

## The Nuts and Bolts of Strategic Foresight

**Jose Ramos**

Strategic foresight is an approach to “forward thinking” that allows groups, organisations, businesses, and people the capacity to develop a grounded understanding of the social change affecting their lives. This allows people to then make decisions and develop strategies based on that “forward knowledge”. The end result is an adaptive capacity in the face of change, and a heightened awareness of emerging opportunities.

Since the beginning of time human beings have had to think about the future to survive. Indeed, across human history the character of this “forward thinking” has changed depending on the nature of the existences that people experienced.

In paleolithic (stone age) cultures, people's outlook on the future was likely an expression of the ways of living those people engaged in. “Foresight” may have meant understanding the migrations of animals which were food sources, be this bovine, fowl, and fish. It may have meant understanding where wild fruit, roots and edible insects existed through the year's cycle. It may also have been expressed through how to survive a very cold winter, a very hot summer, or a period with very little water or food. These people's foresight allowed them to navigate many challenging environments, by looking ahead for weeks and months. While we may consider this a relatively short time frame, for these people, with their tools and in their environments, this was a formidable capacity.

Herding cultures, which followed and later domesticated animals, developed another way of life. These cultures created a symbiotic relationship with their domesticated animals: such as camel, ox, cow, goat and sheep (and in meso-America rodent, dog and turkey). This way

of life offered them a continuous form of sustenance, so long as their domesticated animals had access to food and water. This then changed the character of the “foresight” these people would express. Their “forward view” would need to be focused on finding and exploiting the best habitats for their animals. In Eurasia, migrating longer distances would have necessitated a deeper understanding of seasonal changes in various regions.

Subsistence agricultural cultures, which began to create symbiotic relationships with plants and trees, developed another way of life and hence expressed another way of “forward thinking”. These peoples would need to think about seasonal changes, especially the coming of rains, storms, and harsh weather that could destroy crops. In the ancient agricultural societies of Egypt, Babylon, the Indus river (and others) floods had to be anticipated and managed. It is not surprising that these cultures, which could store more foods for longer periods, and which needed to have a more accurate understanding of seasonal changes, began to look at the stars, and create a more accurate understanding of seasonal changes, culminating in the development of the first calendars.

Industrialisation changed the game yet again. Water resources could be pumped using machines. Goods could be transported quickly and cheaply around the world. Fossil fuels could be used for farming, as well as synthesized into both fertilizers and pesticides. The shift from subsistence agriculture to surplus market agriculture would again shift the nature of the “forward view”. New questions emerged: is there a market for this good? will there be a glut in this good? can this good compete against market alternatives?



*A “forward view” or “foresight” has been integral to the survival of peoples from the beginning of time to the present.*

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# The Nuts and Bolts of Strategic Foresight (continued)

While these examples from history and pre-history are an obvious oversimplification, and the true nature of foresight in these types of cultures is best understood by the science of anthropology, the main point remains salient. A “forward view” or “foresight” has been integral to the survival of peoples from the beginning of time to the present. I would further argue that developing the capacity for foresight has become more important as well as more complex as time has worn on.

Today the average business is faced with a mind-numbing array of issues to grapple with in considering their business decisions.

- Economic globalization has meant that more people are competing in more markets
- Currencies ebb and flow in a turbulent global financial system
- Sustainability challenges are impacting in a number of areas: land use, climate change, waste management and many other places
- Government policy sometimes stabilizes and sometimes disrupts organisations
- Economic boom and bust cycles affect different industries and sectors
- Technologies continue to have big impacts, such as computer,

biotechnology, nanotechnology and renewable energy technologies

- New values are emerging from new generations with new expectations

Faced with so much complexity a common response is to say “I’ll do what I have always done, it has worked before”. However this is a major mistake! We know from history that human life continues to evolve and change in tandem with changes in technology, culture, etc. Engaging in forward thinking not only allows businesses to adapt to a changing environment, it opens up avenues and opportunities that were previously not visible.

The modern art and science of strategic foresight is a grounded approach to understanding this landscape of social change in ways that open up opportunities to decision makers in every walk of life. An enhanced capacity for foresight has a number of benefits. It allows decision makers to understand what the key issues impacting their sector or industry might be. It provides a strategic landscape where various options for development open up. It creates more clarity where an enterprise should devote time and energy. It provides guidance in respect to the direction an enterprise should innovate.

