



## **Extending extension: beyond traditional boundaries, methods and ways of thinking**

**APEN National Forum 2003  
26 to 28 November 2003  
Hobart, Tasmania**

# **Forum Evaluation Report**

*This short report presents the results of the formal evaluation of the Forum. It is in addition to a much larger Forum Report that details the outcomes of the Forum.*

## **Executive Summary**

The 2003 National Forum of the Australasia Pacific Extension Network (APEN), which was held in Hobart 26-28 November 2003, was a great success. Some 28 percent of participants indicated that the Forum was 'Excellent', and a further 58 percent indicated that it was 'Good'. With a theme of "*Extending extension: beyond traditional boundaries, methods and ways of thinking*", the purpose of the APEN National Forum was to: (1) provide a venue for networking, (2) a taste and feel of Tasmania, and (3) most importantly, to provide a range of interesting and challenging speakers and activities which would push participants in terms of their boundaries, methods, and ways of thinking about what extension is, and what extension could be. The Forum certainly achieved its goal of providing an environment for networking with 50 percent of respondents giving an excellent rating for this item. With a reception at Government House, a dinner at Meadowbank, and a dinner cruise aboard the historic MV Cartela, participants experienced the taste and feel of Tasmania. Our invited speakers provided a range of views that received a mixed reaction from participants. Some preferred the more practical contributions of the Best Practice presenters or the APEN Award winners, while others preferred the bigger picture presentation of the keynote speaker, David Morris. While the conference overall was successful, participants would have preferred more time for questions, better lighting and sound quality in the big room, and better projection of presentations. Having two simultaneous presentations in the one room made it difficult to hear. The conference organisers learned a great deal from the organising experience, the participants and the speakers, particularly the benefits of responding to delegate needs and of clearly articulating the design rationale for the Forum. Extension was reinvigorated as a discipline and profession, and was shown to have a critical role to play in Australia's future.

The 2003 APEN National Forum was sponsored by the Grains Research & Development Corporation, Land & Water Australia, Meat & Livestock Australia, Dairy Australia, the Tasmanian Department of Primary Industries, Water & Environment, and the Tasmanian Institute of Agricultural Research at the University of Tasmania.

This Report was prepared by Frank Vanclay and Amabel Fulton together with input from the staff of Rural Development Services, notably Tim Tabart.

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## Introduction

The 2003 National Forum of the Australasia Pacific Extension Network (APEN) was held at the Hobart Function and Convention Centre on Elizabeth Street Pier in the middle of Sullivan's Cove near the downtown area of Hobart. The Forum Convenor was Prof Frank Vanclay, with conference management being provided by Rural Development Services under the leadership of Forum Coordinator, Amabel Fulton.

With a theme of "Extending extension: beyond traditional boundaries, methods and ways of thinking", the purpose of the APEN National Forum was to: (1) provide a venue for networking, (2) a taste and feel of Tasmania, and (3) most importantly, to provide a range of interesting and challenging speakers and activities which would push participants in terms of their boundaries, methods, and ways of thinking about what extension is, and what extension could be.

Specifically, the Forum sought to:

- reclaim the word 'extension' and to acknowledge the existence of a discipline (a field of learning and practice) called extension
- bring people who may not connect with this discipline into the field
- push the boundaries of the field of extension
- promote a new understanding of extension that emphasises the social nature of extension
- realise that extension shares concepts and methods with a range of other disciplines and that there can be shared learning to be gained by making these connections
- acknowledge a range of tensions that exist in the field of extension and develop some understanding of those tensions.

Evaluation is an essential part of any activity to inform future practice. Evaluation also provides an opportunity to allow participants to know that their views have been heard. The evaluation of the 2003 APEN National Forum was designed to assist participants in reflecting about the Forum, and to provide feedback to the Forum organisers and APEN about what people thought of the conference. This report was written as a summary of responses of the evaluation and is intended to be disseminated to participants, organisers, sponsors, and the APEN National Executive.

