Welcome to the Winter 2009 AIAST Tasmanian Division Newsletter.

Recently while tidying my office, sadly an infrequent event, I came across an old copy of the Tasmanian Journal of Agriculture, in fact it was the 50th anniversary edition produced in November 1979. It was interesting to read the article explaining the history of the Journal and the significance of its jubilee. The journal came into being in the 1920’s at a time when the Department of Agriculture was reorganising and expanding. Tasmania had been facing economic difficulties (the more things change the more things stay the same) and improving the efficiency of agriculture was seen as an important way of improving the situation. The approach taken was producer education and to do this the Department of Agriculture created an extension service, of which the journal was a part.

Not many days latter I found out that the Department of Agriculture is disbanding the Extensive Agriculture Branch, and in effect finally shutting down its last extension service. A history of service to Tasmania of some 75 years had finally ended. Recent criticism of changes in the Department of Agriculture has focused on the loss of research, however I personally don’t think that this is an important issue. Tasmania now has the Agricultural Science Department at the University and the Tasmanian Institute of Agricultural Research, both of which did not exist in the 1920’s, and I believe agricultural research is in good hands. What concerns me is the loss of extension, which is in effect the way of communicating the results of research to agricultural producers. My questions are, who will take up this role?, and can the Institute help with this? Ultimately if the results of research are not being communicated to those who need it then the time money and resources invested in research will be wasted.

This newsletter contains information about the Tasmanian Division’s recent Annual meeting, the upcoming symposium in September and some interesting contributed articles. If you as members have anything to contribute on Agricultural science issues I invite you to write an article for the spring newsletter.

**Newsletter Editor**

The Tasmanian Division of AIAST needs an interested member to take on the role of newsletter editor.

The newsletter is an important communication tool for the Tasmanian division. The newsletter contains information about upcoming events and can be a forum for sharing your thoughts on issues of important or the results of your research. The newsletter editor is also sometimes called upon to make a small editorial contribution to the Journal.

The newsletter is distributed quarterly to the Tasmanian members mostly via e-mail as nearly all members are now connected to the net. However where members still receive the newsletter via mail the cost associated with the production and postage will be reimbursed to the editor.

If you take on the role of editor you would be making a useful contribution to the Tasmanian Division of AIAST. If you are interested or would just like to discuss the possibility of helping with the production of the newsletter, please contact me (Brian Stewart) via e-mail bstewart1@iinet.net.au
Or post C/- 87 Alexander Street, Shearwater, Tasmania 7307
**Tasmanian Annual Meeting**

The annual meeting of the Tasmanian division was held at the Man O’Ross Hotel at Ross on Saturday 23 May. The business included the presidents report, treasurers report and the election of the new divisional committee. The new CEO of AIAST Dina Melham also gave a report.

**Election of committee**

The Committee for 2009/2010 is:

- **President:** Brian Stewart
- **Vice President:** Andrew Bishop
- **Secretary/Treasurer:** Neville Mendham
- **Committee:** Frank Walker, Oliver Ward, Colin Birch, David McNeill
- **Student representative:** Meisha Holloway Philips (UTAS Burnie)

The committee meets regularly by phone hookup and if any member has an issue that they would like discussed please feel free to let us know. The contact details are as for Brian Stewart above or Neville Mendham PO Box 22 Richmond, Tasmania 7025

**AIAST CEO**

At the annual meeting of the Tasmanian Division Diana Melham was welcomed as the new National CEO. She was previously with the Australian Seed Federation, another not-for-profit organization mainly run by volunteers, so she was familiar with the needs of a body such as AIAST. Diana told the meeting that the AGM was to be in Adelaide next week, and will circulate each year around the Divisions. The new Board has been appointed. A review of accounting and audit procedures was being carried out, with the aim of improving record keeping and accountability. It is recommended that all Divisional accounts will be brought under National Office management, but that each division’s funds and transactions will be clearly differentiated. Reports will be sent out on a monthly basis. National Office is happy to help with whatever Divisions need, eg in organizing events, on the basis that time spent will be charged to the appropriate event.