Strategic foresight provides a number of effective frameworks and tools for providing

value to clients. It involves rigorously scanning across relevant data sources to understand the nature of change for a sector or industry. It requires sifting and sorting to come to an appreciation of the key themes and issues that are most relevant. Tools in data analysis and interpretation allow for a deepened understanding of the issues faced. In can often entail developing a “picture” of one, two or many possible futures, often called “scenarios”. Importantly, it includes making sure that this new understanding of social change is used to ask: “now what”? It helps decision makers re-think their strategies and core assumptions, opens up awareness of emerging opportunities and helps develop more robust and exciting directions for businesses and organisations.

*Jose Ramos holds a PhD from Queensland University of Technology in Global Studies and Foresight. He has ten years experience working with organisations to develop their foresight capacities. He is a research analyst for the Smart Services CRC, (services2020.net), a senior consulting editor for the Journal of Futures Studies and on the Executive Board of the World Futures Studies Federation, (wfsf.org). He runs a Strategic Foresight business called ActionForesight (actionforesight.net), and can be contacted on : jose@actionforesight.net*

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## FROM THE EDITORS



People and questions are match-made for each other and the question, *what does the future hold*, is one that often finds its way in to people’s minds and conversations. But can we predict the future?

Philip Tetlock, a professor of organisational behaviour in the USA, has built 20 years of research on 28,000 predictions from 284 experts. He found that their predictions of the future were only slightly ahead of the 50/50 accuracy of chance. He concluded that statistics when properly used for interpretation are more reliable than human judgement.

So, with that question of the future in mind we chose the theme of ‘futuring’ for the June Edition of ExtensionNet. And while we’d like to say that a crystal ball is the way to go when you want to know about the future...well it would be so much easier...alas we can’t!

All is not lost however as for this edition we brought together some authors who can enlighten us on how to approach that question in the real world of our extension work today. They use terms like futures, futuring and foresighting and they clarify the link between futuring and strategic planning.

Elizabeth Gillard has long term experience with agricultural producers and change and she connects this to her understanding and practice of futuring. Jose Ramos, principal of *ActionForesight* presents us with foresighting as a tool which has been in human use for millennia. Ian Plowman takes us on the journey of strategic thinking and Paul Higgins shows us that our biases are what hold us back when it comes to assessing data about the future. This clearly supports Tetlock’s call for statistics to be used properly if they are to tell us about probable futures.

How we approach our questions about the future can be anywhere between *fun* or *dread* so we’ve included some cartoons, quotes and technology snippets to help keep it on the fun side!

Also in this edition is a piece from Marion Titterton & Joanna Lyall about the use of on-line and video delivery at Tasmanian extension events.

We hope it all makes for enjoyable reading.

*Gerry and Kate*

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# Futuring : A Tool for Enhancing Extension Effort

**Elisabeth Gillard**

**Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation,  
Queensland**

*"Either we take hold of the future or the future will take hold of us."*

**Dr Patrick Dixon**

Like it or not, the pace of change is growing exponentially through the advancements in technology, new knowledge and new ways of thinking. Such changes influence every aspect of our professional and personal lives. Surely, the emergence of unanticipated events in the future will change the world we have grown used to.

Charles Darwin recognised that it is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent; it is the one that is the most adaptable to change. So, I believe that if the Extension profession is to remain relevant to its clients and funders into the future, it is critical that we build our knowledge and repertoire of competencies to anticipate potential emerging changes and work with our clients to respond effectively with appropriate strategies.

## **Futuring: A Strategic Tool for Extension in the 21st Century**

Futuring is not about prediction – it is not about foretelling or defining the future.

Basically, futuring is a process for anticipating potential changes and rehearsing strategies to effectively deal with them. It's critical to work with clients to generate a number of plausible views of the future and how to act if any of them come to pass.

Futuring is a form of strategic thinking. It is not strategic planning which is a process used to stand in today looking ahead. Futuring is used before you begin thinking about strategic planning. It develops an ongoing conversation within a business enterprise, because we almost certainly underestimate how different the future will be from today.

Futuring is a process for standing in the future and looking back. It helps us focus on and explore those big drivers of change that will govern tomorrow.

If you want further information regarding the future beyond your own experience, look on the Web for what futurists are saying, read journals such as *Foresight* and *Futures* and newsletters such as *Trend*.

