



EXTENSIONNET

June 2002
Vol. 9 No. 4

Newsletter of the Australasia-Pacific Extension Network (Inc)

A0029919P ISSN 1445-2111 Contact: 07 4160 0725 Australia Post approved PP347637000014

Implementing on-ground change

Experience with the Devolved Grants scheme of the Mount Lofty Ranges Catchment Program

Dr Jill Kerby

General Manager, Onkaparinga Catchment Water Management Board

Natural resource management is important in the Mount Lofty Ranges behind Adelaide. The ranges feature one of the highest rainfall areas in South Australia, fertile soils, unique flora and fauna and extensive primary production. The area also supplies most of Adelaide's water and attracts rural lifestyle, urban development, tourism and recreation.

Phase II of the Mount Lofty Ranges Catchment Program (MLRCP) operated from 1998 to 2001 (Phase III will follow). It aims to enhance sustainable natural resource management, with community and government working together, maintaining and improving an environmentally, economically and socially diverse region.

The objectives of the Program are:

- planning to set priorities;
- on-ground action (groups and individuals);
- integrated action in natural resource management;
- community awareness and understanding;
- developing and promoting best practice; and,
- proactively attracting investment with partners.

From the editor

Feedback on the last edition was positive. Thanks to those who wrote in with suggestions. This edition signals a return to more traditional extension stories, but look for more topics from "outside the square" in future editions. In particular, we're keen to see some stories on marketing extension.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr Jill Kerby led the Mount Lofty Ranges Catchment Program, SA, from February 1998 to July 2001.

Currently General Manager, Onkaparinga Catchment Water Management Board

Email: jkerby@cwmb.sa.gov.au



Phase II accelerated on-ground action. Technical and community assessment processes determined priorities for on-ground works to ensure that resources were invested in key locations to address significant issues. On-ground outputs were achieved through the continued provision of devolved community grants, together with the introduction of devolved funding for groups to undertake major on-ground works.

Continued page 2...

DATECLAIMER: AGM

APEN Annual General Meeting NRE Institute, Tatura, Victoria, on Friday November 8, 2002. The AGM will be preceded by a joint AAAC-APEN professional development activity.

IN THIS ISSUE

Planning for innovation p4

Theo Nabben explains how innovation and uncertainty can be reconciled with firm project goals.

APEN strategic plan p7

APEN NE Treasurer Greg Cock outlines how your National Executive plans to do business.

APEN contacts p8

Where to contact your local APEN representative. Also story guidelines for the next edition of ExtensionNet.

APEN is pleased to acknowledge the support of:



DAIRY RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION



Horticulture Australia

Darren Schmidt

Devolved grants is a process whereby the Commonwealth Government passes on some financial responsibility for project approvals and administration to regional organisations.

DIFFUSION OF INNOVATIONS

APEN name change

Some preliminary stats on the name change faxback you received with your last newsletter, where "1" was "Don't change it!" and 9 was "Change it now!" 5 is neutral. Average so far: 5.1

Scores	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
No.	12	2	12	2	17	3	8	6	12

It's not too late to send in your faxback form.

Another online journal

The venerable *Journal of Extension (JOE)* has a companion on the web. It's the *Journal of Agricultural Education and Extension* and you can find it at <http://www.bib.wau.nl/ejae/>. Abstracts are free to download from 1996 to the present, but free full text versions are only available until 1996. Fees apply for more recent articles.

JOE online update

Speaking of *JOE*, the June edition carries a good number of articles relevant to Australian/Pacific extension. Read about international extension, community engagement, evaluation, rural-urban relationships and more. Go to www.joe.org/.

Devolved Grants ... cont'd from page 1

Devolved grants were offered by the MLRCP at two levels: major on-ground works (up to \$150,000 per project, offered annually) and community involvement grants (up to \$10,000 per project offered quarterly). These were intended to achieve major on-ground change and to encourage the community to participate in projects and activities that would:

- enhance and protect the quality of surface and ground water;
- ensure sustainable use and management of water resources;
- protect and enhance biodiversity;
- provide for the sustainable management of land and the protection of soil; and,
- increase community understanding of natural resource management.

While MLRCP had some experience in small community grants during Phase I of the Program (1993-97), major on-ground works were new to Phase II. Management and administration evolved over time, including publicity, database management, application processes, technical assessment, Board of Management appraisal and approval, preparation of financial agreements, payments, monitoring, report assessment and final evaluation.

