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Editorial

“Letters to the editor” from Branch members are always welcome and will be published in the following issue of the Branch Newsletter. Send your communiqués to dreuter@bigpond.com

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Divisional President’s Column

It is almost hard to believe that 2008 is almost over. As a division we have continued to work hard with the National office on the implementation of the recovery plan developed in June. Thank you to all the members who have responded & put their support behind the AIAST, either by contributing to the voluntary levy or to the many new members who have since joined (for more details see the National AIAST Report below).

The SA division is set to have a busy 2009 as we continue to look at the needs of our members through the Focus Groups, the planning of a carbon economy conference & the development of our discussions with the University on a mentoring event.

All of these things are covered in more detail later in the newsletter.

On the national front we have seen in past week the release of the Bradley review of Australian higher education (released 17 December) & the Government’s white paper on a Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (released 15 December). If you haven’t had an opportunity to look at either they can be sourced from:

Finally, on behalf of the SA Divisional committee I would like to wish all of our members & their families a very merry Christmas, & that 2009 will be a rewarding & enjoyable year, both personally & professionally.

I look forward to updating you in 2009 as we work together to advance the interests of our profession, & the agriculture industry in general.

Dr Ben Gursansky
President – AIAST SA Division

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**National AIAST Report**

This month, National President, Geoff Thomas reported to the SA Divisional Committee the following progress on re-invigorating AIAST:

- 162 new members had been recruited nationally to AIAST & that 40% of existing members had participated in the voluntary levy call. Thus, AIAST is now in a healthier financial position, but we need to develop strategies for retaining existing members & recruiting new members. Recently, 24 Landmark staff joined AIAST!
- A new CEO has been appointed – Diana Melham, who previously worked for the Australian Seeds Federation.
- The AIAST website is being re-organised.
- AIAST will proceed with Ag Credited – a modular training course that is provided through registered training organisations. Ag Credited is based on national industry standards aligned to the national Vocational Education and Training (VET) framework. Further details are available under the Professional Development link on www.aiast.com.au.
- The future of the AIAST Journal is under review. An Editorial Committee has been appointed, led by Peter Carberry & three Journal issues are planned for 2009. News from the Divisions will be part of each issue. Reviews & commentaries on topical issues will be sought & published.
- A Professional Indemnity Insurance scheme for consultants is being examined by the Board.
- AIAST Awards will be continued.
- The Council of Agricultural Deans are supportive of Student Mentoring initiatives & plan to hold a National conference on agricultural R&D next year.

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**What do AIAST Members in SA want?**

As part of the SA Divisional approach to retaining & recruiting new members to AIAST, the SA Division will early next year hold a series of ‘Focus Group’ meetings with existing members to explore the services & activities that most members find valuable.
This would then provide insights into how AIAST might recruit new members & provide improved services to existing members. We have established the following categories – Research professionals (Waite & Roseworthy); Consultants, advisors & agribusiness; & Policy professionals, including NRM.

Our aim is to hold the focus groups as a lunchtime function, with lunch provided by the Division, in February 2009.

Each group will comprise between 8-10 participants. Any interested members who wish to contribute please contact Ben Gursansky on 0410 653 255 or ben.gursansky@internode.on.net by 15 January 2009. Committee members will be contacting members to invite their participation regardless, so we thank you for your co-operation in advance.

AIAST SA Divisional submission – Directors of Waite & Roseworthy

In August 2008, the SA Division made a submission to the School of Agriculture’s review of the Director of Waite and Roseworthy campuses positions. The submission outlined the support for these roles as an important link to rural communities as well as driving collaboration and cooperation between the University & other campus institutions. Suggestions were also made as to how these roles could improve the exposure of the campuses to the general community & make a positive contribution to topical issues facing agriculture.

A copy of the submission is available under the SA divisional section of the AIAST website – www.aiaast.com.au (go to ‘About Us’, then select SA from the list of state committees).

Agriculture degree courses under review

The University of Adelaide’s School of Agriculture, Food and Wine is currently examining options for revamping the delivery of the Agriculture Science courses at Waite & Roseworthy. An aim of the changes is to improve the practical and professional skills of the students and one of the proposals is to develop a professional internship and mentoring program. The division intends to provide comments on the report when it is available. Watch this space!

Student Mentoring

The division met with Kelly Banwell from the University of Adelaide’s Alumni office in December to learn about the operations and benefits of the University’s student mentoring program. Each year, each Faculty is provided with funding to host a mentoring evening, bringing together students from certain disciplines and professionals working in that area. This has been a highly successful venture for all concerned. In 2008, the
Faculty of Sciences focussed on a wine industry event, and plans are underway in 2009 for a Chemistry event.

As previously reported the SA Division has been developing a student mentoring program and has identified some synergies with the University’s activities. We will be continuing our discussions with the University in 2009 to establish a partnership focussed on both agricultural and NRM students. The aim would be to organise something that brings these students into contact with members of the AIAST who are working in various sectors of the industry.

The Division is also considering other options for mentoring students, including:

- Work placement and internship for 2nd and 3rd year students to work with agribusiness and consulting firms (again synergies might exist with some of the changes to the Ag science courses at the University, as outlined above);
- Professional development workshops for final year students who are preparing to enter the workforce;
- Travel awards for Honours students to allow them to travel to a relevant conference within Australia.