## **The Extension Role as a Change Agent or Facilitator**

*"In times of change, it is the learners who inherit the future. Those who have finished learning find themselves equipped to live in a world that no longer exists!"* Eric Hoffer

Why should extension officers working with farmers and small business enterprises use futuring as a tool? From its inception, the extension role has been that of a change agent or a change facilitator. So, working with futuring is the natural next step for extension officers to foster a different form of thinking within clients to deal with ambiguity and complexity. It will highlight and develop a capacity for adaptability as a survival skill. A key element of futuring is to take *proactivity* as a business responsibility.

## **A Basic Futuring Process**

The 21st Century has been born in the turbulence of natural disasters, environmental calamities, political upheaval etc. Extension's clients are often caught up in the turbulence and will naturally look for old ways of dealing with difficult times.

Wisely, Peter Drucker pointed out that the problem in times of turbulence is not the turbulence itself, but acting with yesterday's logic. Agriculture is now and will continue to function in turbulent times.

### **Step 1 - Warming clients up to futuring thinking**

Use the wisdom of hindsight by looking back at the changes we have already experienced over the last 10-15 years. Ask them to name what changes that they might not have thought would happen, but have in fact happened.

### **Step 2 - Introduce "Big Drivers" of Change**

Introduce "big drivers" concept – ie shifts which will radically change communities and businesses in 5-10 years time. There are four categories of big drivers: new ways of doing things, new technology, critical uncertainties, new values or beliefs eg increased environmental consciousness, GMO introduction, CSG mining.



*It's critical to work with clients to generate a number of plausible views of the future*

*"The best thing about the future is that it comes only one day at a time."*

**Abraham Lincoln**



# Futuring: A Tool for Enhancing Extension Effort (continued)

Research the current *futuring* and *trends* publications to broaden your knowledge of likely big drivers and develop a brief handout on the four.

Ask people, *what are the five or six big drivers that will radically change their community and business today (2011)?* This will get them talking with others about their ideas.

Try to get them to talk to people who are very different to themselves (we learn more from people who are most different to us; we learn least – in fact, we reinforce the myths we hold – from people who are most similar to us).

From working on big drivers everyone learns that the rate of change will only increase and our businesses and communities will be radically different.

## Step 3 - Understanding the Predictable Reactions to “Unchosen change”

In our society, when we talk about change, we tend to focus on external aspects of change - how it affects our hip pocket, how we do things, our work etc.

It is also common to have some emotional reactions when people begin thinking about big drivers of change. After all, many big drivers are unchosen changes which can destabilise our lives.

Such discomfort or distress is natural. Left unresolved it is not useful as humans under stress reduce their capacity to think well.

You need to emphasise that a critical factor, whether people lead a family company or a country, is their capacity to understand change, especially unchosen change.

## Step 4 - Constructing scenarios

Scenarios are stories about the future - each one modeling a distinct, plausible world in which we might one day have to live and work – they are not predictions.

People use the big drivers (singly or in multiples) to construct (write) scenarios that are just plausible. To do this, they can use a focusing question like: *If all the opportunities in my set of drivers were realised, what would rural communities look like in 2020? What business relationships will I need to operate successfully in such an environment?*

Give them examples of positive and negative scenarios built on say 2-3 big drivers. People often need a template if they have never written scenarios before.

Ask them to write one of their own. If they have time, they could write out “best case” and “worst case”.

## Step 5 - Developing strategies

Strategising gives practical ways to use the scenarios planted in the mind. It will give confidence to, or stimulate a targeted search for information which will give confidence to major decisions.

When people have developed a number of scenarios – or at least one, you need to then ask: *“Given that this is a plausible future, what do I need to be doing to prosper in this type of scenario?”* This begins the strategising.

Once people do this, they can then ask themselves *“What do I need to start doing now to ensure that my strategies will indeed take me into this scenario in good stead?”*

Building scenarios and developing strategies are the real tools for anticipating and rehearsing future options and potentialities. The more people think, talk and plan about these, the more flexible they are able to be to deal with such possibilities quickly and decisively.

## Step 6 - Continuing the Strategic Conversation

One of the most useful ways of introducing the future changes and implications is to start a strategic conversation. There are countless different approaches to do this (e.g. around the dinner table or at a community picnic), but given the number of people whom extension officers want to influence quickly, conducting workshops is an effective and efficient way to introduce a strategic conversation. Keep reminding people that *futuring* is a new way of doing business and thinking.