For major on-ground works, the process was even more complex as the potential project moved through stages of expressions of interest, refinement based on technical advice and detailed project plans. Two custom-built data management systems were developed: one for the MLRCP to administer all aspects of major on-ground works; the other for groups undertaking projects to manage the funds, individual landholder involvement and reporting requirements. In addition, a special group of MLRCP staff provided support and linkages to community groups who were implementing the works.

In a typical year, about \$150,000 of Natural Heritage Trust funds were allocated to about 20 groups for community involvement grants and \$1 million to about 15 groups for major on-ground works. These investments were more than matched by contributions from the community, local and State Governments. Over the three years and nine months of the MLRCP Phase II, this total investment from the community and three levels of government was close to \$9.5 million.

What did we learn?

Through the process of administering this scheme, we developed many systems and procedures, collectively called the *Ingredients of Success* (see diagram opposite). Much of this was learned in the more challenging major on-ground works scheme. Each and everyone of these components was necessary to make the scheme successful. Some of these revolve around reliable sources of **funding** and other contributions, such as:

- Natural Heritage Trust funds (of about \$2 million a year);
- matching contributions (State/Local Government and community); and,
- incentive packages for on-ground works (to encourage landholders to undertake the required priorities).

Others revolve around **priorities and partners**, particularly priority natural resource management issues and multiple and diverse partners (for funding, technical advice, in-kind support etc).

The scheme could not operate without a **community** ready and willing to take on major or minor projects, so the ingredients include:

- community groups and/or landholders in the key areas;
- indigenous (local) knowledge of land, climate, weeds etc;
- support from Landcare officers and others where there are significant environmental issues, but no existing community group to lead the process;
- 'insider' information on the social environment (eg recognising key community leaders, or how to resolve potential conflict within a group);
- general group support, eg providing information, referral to training and technical expertise and advice on planning and coordination of activities and projects;
- access to relevant and timely technical advice to landholders or the group.

There needed to be open, transparent and equitable systems for the groups to obtain funding

- effective publicity and communication;
- an open application process (eg expressions of interest, detailed project plans etc);
- technical assessment of applications, and providing feedback;
- Board of Management assessment and approval.

The MLRCP needed to establish its own administration processes and reporting structures, so the ingredients include:

- database management systems (electronic and hard copy);
- custom-built data management system for administration, tracking and reporting.

In addition, the group needed to be supported in the ongoing management of the project and the funds and associated reporting:

- financial and project agreement with groups;
- payment schedule to groups, linked to reporting (for large projects this tended to be 50% 'up-front', 40% at the half-way point on provision of a progress report and 10% on completion, including a final report);
- site visits and inspections of on-ground works at appropriate times.

Almost all large projects needed additional human resources to implement them, so ingredients include:

- funding of project/implementation officers for most larger projects (to coordinate landholders, technical advice, implementation, reporting etc);
- development of custom-built data management system for groups to use;
- the development of Voluntary Land Management Agreements with landholders.

And the whole process needed to be flexible, so that ingredients include:

- the invaluable team of about 15 individuals from the MLRCP, various State agencies and community groups who acted as the link between each major on-ground works project and the MLRCP;
- ongoing review of processes, procedures and linkages;
- monitoring, 'trouble shooting' and final evaluation.

So what?

Delivering major and complex programs for on-ground change in natural resource management presents considerable challenges, in the complex chain from Commonwealth Government to individual landholder and landholder groups. To a large extent, meeting these challenges relied on the willingness of everyone involved to be flexible, positive, and to work together to devise credible, practical and cost-effective solutions. In other words, the most valuable asset is the human resources of the region and a willingness to invest in people in order to achieve effective on-ground change. ENR