Perhaps it should be appreciated that there were some constraints on the Forum organisers. Firstly, Tasmania was not the original planned location for the 2003 Forum, and with the earlier preferred site falling through, the team from Tasmania assembled a hasty bid in response to a request from the National Executive in March 2003, giving them less than eight months to plan the Forum. With Tasmania being a small state, there was not a large pool of potential volunteers, and there was not time to recruit them. A strategic decision was therefore made to run the Forum executively. A further concern for the conference organisers was the need to return a profit to APEN, with no start-up funding, and with uncertainty as to the level of sponsorship or the likely number of participants. The Forum was therefore managed in such a way as to maximise flexibility. Soon after being endorsed by the National Executive, the Forum organisers held a thinktank session to consider how to plan the Forum. The views of these ten or so people were vital to setting the theme, and deciding on key factors such as the venue, format and range of activities.

Ultimately, the Forum attracted a total of 152 paying delegates, and together with conference organising staff, invited speakers and others, led to a total participation of over 180 people. They were from all states of Australia with some 10 delegates from New Zealand. The Forum operated on budget with a modest profit as was required by the APEN National Executive.

## Methodology

An evaluation survey was included in the conference satchel. Forum delegates were frequently referred to the evaluation at various times throughout the conference, and were asked to complete it during the course of the Forum. Delegates were asked to deposit the evaluation in the box provided as they left the venue.

Some 97 usable evaluation forms were deposited in the box, with a further two evaluation forms being mailed to the organisers. Data on the forms were entered into an Excel spreadsheet, before being transferred to SPSS for statistical analysis.

The form contained a mixture of open and closed questions relating to different aspects of the Forum, as well as some basic demographic data. Apart from some reflection questions, the open questions were along the lines of what could we have done to improve the Forum, and whether there was anything that participants were dissatisfied with. The answers to these questions are used to interpret the quantitative scores.

## Conference Overall

The overall assessment of the Forum was high – 28 percent of participants indicated that the Forum was ‘Excellent’, and a further 58 percent indicated that it was ‘Good’ (see Table 1). Only one person thought that it was ‘Bad’. This person thought that there needed to be more real case studies. We tried to cater for a diversity of interests by including a range of big picture and practical issues. Getting this balance right is difficult and we need to accept that we can never satisfy everyone’s particular interests in all parts of the Forum.

Table 1: Rating of the Forum as a whole

	Excellent	Good	OK	Bad	Valid n
The Forum overall	28	58	13	1	95 (4 missing)

There was no difference between males and females in terms of overall rating. Age was not statistically significant, although there was a tendency for older participants to give a more favourable rating – this may be related to the fact that they were more likely to have friends at the Forum. While occupational setting was also not significant, there was a tendency for those not in government extension (NGO staff, consultants, University and other) to give a more favourable rating than those in government. There was no statistical difference by location, i.e. Tasmanians as a whole did not have more favourable, or less favourable, ratings than people from elsewhere. APEN members did not have statistically different ratings to non members.

Table 2 reveals that the Forum provided an excellent environment for networking, with many people also indicating this in their response to the open-ended question about what was the best thing about the Forum. The Forum was less successful in challenging the perspective of participants or in inspiring their personal development, but maybe these are hard things to do, and having 23 and 26 percent respectively say that this was excellent is still a high score.

Table 2: Rating of various outcomes

	Excellent	Good	OK	Bad	Valid n
Environment for networking	50	42	8	0	95 (4 missing)
Sharing of ideas	27	62	8	2	95 (4 missing)
Challenging your perspective	23	44	31	2	95 (4 missing)
Inspiration for your personal development	26	44	25	4	95 (4 missing)

## Assessment of different Forum components

Different components of the Forum had different ratings (see Table 3). Some people liked the more practical sessions such as the Best Practice Speakers, or the Award Winners, while other people liked the Keynote Speaker David Morris talking about the context that led to the development of the Tasmania Together process, or the three invited speakers from other disciplines. Of these, Associate Professor Ian Blue, discussing health promotion, was frequently singled out as having made a big impact. An area of particular concern, however, was the Poster session (see fuller discussion below).