And always, keep people asking the key question: *“What will my enterprise/community/industry look like when we are successful in that scenario?”*

## In Conclusion

Futuring is about getting people to think “out there into the future” by thinking through trends and potentialities. This is not as easy as it seems – it is about getting clients to focus on extrapolating on today's issues.

*Elizabeth Gillard has worked primarily with extension officers and rural producers for over 20 years. She has specialized in assisting people to maximize their potential and deal constructively with change to their businesses, industries and communities. This paper has been developed based on her extensive experience in working with people on futuring.*

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*“The vast possibilities of our great future will become realities only if we make ourselves responsible for that future.”*

Gifford Pinchot



# What is that Future Stuff All About?

Paul Higgins



Most people think futurists predict the future. This is not true. The first thing I say to someone who asks me for a vision of the future is, “the only thing I will guarantee you is it will be wrong”.

Forecasting a single outcome is a poor basis for thinking about the future. The world is littered with examples of failed forecasting. An example comes from an article in Business Week in April 2009:

***“In early September 2008, the median growth forecast for the fourth quarter was 0.2%, according to a survey by Blue Chip Economic Indicators. The actual outcome was a 6.3% annualized decline”***

A recent report by the Pew Center (State Revenue Estimating: Cracks in the Crystal Ball) stated that over half the US states overestimated revenues in 2009 by more than 10.2%. This was nearly US\$50 billion, and who can forget the dire forecasts of a few years ago that oil was going to be over US\$200 a barrel in the months ahead... something that is still yet to happen.

So if forecasting and prediction doesn't work what does? There are two components to what can be done.

Firstly, while we cannot hope to accurately predict the future, we can get better at thinking what might happen and minimising the chances we will get blindsided by a surprise. Secondly, we have to accept that no matter how good we get at thinking about the future we are still going to fail in anticipating all possibilities, meaning we need to build more flexible strategies. To paraphrase the old Arab saying, “trust in your thinking but tie up your camels”

The key to better thinking about the future is questioning your own assumptions and biases. Often what we believe to be true and turns out not to be, hurts us more than things we don't know. We spend more time and resources on researching new information, than examining our own biases and assumptions. We need to turn that around. General examples of these biases include:

- Recency Bias – the tendency to place more importance on recent events. So if the currency rate has recently risen

sharply we are more likely to consider currency movements to be a higher risk in the future.

- Confirmation Bias: We take more notice of information which confirms our decisions and ignore information which questions our decisions.

A recent study of Israeli judges and their sentencing shows if you went before them just after a meal break you were 65% more likely to get a favourable decision. Go before them too far after a meal break and that chance dropped to less than 20%. It shows, we can differ from rational analytical thinking in ways we usually are not aware of.

The most practical way to think better about the future is via wind tunnel testing. The way it works is to construct a set of possible scenarios about the future your organisation or industry will face. Each of these scenarios is constructed as a story about the future and has its own internal logic and set of interactions. These scenarios are then used to “wind tunnel test” possible strategic approaches with the following outcomes in mind:

- A strategy which is successful in all the future scenarios is more robust than those that are only successful in one possible future.
- A strategy which is successful or fails spectacularly in one possible scenario of the future, but which has a huge impact on the future of the organisation must be closely examined.

Work of this sort has more value than you may realise. Just think about how many times after seeing a movie or reading a book you notice a newspaper story about that very issue. Our minds are primed to notice what has already been noticed. Therefore, if we prime them with possibilities of the future we will notice more signs of change.

Scenarios and other ways of thinking about the future can also benefit greatly from getting some outside perspectives. Too often we only mix with people from our own industry or those with similar views to ourselves. Change often comes at the places where different industries or trends intersect.

Recently I told cattle producers in the Northern Territory about Japanese citizens

using internet technologies to create maps of radiation levels in Japan, using their own data sources. Initially this may seem completely irrelevant, but thinking about how your customers are changing their behaviours and expectations can give some insight to future consumer behaviour.

My message was that the Japanese consumers of the future were being taught to expect access to immediate, detailed and credible information. More importantly they are going around the established channels of information if they cannot trust the authorities. They are likely to do the same to suppliers of agricultural products in the future as well.

So if you do one thing from reading this article get some different perspectives. Read different things, use social media to access information from outside agriculture, or bring in outside people to look at your thinking and strategies.