Western Australia

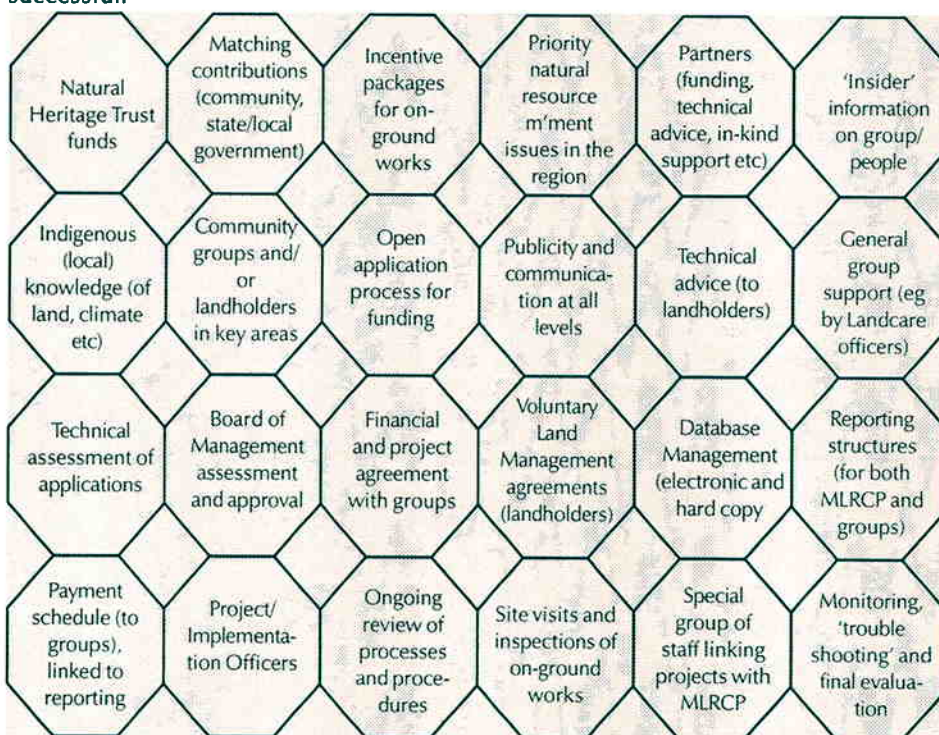
The folk in WA are busy! By the time you read this, WA Chapter will have run their second writing workshop (the first was in late May) which covered research, structure, style, editing and using images. In addition, Uni of Qld's Tony Kelly launched a three pronged workshop adventure in Perth and Kalgoorlie focusing on integrated community development, community development frameworks and community building through heads, hearts and hands.

National accreditation scheme

In March, a joint AAAC/APEN workshop funded by RIRDC was conducted in Canberra to explore the possibility of establishing a national accreditation scheme for workers in natural resources, agriculture and related sectors.

John James and Jon Warren attended, and Jon is on the steering committee to progress the initiative further.

Ingredients for success in devolved grants: a honeycomb of variables. As Jill says: "Each and everyone of these components was necessary to make the scheme successful."

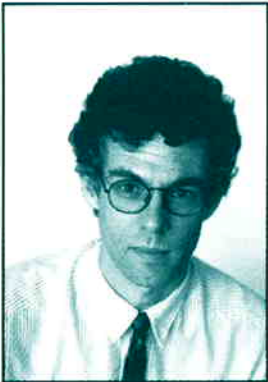


ICEBREAKERS

Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, vision cleared, ambition inspired, and success achieved.

.... Helen Keller

Planning for innovation: The case of working the networks



Theo Nabben, who says this photo is dating and he has a lot more grey hair now.

Contact information

email: tnabben@agric.wa.gov.au

The *Working the Networks Project final report* and two other reports detailing our networking lessons are available from the author.

“Working the Networks” was a WA Department of Agriculture project commissioned in November 1999 to speed up adoption of dryland salinity practices in the West Australian Wheatbelt. The project’s action learning methodology provided an adaptive model for project planning, fostering on-going evaluation within the action learning cycle of plan, act, reflect.

Theo Nabben

Development Officer, Sustainable Rural Development Program, Agriculture Western Australia

Innovation means uncertainty

Innovation projects build new responses to uncertain situations, but how do actors and supervisors embrace the unknowns of the innovation task whilst ensuring appropriate action is undertaken?

Action learning may be an option; it suggests that in uncertain circumstances, initial action should be based on best current understanding, but that the reasons behind choices of goals and strategies are made explicit. Reflection after action, however, generates new understandings, which confirm or challenge goals and strategies, and on these more secure directions, new action can be planned. Assumptions about what is going on and how best to influence can then be tested against experience.

Rather than trying to anticipate unknowns at the start, a project management process based on action learning rapidly and repeatedly draws the results of action back for reflection, and tests the soundness of goals and strategies before initiating the next round of action.

Changing project goals in the light of the first cycle of action

Working the Networks aimed to do *something* to speed up the rate of adoption of dryland salinity practices. While new options were (and still are) needed for dryland agriculture, there were potentially valuable new practices that farmers were not adopting. Most farmers trial new practices on their own property before scaling up, so better private and public support for these trials could increase adoption. The project rationale argued that trials would be better constructed and more learning would be extracted from them. Instead of new practices being rejected because of poor trial

design and implementation, the benefits and limitations of a new practice would be better grasped, and the end rate of adoptions would be higher.