Table 3: Rating of various activities

	Excellent	Good	OK	Bad	Valid n
The overall theme	9	71	19	1	91 (8 missing)
Posters and poster session	1	31	57	10	70 (29 missing)
Minister Bryan Green	2	20	72	6	92 (7 missing)
Keynote Speaker, David Morris	14	77	6	3	96 (3 missing)
The 3 invited speakers sharing perspectives from other disciplines (Ruth Lane, Ian Blue and Sue Kilpatrick)	7	62	30	1	94 (5 missing)
The 2 APEN award winners, Jess Jennings and Fiona Johnson	19	66	13	2	86 (13 missing)
The 3 Best Practice Speakers, Mark Paine, Jeff Coutts and Bob Macadam	13	65	14	8	86 (13 missing)
The contributed papers	5	80	15	0	93 (6 missing)
The report back and wrap-up session	6	41	45	8	63 (36 missing)
Group discussions	12	49	31	8	77 (22 missing)
Training workshop	25	36	32	7	75 (24 missing)

## Detailed comments about selected components

### (1) Field trips

Two field trips were held in conjunction with the Forum. The first one on Wednesday, before the Forum, visited various activities in the Derwent Valley. The second field trip extended across the weekend after the Forum and looked at a range of farming and other activities in Tasmania's South East. The field trips were separately evaluated. The field trips were independent activities provided on a commercial basis by Rural Development Services Pty Ltd, the company contracted to provide conference management. The evaluations of these field trips, as well as comments about them in the Forum evaluation indicate widespread satisfaction, however there was some concern that there were over-priced. While we acknowledge that this may be the perception, we need to emphasise that the need to recover full costs for these activities did mean that a commercial rate needed to be charged.

Some people commented that there were no farmers at the Forum. Strictly speaking this is not true, however, it is true that we did not specifically draw attention to farmers. However, we also were of the view that it was an extension forum to share between extension professionals. While we could have encouraged more farmers, it is not entirely clear to us what the direct benefit to farmers themselves would have been. Perhaps we could have had an invited speaker who was a farmer. Nevertheless, we provided ample exposure to farmers on both field trips.

### (2) Rural Servicing in Transition workshop

The Rural Servicing in Transition workshop was a special activity held under the auspices of the APEN Tasmania chapter for public and private extension professionals in Tasmania. It was sponsored by the Department of Primary Industries, Water and Environment (DPIWE) and APEN Tasmania, and was endorsed by the Tasmanian Agricultural Productivity Group, the Tasmanian Farmer and Graziers Association, and Greening Australia (Tasmania). It was attended by over 70 people from a wide range of backgrounds. The workshop was a great success in terms of:

- confirming that extension was a vital activity for public, semi-public (NGO) and private sector organisations alike
- enthusing everybody that extension is a viable concept that can adapt to new circumstances
- revealing that the future of extension is likely to be about public-private partnerships
- validating that APEN has a crucial role to play, especially at the state level
- identifying projects and actions for enhancing the effectiveness of extension in Tasmania
- identifying a small group of participants to take leadership
- securing on-going support for APEN from the Tasmanian DPIWE.

### (3) Induction Day

As a special initiative to ease the introduction of new people to the Forum, an Induction Day was held. 'New' in this context was intended as a broad concept, implying new to extension, new to APEN, or new to conferences. The half day workshop primarily intended to facilitate interaction amongst a group of people, and to introduce them to APEN, to the jargon of extension, and to the art of getting the most out of conferences. Attended by about 15 people, the activity was superbly facilitated by Laurie Bonney with assistance from Luciano Mesiti. The Day was sponsored by the School of Agricultural Sciences at the University of Tasmania. The participants in this special activity formed a tight bond with each other and this increased their enjoyment of the Forum as a whole. The concept is highly recommended for future conferences.