Now you can do all these things and still get blindsided (and you will!). Therefore you need to find ways to make your strategies more adaptable to change. Early in 2010 I was talking to a major client in Queensland. They explained to me that since their grandfather had settled in the area, periods of drought had always been followed by a particularly wet period. As it happens this has occurred, but my message to them was they should not base their strategy on such an expectation, especially if their strategy risked the business if it continued to stay dry.

Many people rely too heavily on historical trends or patterns to plan. The trouble is when those patterns break, and they always do, anyone who relied on them continuing can find themselves in serious trouble. They find themselves overcommitted to a single strategy and without the capacity to change. Futuring is the way you ensure that doesn't happen to your clients.

*Paul Higgins is a Futurist with Emergent Futures. Paul has a First Class Honours Degree in Veterinary Science, a Bachelor of Animal Science, and a Masters Degree in Strategic Foresight. Paul works with government, statutory organisations, commercial operations, and not for profit organisations on foresight and strategy. Paul uses social media as a communication tool for clients and potential clients, for information gathering in Emergent Futures' environmental scanning program, and as a collaborative tool for work with people around the world.*



# Strategic Learning - A Generic Approach

*Ian Plowman*

*No organism  
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There are two broad forms of planning. 'Operational Planning' is what we do in order to maintain the status quo. 'Strategic Planning' is what we do when we acknowledge the status quo may not represent the future, and that we may need to change our thinking and behaviours to better equip us to survive and thrive in a world that differs from the one we are now in. Changing our thinking and behaviour in conscious and constructive ways is commonly called 'strategic learning', of which 'planning' is but a small part.

Evolution talks of 'survival of the fittest', a term that is often misunderstood. 'Fittest' really means having the best fit between the attributes of the organism and the conditions in its environment. As evolution has taught us, as the environment changes, the organism needs to change with it. And responsibility for survival rests solely with the organism. Conversely, if the external environment is stable, then change in the organism is unnecessary.

No organism is a closed self-sufficient system. Every organism depends for its survival on the capacity and willingness of the external world to resource it.

For every organism, person, enterprise, industry or nation, there are two broad categories of threat to survival. The first are internal to the organism itself. Our internal attributes are not a steady state. For example, the journey from infancy to childhood to maturity to senescence illustrates the lifecycle changes that are not only found in living organisms. They also occur in enterprises, industries and nations. That lifecycle journey is often punctuated by periods of sickness and recovery. These punctuations threaten the essential organism/environment 'fit'. The second category of threat to an organism's survival is external to the organism. Competition for scarce resources or changes in the nature of the external environment also threatens the 'fit'.

So a healthy organism (or person, enterprise, industry or nation) is one that maintains 'fit'. It does this through continuous learning. The intention of this article is to offer some ideas on how best to do this. These ideas are divided into two groups, and then brought together into a systemic whole.

Consider the grand final of a football match. The coach watches from the 'box' up in the stand. At half time the players come off the field into the dressing room where they talk with the coach. Then they go back out on the field and continue playing. This simple series of events illustrates the process of 'strategic learning'. Let's unpack what is going on. First there is a period of 'activity'. Up in the box, the coach is 'reflecting' on what is occurring. During the break, activity stops. The coach and the players exchange ideas, which, at this point are only theoretical, since they have not yet been applied. Plans are then formulated on how to play the second half even better. Shift the scale of this conversation to the whole season and the same patterns are repeated, namely: activity, reflection, generalised ideas, planning, followed by further activity. Readers will immediately recognise the 'experiential learning spiral'. This is the basis of all successful strategic learning, of which planning is but a part. The 'experiential learning spiral' is the 'process' by which successful strategic learning can occur. In fact, I suggest, it is the ONLY process by which successful strategic learning can occur.

Characteristics of the experiential learning spiral are:

1. It is a spiral, not a circle. It does not return to its starting point.
2. The stages of the spiral – activity, reflection, general ideas or theory, and planning, can only be completed in that order for learning to occur.
3. One can start at any one of the four elements of the spiral, provided the others are completed in sequence.
4. There are individual differences in the way organisms/people learn. Some learn best by doing, others by reflection, others by theories, books, formal education, etc, while yet others learn best through planning. Hence strategic learning is strengthened by involving multiple and diverse perspectives.
5. The centre of the spiral outwards to our present position represents what we know. The space beyond represents our ignorance. Hence, spatially, the more we know, the less we know.