The project selected a target region, the south eastern Wheatbelt, and agency staff, private consultants and farmers were interviewed to get their perception of blocks to and opportunities for improved adoption. This produced a rich picture of the evolution of sustainable farming systems in the region, but did not support the initial goals.

Private consultants thought they were pushing adoption of new practices as hard as they could with their clients, and making progress toward sustainable systems. Agency staff were mostly new graduates, unfamiliar with the community, the industry and lacking the technical knowledge behind the farming systems in the area. It emerged that the networks between all the players were weak.

Agency staff didn’t know who to go to within the agency to get technical advice, or who to go to in the local community to understand best local practice. Private consultants didn’t think much of the technical competence of agency staff, and didn’t talk much to each other. Agribusiness maintained its direct relationship with farmers around the sale of materials, but didn’t talk to other service providers. Local agency staff changed frequently, so any emerging networks continually stumbled as people left. Faster movement of technical specialists within the agency, and the shift to a project-based rather than discipline-based organisation had fractured networks within the agency.

The project management team discussed these new understandings and decided to refocus the project goals on building up the networks between private and public service providers. The revised project logic argued that the Department of Agriculture’s capacity to deliver service was seriously compromised by weak networks, and staff needed to focus explicitly on building stronger networks. Further, the capacity to tap into and build networks was becoming more important in agriculture, as farmers, consultants and agribusiness became more adept in network-

ing across distance and industry sectors to source new ideas and technical information. The agency needed a distinct networking capability if it was to contribute to the evolution of farming systems.

The project developed a new strategy for this goal: to form an action learning group of service providers in a target catchment (the Woodanilling-Dumbleyung catchment), who would set about strengthening the networks between service providers. The assumptions behind this strategy were:

- *People learn best through action.* By focusing on a specific catchment, and drawing together service providers working there, the project would create an opportunity for joint action, which would lead to improvements in the networks.
- *Action based on participants' own assessment of the situation would produce sustained action.* By facilitating participants' own analysis of the strengths and weaknesses across regional networks, they would be motivated to make the improvements they thought necessary.
- *As action was taken, skills would develop.* The project consultant would facilitate reflection on what was working and not working in the action taken, and this would lead to better targeted action and build the underlying knowledge and skills of participants. Each cycle of action would raise questions about how to build networks and open up more opportunities to extend networking skills.

Changing project strategy based on the results of a second cycle of action

The first phase changed project goals and strategy; the second led to a significant refinement strategy. The first assumption of this phase was that service providers would develop skills in networking as they improved networks in specific catchments. This didn't happen. A group (the Wagin Group) was formed and over several months looked at how to strengthen local provider networks, but participants didn't have the organisational capacity to bridge the gaps between networks. The analysis: delivery was weak. Participants did not have the authority, nor in many cases the competence, to get networks with differing values to related better to each other. They were not able to not get the attention of those with more authority.

However, as they worked on all the difficulties this threw up, service providers began lifting their *own* networking skills. Discussion on how to network was the liveliest part of the meetings. Gradually, a new understanding coiled its way into the group's collective awareness: *Working the Networks* might be better off targeting service providers who were building networks as a *major part of their job*. The people most committed to the task were in fact the full-time networkers, and the Wagin Group had struggled to keep the attention of those for whom building networks was peripheral to their work tasks.

One participant suggested we get a group of full-time networkers and form action learning groups that gave them time to talk and work together on their networking and network building skills. We compared notes on the network builders we knew, and set about them. In the space of six weeks, the project closed down the Wagin Group and had new two groups of *network builders* up and running.

What allowed flexibility in project direction?

The project's ability to change goals and strategies was based on:

Initial assumptions about innovation. The project consultant and Management Team approached the task as innovation - the creation of new processes and products to meet difficult circumstances, rather than the application of established products and processes to well-understood circumstances.

They accepted from the start that the best way to proceed would become apparent as the project progressed, and that there was a level of risk in heading in any particular direction. The team also accepted that the consultant would be the person close to the action, making tactical decisions without reference to the management team, and generating options for strategies and goals.

Regular communication with the management team. The consultant's track record in managing innovation projects engendered a level of trust to begin with, but regular communication built this trust into shared understanding of the issues the project was encountering. The flow of information from the project meant that everyone saw when the management team needed to reconvene face-to-face, and what the agenda needed to be.