#### (4) Poster Session

We intended to prioritise the poster session. Because squeezing many paper presentations into a conference program always creates time and timetabling problems, we wanted to encourage posters. We also believe that posters are an under-utilised tool in extension. Because of our commitment to posters, we wanted to have a real poster session with dedicated space and time, and we sought to encourage the use of posters by offering a prize for the best poster.

Unfortunately, our good intentions were thwarted in several ways. First, and most seriously, the timing of the Government House reception was brought forward outside of our control and at short notice thus eating into the time we had allocated to the Wednesday evening activities, including the poster session. Secondly, the room we wanted to use for the Posters was not available, so we had to use a smaller room which limited the space that was available. Finally, although we tried hard, no sponsor wanted to donate a substantial prize specifically for the best poster, and thus we were not able to make this a major feature. We do feel therefore that the Poster session was sub-optimal, and we accept the criticisms made by several people, including several poster presenters, who were disappointed by the reaction they got to their posters. We fully sympathise with their concerns and beg their understanding.

For future conferences, we strongly urge conference organisers to devote proper time and dedicated space to the Poster Session, perhaps allowing poster presenters two minutes to speak to the whole audience about their poster. We strongly advocate the prioritisation of posters that we intended, and we encourage the use of inducements (such as a prize) to create incentive to take the poster session seriously. Finally, we hope that sponsors will see the value of Poster Sessions, and that they will assist organisers in making poster sessions work by sponsorships directed to poster sessions.

#### (5) Group Discussions

Given our intention to have keynote and invited speakers who would challenge and expand the boundaries, methods and ways of thinking of extension as a discipline, and of individual participants, we felt it necessary to provide a process to help participants reflect on and make a practical connection with the new ideas/methods being presented. We decided that one way to facilitate greater engagement with the bigger picture presented was to have small group discussions based around what people learned from the speakers, and how they might use that learning in their daily practice.

To make the group discussions work effectively, and also to create an opportunity for new people to make contacts, we decided that we would use the self-selected training workshop groups as the basis for forming the discussion groups. We also decided that we would encourage these groups to sit together at the dinner on the first evening (at Meadowbank) so that the introductions could be done then, thus creating some familiarity when the groups met. We also used names of common Tasmanian animals to create something of a Tasmanian experience. Soft toys were used as mascots in an attempt to create some team spirit.

While our concept worked to some extent, we are aware that there was a logistical problem in our registration process such that there were some mix-ups. And, while 12 percent thought that the group discussions were excellent, and 49 percent thought they were good, a small number of participants did think that they were a waste of time. Others commented that some facilitators could have done a better job of facilitating and time-keeping, especially in the rounds of one group where not all members got to have a say. There was no significant difference between groups in the score on satisfaction with the discussion group.

We have reflected on the group discussions, and recognised that they were a challenge to facilitate. The rounds did mean that everyone got to have a say, including the more quiet or reserved people who might not otherwise have a chance to say anything. However, the rounds

did have the effect of stifling debate. Perhaps the facilitators needed to be more flexible in their approach. One person suggested that they should have used the ORID technique. (ORID is a focussed conversation method, and is described in full in the book, *The Art of Focused Conversation*, by Brian Stanfield, co-published by New Society Publishers and the Canadian Institute of Cultural Affairs, 1999). We concluded that maybe the discussion groups should have been 90 minutes each, rather than the 60 minutes they were allocated.

There was some debate about whether the reporting back from the groups was desirable. Views about this were mixed, but it is possible that the value of the groups was in the discussion itself, rather than in the outcome.

Some commentators thought that the discussions were better on the second day, while others thought that they were a bit flat then. With the amount of alcohol consumed by some participants the night before, either on the Cartela or at the pub afterwards, perhaps it is not surprising that some people were a bit exhausted!

## (6) Training Workshops

As part of our commitment to having a range of formats, and in ensuring the Forum provided practical take-home skills as well as ideas, we decided to include a range of training workshops in the program. We originally conceived of a wide range of topics, but with limited sponsorship money, we were unable to pay workshop facilitators, and were therefore limited in what we could provide.