There will be a two-day workshop in Canberra in September on R and D. The Journal has been re-instated, with three issues per year proposed. CPAg will continue, at least until 2010. There were three people working in National Office now, with Diana full-time, and Claire and Brooke part-time. Casuals are brought in as required.

Diana noted that 450 members had responded last year to the call for a voluntary levy, indicating strong support from a large proportion of members for the Rescue Plan.
Farm Visit “Glen Esk” at Conara

At the conclusion of the annual meeting and lunch at the Man’o’Ross Hotel the members of the Tasmanian division traveled to “Glen Esk” at Conara, and were given a tour by Keith Pengilley and Ian MacKinnon. Major irrigation developments are transforming this property, and are also about to be embarked upon on the recently-purchased Brambletye property just over the South Esk River. Ian is confident that agriculture has a bright future. He sees the key drivers for success at Glen Esk and its associated properties as access to reliable water, irrigation infrastructure development, flexibility of enterprises and a move away from bulk commodities towards commodities/areas where we dictate the price, economy of scale, sourcing external expertise and a willingness to take risks.

Frank Walker, David McNeill and Neville Mendham listen to Ian McKinnon explaining some of the operations at Glen Esk

Membership

It is pleasing that most of the Tasmanian Division members have renewed this year, and we have picked up 3 new members. However there are currently 5 members who haven’t renewed. If you are in this group and would still like to retain membership can you renew it by July 10 please as after this date, all unfinancial members will be terminated and be forwarded a letter advising this from the national office.
**AIAST National Meetings**

The AIAST National Annual General Meeting and a meeting of AIAST Divisions were held in Adelaide on May 27. Tasmania was represented at both meetings by committee member Frank Walker.

Frank has submitted the following notes about the divisional meeting. It can be seen that there are to be changes in the way divisions, such as the Tasmanian Division, operate. As an example, under the Corporations act, it is no longer legal for us to operate our own bank account and cheque book. These will have to be administered by national office. Also in future we will be required to hold our annual Divisional Meeting (no longer called AGM, only the national meeting is legally such) before the end of March.

**Briefing Note**

National Office will send summary notes and minutes relating to the Divisional Meeting and AGM held in Adelaide on 27th May 2009. There has been a delay in the preparation of the data due to National Office having to direct inputs to quickly locating new premises and moving to same.

This briefing note summarizes key matters reviewed at the Divisional Meeting as follows:

*Engaging Divisions*
National President Geoff Thomas is determined to engage Divisions with the Board and National Office.

*Increasing membership*
This is vital to the operation of the Institute. South Australia is currently using focus groups to obtain an insight into potential and present member’s attitudes towards the Institute, and the need for services by type, networking etc. Information will be shared with other Divisions. This will lead to better formatting of operations to improve value provided to members.

It is imperative that more effort be applied to converting student membership to full membership. The Board is to review the option of a special scale of fees for young members.

*Development of a Voice*
Procedures are to be developed to facilitate nominated members to comment on issues. This will need to be in front of Government and industry. Nominated persons will build relations with the media.

*Demonstrate Success*
The Agric. Education paper and conference successfully highlighted the inputs needed. In future processes will provide for better demonstrating success.

*Strategic Plan*
To be reviewed by the Board and circulated for comment. A major document that was in part worked over at the meeting.

*Pricing for Profit*
There is a need to price events to at the very least cover all costs and preferably return a profit. Most events if worth running will draw attendees and show a profit.
Divisional cheque books
The Board has been advised that it is not operating legally with Divisions managing funds and writing cheques. More information will be forthcoming. In future it will be necessary for Divisions to spend then be reimbursed.

Annual Divisional Meeting
Needs to be held before the end of March.

Greater involvement of Agribusiness
Divisions need to review local level opportunities and input accordingly.

CPAg
Information on present and new scheme to be finalised by Board.