Assumptions drawn at the start of the project:

1. People learn best through action.
 2. Action based on participants' own assessment of the situation produces sustained action.
 3. As action is taken, skills develop.
-



Ross Colliver is the principal author and consultant who manages the *Working the Networks* Project. Just before this photo was taken, Ross was told the project strategy had changed again.

Ross' consultancy is called Training & Development Group - his contact details are Ph 08 9386 1412, email colliver@mpx.com.au

Implications: the next ten years.

We can be sure to see the growth of private advisors, a re-assessment and repositioning of public agency roles, growth in knowledge itself and increasing integration of that knowledge into farming systems.

We will need an adaptive and flexible extension process.

Traditional project management may shackle extension without an explicit process to shape project goals and strategies in light of project learning. Action learning may provide one model for this, allowing the project team to learn from and respond to new understandings about changing situations, which may be more appropriate than traditional extension approaches that define outcomes up front and do not, or have trouble with, adjusting these to real world conditions.

Whether project funders will tolerate the flexibility offered by systematic reflection on action is another thing. The less familiar project funders are with the uncertainties being investigated by extension projects, the less tolerant they may be of change in initial goals and strategies.

Alternatively, deliberate testing and reworking of assumptions may appeal to funders, allowing them to follow new understandings as these are generated and change project focus as necessary.

Tacit assumptions made at the start of a project only become apparent as action reveals that the real world doesn't fit those assumptions.

Regular communication with participants.
The consultant built an email list of all people with whom he had contact as the project progressed. After every major step forward (for example, after a meeting of the Wagin Group), and about every four to six weeks, he put out a summary of progress which covered action taken, implications for strategy, and next steps. The thinking behind the action of the project was transparent to the growing network of those involved. When it came time to change direction, those with the interest in the new direction knew where the change had come from and stayed engaged.

Project goals and strategy were constantly and explicitly tested and rebuilt. Assumptions connect a beginning intention, with goals, with strategies, with action. These assumptions were declared the start, but revisited throughout. For an innovating project, not only does understanding of *the world out there* develop as a project progresses, but tacit assumptions made at the start of a project only become apparent as action reveals that the real world doesn't fit those assumptions. It was tempting to bury this incongruence and either continue as planned or change direction without reworking initial assumptions. But at that point, innovation would have stopped.

Holding onto strategy

Strategy doesn't always have to change: new insights can shape tactics without changing strategy, even when events strongly challenged what had been planned.

As the two new action learning groups got underway, the consultant reminded participants to report their progress at mid-term and at the end of the six month period. However, as the mid-term progress reports neared, the need for these was challenged by both groups. The consultant's draft agenda for the mid-term session drew an alternative proposal from spokespersons for the two groups, who had quickly consulted their respective groups. They argued for an ordinary working session of each group, on the grounds that the groups were just starting to hit their straps and needed more time as a group to get into their issues. It was too early, they said, to be giving progress reports.

In response, the consultant revised the agenda, starting the half day with a normal work session of the groups, then a review of the action learning process so far and sharing

of learning between groups. After lunch discussion of *learnings so far* started rather flat in tone, but hit a more animated pitch as the two groups realised they were covering similar *and* different issues, and had actually begun to identify some worthwhile practices in networking and network building.

The review of the project process raised the issue of progress reports at the end of the project. Many were reluctant to accept this requirement. The consultant presented the progress report as an account of their learning to their peers within the action learning group and beyond, and an opportunity to add to the collective understandings about networking and network building. He made it clear that he had an obligation to describe best practices and that their progress reports would help him do this. He opened up more options for *making* a report, including verbal presentations and presentations of critical incidents, rather than whole sequences of actions over several months, and more options for *preparing* a report. He explored the help he could provide to participants in preparing their reports, but stuck with the intention that the reports should provide an account of learning to peers.

Once again, the action threw up a challenge to project activity, forcing to the foreground discussion of the idea of a progress report and making more explicit assumptions on all sides. Participants reacted to the request for progress reports as if this was a demand by some distant authority. They had joined the project to do some learning for themselves, in fact to create a conversation different to the discourse of production and administration that dominated their work. They were not about to manufacture reports to keep someone else happy. The consultant deepened his exposition of a progress report: it was first of all a place where individuals could draw together their learning, so that they would know what they knew more explicitly. It was also a way each could contribute to the understanding of peers and to a field of practice. Rather than being time off-line, away from the pressures of work, the discussion about progress reports placed learning activity in the centre of extension activity, as an innovating effort that tackled central tasks in extension practice, and that could deliver new practices.