Nevertheless, overall, the training workshops were well received, with 25 percent indicating they were excellent. One person commented that they wanted to be able to do a second workshop! Some participants, however, felt that the workshops were a waste of time. Some participants also felt that the workshop they did was not participatory enough. In one case, it was thought that the presenter would have made an excellent keynote speaker, but they needed a more participatory style in a workshop setting.

There was no statistically significant difference in the degree of satisfaction between workshops, although the small sample size for some workshops makes this a complex issue. The workshop with the lowest mean score was the workshop on evaluation. In that case, there appeared to be a bimodal distribution with some people liking it very much, while others who already had some evaluation experience felt that that the workshop needed to be more advanced. While the description of the workshop clearly indicated its introductory nature, we now realise the demand for an advanced evaluation course. In fact, the most common request for future workshops was for courses in advanced evaluation. Other suggestions for future workshops included the following:

- Forms of engagement
- Extension tools
- Evaluating the use of websites
- Negotiation workshops
- Case studies of experience
- Models of integrating research and extension
- Writing conference papers
- A workshop on philosophical approaches
- Extension theories and core concepts in extension
- Innovative ways to run field days
- Marketing and sales training
- Working with small farms
- International policy in agricultural trade and related issues
- Social science methodology and extension
- Wide models and extension frameworks
- Defining the necessary competencies of extension professionals
- Information management
- Adult learning principles

## (7) Invited Speakers

In our Forum concept, we wanted to ask two groups of invited speakers. One group would represent a range of disciplines outside of extension, but which were in some ways similar to extension. The intention here was to see what extension could learn from outside the field of extension. Some effort was put into researching appropriate speakers and in negotiating with them over the content of their talks to ensure that they would hit the mark. We also selected a group of speakers to represent best practice in extension, or the state of the art in extension. We also decided to feature the two GRDC/APEN award winners, Jess Jennings and Fiona Johnson.

Overall, there was approval for the invited speakers. Ian Blue, Jess Jennings, Fiona Johnson, Mark Paine, Jeff Coutts as well as the conference keynote speaker, David Morris, were all specifically mentioned individually by name as having been a source of inspiration. There was a view that it was wonderful that there were public outputs from the Joint Venture Capacity Building project. While these speakers did receive strong support, there were some participants who found it difficult to relate to everything being presented.

There were several concerns with the speakers in the main conference room, the Sovereign Room. Firstly, most speakers spoke over time, thus limiting the available question time. While the Conference Convenor, Prof Vanclay, attempted to control this, he decided not to truncate the speakers. While this allowed the speakers to make their points, it did mean that a vibrant question and answer session did not occur.

Perhaps the biggest and most difficult criticism made of the Forum was with the venue itself. The venue's location, space and light were among the reasons why we selected it, and while many people loved the venue, it is clear that it is not particularly suited to PowerPoint type presentations in large group gatherings. The low ceiling and the lack of adequate projection space, as well as pillars in the room, meant that many people in the audience could not adequately see. Some other technical difficulties meant that lighting on the speakers was inadequate, and the sound system on the first day was poor. We attempted to remedy the problems as we became aware of them, and to the extent that it was possible to do anything about them. Some of the problems however relate to the design of the venue itself, and that in selecting this venue, we had to accept both its good and bad points.

To some extent, we anticipated these problems but selected the venue on the basis of its positive characteristics. Our one regret is that we did not articulate the reasons for selecting the venue, nor acknowledge its limitations, to the participants. In hindsight, we feel that we perhaps should have used a commercial contractor to provide AV services for the conference although we recognise that this would have been a considerable cost and would have affected the profitability of the conference. Ideally, we should have used a double projector, so that there was more than one projection screen. We will discuss the concerns that have been raised with the venue management.

