

EXTENSIONNET

NEWSLETTER OF THE AUSTRALASIA-PACIFIC
EXTENSION NETWORK (INC)

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APEN's 2nd Australasia Pacific Extension Conference is close ... very close!

"Managing Change - Building Knowledge and Skills"

is the theme of the conference to be held at the Albury Convention Centre from the 18-21st November, 1997. It is emerging from being a 'national' conference to an 'international' one! It is great to have some members from New Zealand coming. We look forward to stronger and more numerous ties with our Kiwi colleagues. We especially welcome international Pacific neighbour members, including at least two from **Papua New Guinea and another five from other South Pacific islands!** We are grateful to AusAID and ACIAR for their financial support of these latter delegates. We all have much to gain from regional interaction amongst extensionists.

There are currently over 180 delegates registered for the Conference. There is still time and for many more new participants to register. Please consider! There is an impressive



group of keynote speakers, a tremendous array of worthwhile papers being presented and some thoughtful training sessions and fieldtrips organised. We know there have been important national landcare-related conferences in both South Australia and Tasmania recently ... so we can appreciate the current low numbers of delegates for Albury from those two states. However, we would love to see more folk from those states - both for their important inputs and also so they can share Conference benefits afterwards with colleagues.

This edition of **ExtensionNet** features articles from keynote speakers of the upcoming Conference. We wanted to introduce them all prior to the Conference, by way of different yet complementary thoughts to those we will be hearing in a few weeks time. Diana Day and Jeff Coutts have been able to provide papers and Bob Macadam responded to a similar request.

The papers are quite different. Jeff Coutts gives us a taste of what might follow in some of his Conference contributions, around evaluating extension. Diana Day provides an important perspective inclusive of (yet also beyond) extension, with regards community-wide participation in environmental management. Her context is the Hunter River Catchment. The article highlights points taken from an address to a NSW Department of School Education conference. Bob Macadam was one of the Steering Committee members instrumental in APEN coming into being. His short paper raises several highly relevant issues of extension.

The **next** (and final) edition of **ExtensionNet** for 1997 will highlight some themes and outcomes from the Conference and from the Annual General Meeting of APEN. You should receive it sometime in December.

NOTIFYING ALL APEN MEMBERS

**The APEN Annual General Meeting
Is being held at the Albury Convention Centre
At 5.30pm on Wednesday 19th November 1997**

See pages 7 and 10 for details

Hope to see you there!

From the Editor

Dale Williams

I will be stepping aside from the Committee of Management at the next AGM and from the role of ExtensionNet Editor after the December issue. I would like to thank members for the opportunity of my involvement in these capacities in recent years. I warmly encourage different APEN members to share in management opportunities and responsibilities. Ours is a 'network'. It is more than a professional 'association'. It will work if we all equally own its purpose, processes and benefits ... if we each play our roles in its shared life. Recent years have been

busy and somewhat stressful, in general, for me. One small way of making a little more time for my wife's and my Doctrates is for me to put aside my APEN work (and looking for other 'outs' too). It is also healthy for APEN to keep circulating new insights, abilities and experiences of diverse members through regular change of committee members.

I encourage widespread support by membership in contributing individual articles to **ExtensionNet**. I also urge Chapters, groups and individuals to take more responsibility for ensuring provision of content for whole issues. **ExtensionNet** needs YOU. Most

members have basically not responded to public requests for input and groups have similarly balked at specific requests to take responsibility for issues three, six or nine months ahead. Difficulties obtaining sufficient copy for some issues and late submissions of articles creates delays getting **ExtensionNet** to you. We potentially have a great tool in **ExtensionNet** for professional development, mutual encouragement and collaboration. I know it can become something 'much more' than what it already is. Each of us has MUCH to offer. Please share it. All the best!



Preparing another pounce on extension evaluation

Jeff Coutts, Rural Extension Centre, Gatton

The evaluation of extension has been an on-going area of difficulty. Either it has been undertaken too simplistically (measuring the total level of adoption of specific technologies or practices - despite extension being only one of the influences operating), or it has been measured with complex formulae that provide doubtful results. Following a major review of extension evaluation Scrimgeour et al (1991) concluded that ... given the fragility of estimates... it would be possible to carefully choose a model estimated over the data set and 'prove' that extension has been or has not been, a very productive investment.

A number of factors are demanding that extension evaluation is better addressed. Government departments in Australia are increasingly viewing extension as an arm of rural policy rather than as an ad-hoc provider of services. Programs and projects are being 'contracted' out to extension through the funder-purchaser-provider approach. This brings with it an expectation of demonstrable policy outcomes. Likewise, Research and Development Corporations are increasingly funding extension either through government agencies, or directly through private providers. These funding bodies are also accountable and require evidence that

the Commonwealth and industry dollar is being used effectively.

Evaluation of extension can be likened to making a case to present to a jury. Evidence is collected and analysed in a rigorous and transparent way. A combination of quantitative measurements, qualitative analysis and an appreciation of the context surrounding the case is woven into an argument to inform, and if necessary, convince a third party.

Whether the third party is a funding body, a project team or an industry or community group, the same principle applies.

Unlike the jury example, however, extension evaluation has the potential to involve all parties in the evaluation process at some level. Not only is this often more effective, it means that evaluation becomes a learning exercise for those most intimately involved in the program or project. The results of the evaluation then become part of the project memory with the potential for considerable impact, rather than remaining in a published report written by a disembodied external evaluator.

Extension evaluation is not only needed for accountability and funding

purposes, but also to provide a rapid learning loop for those of us involved in the operation, management and training of extension. It is time to take the tiger by the tail, and design and implement effective evaluation processes to allow extension to develop and continuously improve its value to those who benefit from it.

I will be presenting a paper at the Second Australasia Extension Conference entitled 'Exposing the tiger- a fresh look at the evaluation of extension'. I propose a framework for thinking about, and planning, the evaluation of extension programs and projects. It will also seek to provide examples of the application of this framework in practice. Importantly, it will attempt to demonstrate that extension can be evaluated on the basis of the specific knowledge process which it is contributing towards change, and to remove the angst of having to prove direct 'cause-effect' impact of projects and programs.

Reference:

Scrimgeour F, Gibson J & O'Neil P (1991) *Agricultural Extension: An Economic Assessment*, University of Waikato, New Zealand.