ENET

Renewed focus and directions for APEN

Over the last twelve months the APEN National Executive (NE)* has been developing a strategic plan in order to

- prioritise and streamline the volunteer effort on the NE;
- communicate "what we are on about" to members, potential members, sponsors and partner organisations;
- build a sense of team amongst the NE; and,
- be able to measure/celebrate our achievements.

The process began in 2000, and developed further in Melbourne in December 2001. Incomplete and imperfect as it is (and should be!) the plan is now driving the agenda of what we do, from the structure of meetings, the development of budgets and most

importantly, driving what APEN does for its membership.

With constant pressure on volunteers' time and competition for members' attention from other organisations and interests it is critical that APEN continues to evolve and improve if it is to prosper. The NE wants to ensure that APEN stays relevant and an plays an important part of people's portfolios of interest. To use marketing parlance, the NE wants to ensure APEN is "front-of-mind" for members and non-members.

We set a vision for APEN that shows that we aim to make a significant contribution to people in (rural) Australia "*successfully managing change*" and that APEN be the "*peak body for change management professionals*".

We set four goals for APEN to work toward that vision. They are to:

1. be recognised as the Peak Body for change management professionals,
2. have a vibrant and effective network,
3. provide maximum professional development opportunities, and
4. ensure a high *profile amongst members, potential members, policy makers and funders*.

The business of APEN has been split into nine portfolios within the context of the above Goals; with the management of portfolios assigned to individuals on the NE. Each portfolio has a set of objectives, actions and performance measures, summarised below.

* Note: the "National Executive" (NE) is the new name for the old "Committee of Management (CoM).

OUR OBJECTIVES ... THINGS THE NATIONAL EXECUTIVE (NE) REALISTICALLY THINK WE CAN ACHIEVE!

Goal 1: Be recognised as the Peak Body for change management professionals

Management Portfolio

- The NE to be highly effective with a smooth running Secretariat (John James).
- Strategic relationships/ alliances that enrich APEN and clear policies on change management (John James).

Financial Resources Portfolio

- NE has a strategic approach towards the financial stability and resilience of APEN (Jon Warren).
- Robust financial systems in place and being used (Jon Warren).

Evaluation Portfolio

- Continuous improvement and innovation in the development and implementation of portfolios (Heather Shaw).
- Efficient / effective collection of relevant, utilisable data to evaluate portfolio progress and impacts (Heather Shaw).



Author and APEN Treasurer, Greg Cock

Goal 2: Have a vibrant and effective network of change management professionals

Chapter Support Portfolio

- Cultivating responsibility throughout Chapters and a sense of belonging and importance of APEN (Jane Weatherley).
- Better linkages created between the NE and chapters with assistance provided to Chapters (Jane Weatherley).

Membership Services Portfolio

- Members are aware and informed about APEN and APEN knows who its members are (Greg Cock).
- Members are satisfied with the benefits provided by APEN and Membership numbers are increasing (Greg Cock)

Internal Communication Portfolio

- Through ExtensionNet, the web page and the e-mail discussion lists, members feel they have a platform for sharing facts, opinions, and experience (Darren Schmidt).
- The purpose, quality and integrity of APEN are reflected in hardcopy promotional materials (Darren Schmidt).
- Members feel comfortable about passing on to the editor information relevant to other members (Darren Schmidt).

Goal 3: Maximum professional development opportunities for change management professionals

Activities Portfolio

- One International Conference from 2001; one National Forum run every four years from 2003 (Amanda Miller).
- Members provided a minimum of two professional development workshops per year in at least five locations (Amanda Miller).

Knowledge Resources Portfolio

- Time efficient/effective facility for members to disseminate/source change management literature (Paul Ainsworth).

Goal 4: APEN has a high profile amongst members, potential members, policy makers and funders

Marketing Portfolio

- APEN's markets are well defined and APEN is positioned to meet the needs of these markets (Terry Reid).
- Strategic alliances with funding bodies, kindred organisations and institutes of higher learning are developed to generate income and professional co-operation (Terry Reid).
- APEN is "front-of-mind" for members and non-members (Terry Reid).

A complete version of the plan will soon be on the APEN website: www.apen.org.au. We hope that you sense the outcomes of our planning and that we all see a bright future for our organisation.