Frank Walker, June 2009

Upcoming Events

The Student Forum:
The Student Forum will once again be held in collaboration with SAS (School of Agricultural Science). Date and further details will be advised in the Spring Newsletter.

Fellows Dinner:
The date for this has tentatively been set for Tuesday 8 September, Minister Llewellyn has been invited. Further notice will be given closer to the date of the event.

Grasslands Society Conference:
The Tasmanian Branch of the Grasslands Society always kindly passes on information about AIAST events to its members. Therefore it is only fair that the Tasmanian division of AIAST can reciprocate. The Tasmanian Branch of the Grasslands Society Annual conference will be on July 10th at the Tram Shed in Launceston. The title of this year’s event is “Greener grass, the new approach”.
For more information contact either;
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AIAST Tasmanian Division Mini-Symposium/Dinner “The Genetic Future-More than just GMO’s”
30 September 2009, Hotel Grand Chancellor, 29 Cameron Street, Launceston.
A fascinating meeting has now been organised with speakers Dr Tony Fist (Tasmanian Alkaloids), Dr Aduli Malau (Universiroy of Tasmania), Dr Meixue Zhou (Tasmanian Institute of Agricultural Science and Technology), and Mr Steve Martin (The Lost Seed) talking about the importance of genetic material in the plant and animal industries and the future of agriculture.

Cost will be $25 head plus dinner.

The symposium will run from 4:30pm to 6:30 pm including a panel discussion and will be followed by Dinner. More details to follow shortly via flyer but mark this date in your diary now.
Climate Change Forum

Recently the University of Tasmania ran a forum on climate change and how agriculture can respond to it. I regret that I was unable to attend and also I am disappointed that so far there has not been any publication of the results of the forum, although I expect that one will be available at some stage. In the interim I can recommend the ABC rural radio web-site where several stories on the forum appear. Professor Tony Norton, one of the presenters, kindly sent me his PowerPoint presentation. It contained a number of graphics that are difficult to present in this newsletter. However, here is a summary of the presentation and I would be happy to forward a copy of the presentation with all the graphs and figures via email to any member who would like to see it.

Tasmanian Land and Agriculture
By Professors Tony Norton & Jann Williams, TIAR

Professor Norton spoke about climate change and risk management, and the challenges and opportunities presented by climate change. Tasmania benefits from a global effort in climate change science. The climate of Tasmania has become warmer and drier over the past several decades. Climate change in Tasmania is also accelerating: for instance comparing mean annual temperature increase (°C) over 3 different time periods - for 1910-2007 it was +0.08°C/decade, for 1950-2007 +0.11°C/decade, and for 1990-2007 it was +0.31°C/decade.

Professor Norton argued that credible mitigation, adaptation and risk management strategies need to be adopted urgently. He said that Tasmania is fortunate to have much local expertise to help respond to climate change. For example, significant expertise on climate change is held by professional staff based at the University of Tasmania, CSIRO and Bureau of Meteorology in Hobart. A new research consortium called Climate Futures Tasmania has been created to help improve climate forecasting and to support the development of climate change scenarios in Tasmania. These scenarios can be used to improve mitigation by reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and to develop more realistic strategies for adaptation to climate change in different sectors of the economy.

Drivers of Land Use Change
Responding suitably to climate change will be challenging and requires a long term, integrated approach within agriculture and the broader economy at both a national and international level. Contemporary land management and agriculture is complex. The drivers of land use change are complex and intertwined. These drivers include:
‘Globalisation’ (which leads to increased competition, changing international trade arrangements, and changing commercial returns from commodities and products); ‘Profitability’ (this is market-driven and leads to increased intensity of resource use, innovation, vertical co-ordination; and the need for value chain efficiency, traceability and Quality Assurance); and ‘Sustainability and Food Safety’ (community values and consumer expectations about resource management and food quality are changing and require new regulations and guidelines of best management practice).

