

# EXTENSIONNET

NEWSLETTER OF THE AUSTRALASIA-PACIFIC  
EXTENSION NETWORK (INC) A0029919P

AUSTRALIA POST APPROVED PP 34763700014

## Niels Röling and Janice Jiggins Visit the West



*Niels Röling and Janice Jiggins with APEN WA Chair, Amanda Miller (centre).*

APEN WA and Agriculture Western Australia were pleased (read ecstatic!) when Niels Röling and Janice Jiggins accepted an invitation to visit WA during the first week of August. The aims of the visit were:

- to show them the changes that have occurred since their last visit 10 years ago;
- to provide opportunities for people working in agriculture and the environment the opportunity to hear and learn from them; and
- to learn more about the opportunities for overseas work for people interested in such ventures.

During the week Niels and Janice spent time in Perth and country locations Northam and Tammin and worked with staff from Agriculture Western Australia and the University of WA, LCDC coordinators, Bushcare workers and farmers. They were impressed with the enormous social capacity that has been built in the last 10 years to address issues of land degradation and sustainable rural development. However, they expressed concern for the need to “safeguard the social capacity” as The Decade of Landcare comes to a close. “It would be a tragedy to lose this social capacity that has taken so long to nurture and build, and which now represents a

fantastic asset, through a lack of support and funding” said Janice. There were a number of significant discussions and learning points for many of those who came to hear what they had to say. Towards the end of their visit Niels and Janice challenged a large forum in Perth with a seminar on the uncertainties they saw facing agriculture, and hence agricultural extension, and five perspectives that could be used to look at the way we might deal with these uncertainties. The seminar is summarised later in this Newsletter.



**CONTENTS**

Niels Röling and Janice Jiggins Visit the West .....	1
From the Chair .....	2
From the Editor .....	2
Four uncertainties facing agriculture and five perspectives to deal with them .....	3
Woolpro™ - Supporting adoption of technology in the West Australian wool industry .....	6
Talking to Traditional People about Contemporary Conservation .....	8
Community Agricultural Centres – working closely with farmers .....	10
1999 National APEN Forum Update .....	10
APEN News .....	11
APEN Steering Group .....	12

**From the Chair**

*John Bourne*

The response to the new **APEN Award for Excellence in Extension** has been very positive. We have received five nominations, and the Committee of Management will be assessing these at its tele-conference next week. In fact the response has been so pleasing that I am wondering why we haven't offered this previously. However the initiative has now been taken, and many thanks again to Amabel Fulton for proposing and running with the idea.

The arrangements for the **National Forum in Perth, November 11<sup>th</sup> - 12<sup>th</sup>** are well advanced and fliers are now being circulated. The WA organising committee has put a great deal of time into the event and the support of Agriculture Western Australia is very much appreciated. Some impressive guest speakers from both WA and the eastern states have been arranged. At each of the previous Forums, WA has been well represented, and so I would urge every-one to make a special effort to make the trip west in November. **Thanks also to Sally Marsh** for taking on the Editor's job for this Western Australian issue of *ExtensionNet* – Elwin Turnbull is busy in Nepal at present.

Following a national advertisement, the Committee of Management recently considered three **tenders for the APEN Secretariat**. The current tender of two years, with the option of two additional annual re-negotiations, expired at the end of July this year. We are pleased to announce that the successful tenderer was Rosemary Currie of Creative Management Services. Rosemary has provided a very effective and efficient secretariat for APEN in previous years, and put forward a proposal that more than addressed all of the aspects requested in the tender document.

A final note of interest. The APEN Secretariat continues to receive requests from time to time, from a range of organisations, for **short term consultancies relating to extension expertise**. We have been distributing these as widely as possible through our Network, however can not always get to everyone particularly if there is a short response time. If you would like to be informed of relevant potential consultancies that come up, please contact Rosemary Currie at the Secretariat.