## (8) Contributed Paper Presentations

There is a fundamental problem inherent in conference organisation. People need to give papers in order to get permission and funds to come to conferences. Paper presenters want a sufficiently large audience for their papers, and sufficient time to present their papers. Nobody wants to stay at a conference for too long (either each day or in terms of the number of days). And conference organisers need to curtail costs by limiting the number of breakout rooms. Some venues are limited in the number of breakout rooms that are available. All of this adds up to an impossible combination.

Our approach to managing this complexity was to take the view that this was a Forum rather than a conference. As a Forum, we included a range of presentation types. This meant that the available time for contributed paper presentations was limited. We therefore took the line that

the presentations were flag-waving exercises. The intention was not for presenters to make a thorough case, but rather that they should present the gist of their argument as an invitation to people to connect with them in one of the breaks. By the same rationale, we banned questions and instructed the session chairs to rigidly enforce the timing of speakers. To support our position, we made a special effort to have refereed papers which were intended to be available on a public website ([www.regional.org.au/au/apen/2003/](http://www.regional.org.au/au/apen/2003/)) well in advance of the Forum. Unfortunately, technical issues which were the responsibility of the website sub-contractor (The Regional Institute) meant that there were major delays in getting the papers published online, and they were not available until only a few days before the Forum started.

Needless to say, this philosophy attracted some criticism from participants, especially some paper presenters who felt that they did not receive adequate feedback for their efforts. Many people commented that they would have liked questions. Presenters wanted longer to speak, but some participants liked the flag-waving format. The almost ubiquitous use of PowerPoint led some people to comment that maybe it should be banned!

Many people felt that having two presentations in the Sovereign Room did not work. We acknowledge this view and would not do it again. However, we were using all rooms in the Convention Centre. While we considered the possibility of using rooms in nearby buildings (and did so for one of the training workshops), we considered that this was not practical for the contributed paper sessions. Not to put two presentations in the Sovereign Room would have exacerbated the timetabling problem, and would have meant that we would have had to decline some of the presentations.

## Social Activities and Catering Arrangements

Apart from the technical issues associated with the logistics of the venue, there was general praise for the social activities we organised and the catering arrangements (see Table 4). The Government House reception was a thoroughly memorable occasion for those who were fortunate enough to attend. Because of security arrangements, it was necessary to supply the names of attendees well in advance of the event, with last minute additions prohibited. Apart from meaning that some people unfortunately had to miss out, this also was an organisational nightmare for the conference organisers. Very regrettably, an administrative error by the conference organisers meant that two of our delegates' partners were not issued with invitations and were therefore not able to attend. However, with 59 percent saying that the reception was excellent, we are glad that we went to the trouble.

Table 4: Rating of social activities and catering arrangements

	Excellent	Good	OK	Bad	Valid n
Government House Reception (Wednesday)	59	38	1	1	66 (33 missing)
Meadowbank dinner (Wednesday)	52	41	7	0	58 (41 missing)
Dinner Cruise on the Cartela (Thursday)	37	42	18	2	83 (16 missing)
Lunches at the Convention Centre	18	46	34	2	92 (7 missing)
Morning and afternoon teas	13	48	34	5	94 (5 missing)

The Meadowbank dinner also had a high rating, with 52 percent saying it was excellent. One person commented that they did not like being put with strangers, while other people liked the idea that they were encouraged into a new group. The strategy of having the discussion groups have dinner together was good for people who knew no-one at the conference. The dinner was mildly affected by the late start, due not only to the AGM going overtime, but also due to the Metro bus breaking down and delaying participants by 30 minutes or so. While this was completely outside our control, we are very grateful for the good humour the people on the bus showed.

The official conference dinner cruise aboard the historic MV Cartela was also well liked, although some participants complained it was noisy, and some vegetarians felt that they were not adequately catered for. We respect their views on this, as more than one member of the organising team is also vegetarian. We tried to accommodate all special requests, and did communicate these with the third party supplier of this service. We will pass on this feedback to them and suggest that in future they give greater consideration to the needs of vegetarians.