A notable feature of globalization and increased competition in agriculture is the intensification of land use and the natural resource base over time. Some examples of changes in land use in Australia since 1980 include: clearing native vegetation for agricultural use; converting naturalised pasture to sown pasture; diversifying the range of crops grown; changing from grazing to viticulture; substituting beef production for wool production; substituting irrigation for dry-land agriculture; converting cleared land to plantation forestry; and rezoning of land for hobby farm development.
Challenges for Tasmanian Agribusiness
The challenges for Tasmanian agribusiness are well known and could be summarised as ‘Growth’, ‘Innovation’, and ‘Sustainability’. The agricultural sector in Tasmania has a general focus on growth and productivity. Economies of scale through land consolidation and industry restructure/adaptation are sought across many industries. Innovation using a ‘whole-of-chain’ approaches, branding and access to new technologies is considered important. Farm sustainability through use of new technologies, enhanced environmental stewardship and smarter use of key land and human resources is increasingly recognized and promoted.

Major challenges for environmental sustainability
The Priorities for Tasmania’s Landscapes and Communities include sustaining land and water resources; conserving biodiversity; responding to climate change and variability; mitigating threatening processes; protecting threatened species and communities; managing and restoring remnant vegetation; controlling and eradicating weeds & pests; managing salinity; building community capacity; and protecting cultural heritage.

However, responding to the challenges outlined above for agribusiness and the environment in Tasmania is problematic. For example, capacity building in the agricultural sector and rural community is complicated by demographic change and ageing. On average, the farming community is less well educated and on lower incomes compared to other sectors. The average age of farmers in Tasmania is also increasing since relatively few younger farmers are entering the sector over time. All of these factors may have a bearing on the ability of the sector to be able to respond suitably to the new needs of climate change.

Age structure of farmers, Tasmania 1996 - 2006
Conclusions
Tasmanian agriculture now operates within a complex international context where drivers of change can occur as a result of international, national and regional factors. Increasing complexity within agriculture demands greater strategic planning, greater business acumen and prudent risk management. There has been a move to increasingly complex land use management and food production systems. This brings increasingly complex resource access and management issues, and greater risks. To meet these challenges and address climate change, there needs to be a greater focus on innovation in farm enterprises, the smarter use of key land resources, smarter deployment of human resources, and enhanced strategic planning at a regional level. Despite the magnitude of these challenges, the opportunities are significant. For example, a major opportunity exists to integrate land, natural resources use and human/social capital across Tasmania’s landscapes, industries and sectors. This integration could take into account carbon sequestration, biodiversity conservation and environmental stewardship, agricultural production and sustainable water use. By tackling these issues in a more sophisticated and integrated manner, it will be possible to more effectively secure the future of Tasmanian agriculture and the agricultural landscapes and natural resource base that underpins the sector.
**Interesting Websites**

As a follow up to his article, which appeared in the Autumn Newsletter, I received this e-mail from Julian Cribb.

**Global Food Crisis - new site**

Dear colleague -

I am please to announce that ScienceAlert has just launched a special website covering the global food crisis.

Our aim is to foster a worldwide discourse on what humanity should do about the food situation, now and in the decades ahead, and about the science and technology needed to address it.


This site is brand new, and we have just started our search for suitable material.

With that in mind, I wish to invite you to contribute - in the form of news items about S&T, opinion articles on aspects of food and its sustainability, and feature articles dealing with the major issues of feeding humanity in the coming half century, and by commenting knowledgably on anything which appears on it. We welcome all these whether from reputable individuals or institutions.

I also wish to invite your institutions to support the site by logging forthcoming conferences and important events on our events calendar for free - and likewise any professional scientific jobs or scholarships in its jobs section. Should you wish to highlight your events or positions vacant, you can also pay a very modest amount to advertise them, which will help us keep the site running.

Any written contributions can be made to editor@sciencealert.com.au
Comments can be added at the end of published articles and opinion pieces.
Advertising can be booked at adsales@sciencealert.com.au

with best wishes

Julian

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