding the geography of APEN deliberately not just to the edge of Australia but into the Asia-Pacific region, we also had

the ambition and feeling that APEN

would be the peak body for this profession in this part of the world, and I think some of that has transpired.”

Warren says some of the original planned activities for APEN have proven beyond the scope of the organisation. One example was an APEN-mediated journal that reported on excellences in extension.

But he says although that journal never saw the light of day, extension developments were well covered between ExtensionNet and the extension material carried by the CSIRO journal “Australian Journal of Experimental Agriculture”.

Warren says one of the challenges first identified by the original APEN executive was to find a way to expand the network to meet the needs of kindred professionals in the region who didn't necessarily go by the name of ‘extension officers’.

“From the outset, we realised that to get APEN onto a professional footing we needed to be as inclusive as possible,” Warren says.

“It's interesting to see that 10 years down the track, we're still having healthy debate about how best to include people from other industries and professions, and I think that needs to continue,” he says.

The other 10-year-old challenge, says Warren, was/is what to call the organisation.

“We had a long debate about whether to include extension in the APEN name way back then, and the discussion's still going,” he says.

“I'm still not convinced about the word ‘extension’ but there's some recognition of the name out there now because APEN's gone from strength to strength.”

“From a point of view 10 years on, it's wonderful to have seen it happen.”