Lunches at the Convention Centre were perceived as being generally good, although some people felt that there was a queuing problem. There was a major problem with the provision of morning tea on the first day, which was corrected at subsequent breaks. Some people would have liked a greater range of food (such as fruit) available at the breaks, and more fruit and cheese at lunch.

## **Other Issues**

Some participants mentioned that they wanted the Delegate List at the beginning of the conference rather than afterwards. While the Delegate List was provided to all participants shortly after the Forum, we were not able to provide it earlier as we had neglected to seek permission to publish delegate's contact details until they arrived at the Forum. In hindsight, we should have sought this permission on the registration form.

We selected Tasmania Temptations as the official travel agent because they are a government-owned Tasmanian travel agency who claim to know Tasmania and who claim to offer a dedicated conference service including personalised service, a 1800 phone number and a discount off normal commissions. Theoretically, they should be ideal. We are aware however that some participants were not entirely pleased with the service they received from Tas Temptations, and we are aware that some people were informed of accommodation options that were not really suitable for their needs. If this was your experience, we apologise, and we encourage you to provide this feedback directly to Tas Temptations. As we intend to provide general feedback to all our stakeholders and associated parties, we would be pleased to hear the specifics of any particular concern.

## **What we learned**

We learned that conference organisation is a lot of work, but it is also fun, and it is worthwhile when you believe in what you are doing. Our faith that extension is a viable and valid discipline and profession has been reconfirmed, and our belief that APEN is worthwhile and crucial has been strengthened. We also learned a lot about teamwork and good humour, as well as about the need for, and processes of, good communication. We learned to appreciate the need to be flexible and the power of negotiation through discussion. Further, we learned that it is important to be clear about the rationale behind various decisions and to articulate these decisions to people who might be affected by those decisions. It is also necessary to make time to do this in the conference program.

Our experience of participating in the Forum, and especially in listening to the enthusiasm, energy and excitement that was on display shifted our feelings from being concerned about the future of extension (and potentially thinking that extension was in decay) to being reinvigorated and excited and convinced that extension has a real future as a mature profession. Our view that extension is legitimate, socially expected and environmentally necessary was confirmed. Extension is a component of policy, and part of a suite of tools that are available to bring about desired social change and socially desirable environmental outcomes. The decline that extension has experienced over the past 20 or so years needs to be reversed.

## **Conclusion**

This evaluation of the Forum confirms the adage that you can't please everyone. Whatever some people thought was excellent some others thought was bad. What is required, and what we attempted to achieve, is to please most people most of the time. The results of the evaluation confirm that this was achieved. Much potential concern can be avoided by being open to feedback and having one's eyes and ears open to what might go wrong and correcting it before the harm is done. Thorough planning, attention to detail, anticipation and envisaging what the conference will look like all assist in designing a conference that runs smoothly.

Time is the one problem of every conference. The multiple demands on time mean that there is a temptation to squeeze too much into a program, or to cut short the time that is required for questions, discussions, or even spare time for participants to think, reflect, or network.

The success of the Forum, and the interest in the Forum shown by the Tasmanian Department of Primary Industries, Water and Environment, demonstrate that a Forum like this has the potential to have a major impact on people as individuals, but also at the political and policy level. We feel rewarded and validated by the experience of Forum participants and the success that this Forum achieved.

## **Acknowledgments**

Many people contributed to the success of the Forum. All the participants and contributing speakers, the sponsors, the invited speakers and workshop facilitators, the staff of Rural Development Services, the staff of the Hobart Function and Convention Centre, and the people whose business activities were visited by the field trips, all contributed to making the conference successful. We are also very grateful to the group of people who we regarded as our reference group, who gave up close to a day of their time back in early April 2003 to share their ideas with us about how the Forum might look like. We are proud of the Forum that we created, and we hope that we developed a Forum that was in good faith with the concept that we distilled at that meeting. Thanks to the people who contributed to the inspiration on that day: Penny Bastock, Liz Bond, Simon Burgess, Michael Hart, David O'Donnell, Angela Sparrow, Judy Terry and David Wright.