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Carbon Emission Conference in SA

Carbon emission trading is a current hot topic in Australia. Whilst agriculture is not scheduled to be included in the scheme until 2015, it will be implicated through emissions generated in the production of farm chemicals and use of energy in farm production / food manufacturing.

Already AIAST has hosted carbon economy conference in Brisbane and Melbourne this year. Both events were very successful & well attended. The presentation documents from the Victorian conference held in November 2008 are free for members (contact Head office).

The SA Division of AIAST will host a similar event in 2009, focussing on farming systems relevant to South Australia. A sub-committee has been formed to develop a program & panel of speakers. At this stage we believe April would be the best month for this event.

Any members who know persons with expertise in carbon cycling within farming systems or the economics of carbon trading schemes or policy implications for agriculture should contact Ben Gursansky on 0410 653 255 or ben.gursansky@internode.on.net.

Further details will be available in the next Newsletter & on the AIAST website in the near future.

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Two News items from FASTS:

Science Education in Australia:
The Federation of Australian Scientific & Technological Societies (FASTS) in early November summarised an ACER report on “Participation in Science, Mathematics & Technology in Australia”. The Report was released by Minister Gillard. Main points include:

- There has been a decline in students studying science over the past 30 years;

<table>
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<th>1976</th>
<th>2007</th>
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<tr>
<td>55% of students studied Biology</td>
<td>25% of students studied Biology</td>
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<tr>
<td>29% of students studied Chemistry</td>
<td>18% of students studied Chemistry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28% of students studied Physics</td>
<td>15% of students studied Physics</td>
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- Although harder to track, % in students studying advanced Mathematics has also declined since the mid 1990’s;
- The uptake of science-related studies at Universities was stronger amongst those who specialised in science studies in their final school year;
- University enrolments in natural & physical sciences have remained steady since 2001, with an increase in health education & a decline in information technology.
- Generating higher levels of participation in science-related studies at University appeared to partly depend on strengthening science education in schools. This may in turn depend on deepening teacher expertise in science or in recruiting teachers with a background in science;
- The challenge is to recruit science graduates into teaching & into teacher training.

Australia’s Expenditure on R&D:
In October 2008, FASTS provided a summary on statistics complied by ABS:

- In 2006-07, Australia’s gross expenditure on R&D reached a record $21 Billion, which is 2.01% of GDP (the first time we have exceeded 2%). We are now in the top 10% of OEDC countries;
- The major impetus for this increase came from business sector investments (57.3% of national expenditure). Commonwealth & State levels of expenditure have fallen to 9%. Universities share has remained fairly constant at 26% of gross expenditure;
- Proportional expenditure on basic research declined from ~12% in 1992 to 8.4% in 2006/07;
- There has been a re-orientation towards health & medical research & towards environmental & social development.
GRDC Adviser Update Conference (February 18-19, 2009)

The 2009 GRDC Update Conference will be held in the Adelaide Convention Centre on February 18 to 19th. Emphasis will be directed to:

‘Changing directions – strategies for more cost-effective cropping’

- Dealing with rising costs; and
- Adapting to change.

Registrations close on January 30th, 2009. Contact Jon Lamb 08 8362 5417 or email jlcom@chariot.net.au

An Aussie Poem (for Xmas):

The sun was hot already - it was only 8 o'clock  
The cocky took off in his Ute, to go and check his stock.  
He drove around the paddocks checking wethers, ewes and lambs,  
The float valves in the water troughs, the windmills on the dams.

He stopped and turned a windmill on to fill a water tank  
And saw a ewe down in the dam, a few yards from the bank.  
"Typical bloody sheep," he thought, "they've got no common sense,  
"They won't go through a gateway but they'll jump a bloody fence."

The ewe was stuck down in the mud, he knew without a doubt  
She'd stay there 'til she carked it if he didn't get her out.  
But when he reached the water's edge, the startled ewe broke free  
And in her haste to get away, began a swimming spree.

He reckoned once her fleece was wet, the weight would drag her down  
If he didn't rescue her, the stupid sod would drown.  
Her style was unimpressive, her survival chances slim  
He saw no other option, he would have to take a swim.

He peeled his shirt and singlet off, his trousers, boots and socks  
And as he couldn't stand wet clothes, he also shed his jocks.  
He jumped into the water and away that cocky swam  
He caught up with her, somewhere near the middle of the dam

The ewe was quite evasive, she kept giving him the slip  
He tried to grab her sodden fleece but couldn't get a grip.  
At last he got her to the bank and stopped to catch his breath  
She showed him little gratitude for saving her from death.

She took off like a Bondi tram around the other side  
He swore next time he caught that ewe he'd hang her bloody hide.
Then round and round the dam they ran, although he felt quite puffed 
He still thought he could run her down, she must be nearly stuffed.

The local stock rep came along, to pay a call that day. 
He knew this bloke was on his own, his wife had gone away 
He didn't really think he'd get fresh scones for morning tea 
But nor was he prepared for what he was about to see.

He rubbed his eyes in disbelief at what came into view 
For running down the catchment came this frantic-looking ewe. 
And on her heels in hot pursuit and wearing not a stitch 
The farmer yelling wildly "Come back here, you lousy bitch!"

The stock rep didn't hang around, he took off in his car 
The cocky's reputation has been damaged near and far 
So bear in mind the Work Safe rule when next you check your flocks 
Spot the hazard, assess the risk, and always wear your jocks!