*APEN is pleased to acknowledge the support of:*



**Natural Resources and Environment**

- AGRICULTURE
- RESOURCES
- CONSERVATION
- LAND MANAGEMENT

**From the Guest Editor**

*Sally Marsh*

It's been an exciting time for extension in Western Australia over the past few months. We are in the throes of planning for what promises to be an exciting and challenging National Forum in November. An update on the forum is included in the Newsletter. Just when we thought things couldn't get any busier, Niels Röling and Janice Jiggins accepted our invitation to visit WA at the beginning of August. Their visit proved to be both challenging and inspirational to many who took the opportunity to be involved, not to mention exhausting for Niels and Janice. A report on one of their major presentations is included in the Newsletter. Other articles are accounts of practical extension activities happening in two vastly different arenas. Keith Noble writes of his work as a landuse planner in Central Australia and Kathryn Egerton-Warburton tells of the Woolpro™ team's work with wool growers in WA. I hope you enjoy this and other reading in the Newsletter. We in the West look forward to seeing you all in Perth in November.



*Elwin Turnbull is looking for someone to take over the Editor's job as his two year term comes to an end at the AGM in Perth. - Interested? It's very rewarding!*

## Four uncertainties facing agriculture and five perspectives to deal with them

*A summary by Fionnuala Frost and Sally Marsh of a seminar given in Perth by Niels Röling and Janice Jiggins, August 1999.*

### Four uncertainties facing agriculture worldwide

#### *The agricultural treadmill*

The notion of the agricultural treadmill (Cochrane, 1958) describes the agricultural production process in the following manner.

- Many small firms all produce the same product.
- No-one can affect the price of the product, and producers try to produce as much as possible, even when this goes against market trends.
- A new technology will allow those who use it first to capture the windfall.
- After some time, others will follow.
- Those who have not innovated will be forced to innovate to keep up with the current trends.
- Those who are too old, too small, poor or in some way disadvantaged to innovate will eventually drop out and those who capitalised on the windfall profit will capture their business.

This process has benefits for policy-makers. There are considerable benefits from technological change and these are passed on to the consumer since primary products are produced more efficiently and competitively. Labour is freed for other pursuits, and technological investment requires a relatively small investment on the behalf of the state.

However, there are risks associated with the treadmill.

Alternative employment may not be available for the 'freed-up' labour. Companies rather than consumers may capture the benefit. In many instances farm incomes are not sustainable, market pressure leads to unsustainable forms of farming and global competition eventually drives out national agricultural industries.

This treadmill is currently the process that drives agriculture. This process will not sustain the ecological environment.

#### *The future of energy*

Our economy is based on cheap energy. We are becoming increasingly reliant on using cheap energy and the amount of energy we currently use is 4 times the amount that is discovered. There is a need to investigate alternative energy sources and incorporate these into the farming systems of today in order to provide sustainable agricultural systems.

#### *Climate change*

This is a very real phenomenon that is currently unpredictable. Rainfall and temperature significantly affect biotic response and our current farming systems are, in effect, placing all the eggs in one basket. Climate change has the potential to significantly affect the areas of agricultural surplus and deficit and destabilise our current geopolitical relationships. To a large extent this is out of our control.

The threat of climate change means that having fixed reserves

for biodiversity might be a risky option. There are suggestions that in response to such potential dramatic climate change, germplasm be used to breed crops that are more adaptive to such dramatic changes. While this is a possibility, it should also be stated that neither human nor institutional capacity is as flexible as the movement of germplasm and so this option is potentially very limited.

#### *Ecological function and process*

There are interconnected problems in our world and we need to deal with them inside an agricultural context because so much of the globe is under agriculture. Agriculture must relate to Environmentally Sustainable Development (ESD) in order to support populations around the world. The new agenda in agriculture is more than just adding environmental recommendations to current farming systems. Agriculture, and indeed the institutions, must adapt to support ecological process and function.

**We can trap ourselves into a way of thinking that views agriculture as "farming" rather than as "management of a resource": a resource that can supply carbon sequestration and fresh water, provide space for recreation and opportunity for recycling, etc**

**Extension services must not become trapped into the language of production; rather, it must take on a language of opportunities for ESD issues.**

*Continued next page* ➔