6. The learning spiral is not static. We are either spiralling outwards and learning, or we are regressing towards our initial ignorance. Think of a skill you acquired many years ago that you have not applied recently to gain an understanding of this regression. 'Fitness' is not passive. We need to constantly work at it.
7. Cycle time matters. Strategic learning that spirals continuously is going to be far more effective than any annual strategic planning exercise. And far less stressful.
8. Learning is infinite.

The *process* of strategic learning is necessary. Yet it is not sufficient. We also need to consider *content*.

There are six *content* domains that any organism needs to pay *process* attention to. These domains are scalable. That is, they apply equally to an organism, a person, an enterprise, an industry or a nation. Threats to 'fitness' can come from any one of these.

1. Characteristics within the organism or entity. These characteristics can include physical, mental, and spiritual health, knowledge, skills. These are

the attributes that enable us to engage with the external world.

2. Relationships with our support network. These relationships include intimate (spouse, lover), family, friends, professional networks, work mates. These relationships supports us, enables us directly or indirectly, to do our job.
3. Our job. The basic activities we carry out in order to earn resources from the outside world.
4. Our customers. Those who are the beneficiaries of what we produce and on whom we depend for our immediate resources.
5. The competition. Resources in the external world that we need for our survival are also attractive to others. Our survival depends upon our being able to defend against these competitive pressures.
6. The macro-environment. The external world, upon which all organisms depend, including our customers and our competitors, are in a constant state of flux. And the rate of that flux is steadily increasing.

Putting the four process phases of the strategic learning spiral together with these six content domains gives us a generic strategic learning framework. (See *Figure 1*, below)

Any organism, individual, enterprise or industry could easily populate each of these 24 cells with the appropriate and relevant detail (for them). Then each of the cells could be scored on a scale of 1 (we are doing this very poorly) to 5 (we are doing this very well). Imagine this occurring in your enterprise. Imagine if all of the members of your enterprise were to do this individually and privately before comparing notes. You would then have the basis for a very productive 'strategic learning' conversation.

*Ian Plowman is a facilitator, presenter and coach. He runs a consultancy that specialises in unlocking creativity and innovation in organisations, associations and communities. For more information about Ian and his work visit his website at: <http://www.plowman.com.au>*

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	Self	Relationships	Job	Client	Competition	External World
Activity						
Reflection						
Ideas						
Planning						

Figure 1

*"When it comes to the future, there are three kinds of people; those who let it happen, those who make it happen and those who wonder what happened."*

John M Richardson Jr.



*Mum! The database says that I don't have to clean my room! Because in the future it'll just get messy again, and I'll have to do it over-and-over.*





Marion Titterton

# Distance Extension: Online and Video Delivery to Extension Events

**Marion Titterton and Joanna Lyall,  
University of Tasmania, Cradle Coast Campus, Burnie**

## Introduction

In Tasmania, many of our public good -funded extension projects in the dairy industry entail events which necessitate delivery in four or more key dairying areas, the far north- west, north- west, central- north, north- east and King Island. This has evolved over the past decade despite diminishing resources in personnel in public-good funded extension and dedicated extension project funding.

To attract good attendances each event is required to be held as a field day, workshop or forum within no more than two hours travel and usually offering at least one key note speaker who is an authority in the theme of the event.

Key note speakers have often been invited from the mainland and the cost of flights and accommodation add considerably to budget expenditure. Because four or five field days or workshops are organized, it often necessitates the speakers travelling from one centre to the next and this can take up to a week of their time with the accompanying cost of accommodation. King Island events present even greater costs with flights and consultancy time.

In December 2010, an event on energy efficiency (a component of a climate change adaptation extension program) was held at four venues in the Tasmanian northern region. To hold the same event on King Island would have represented a major cost to the project. In order to mitigate the expense, it was decided to try a new approach when a forum was organized on King Island in early February, 2011 in which half of the agenda focused on energy efficiency and renewable energy while the second half dealt with alternative forages for hotter, drier summers.

The approach, which we called "Distance extension" was the first extension event ever presented in Tasmania using video and on-line technology and could therefore be viewed as a trial.

## Method and Outcome

Several weeks before the event, the concept of using on-line technology was tested with two application platforms. The first choice was a webinar application called Elluminate,

administered by the University of Tasmania but doubts arose about its reliability outside of campus, especially for remote regional areas. Skype was then tested by TIAR personnel between King Island, the Cradle Coast campus and Cressy, and was found to be reliable and robust for all participants.

The forum was facilitated in the following way:

### Energy session

At one of the energy efficiency field days held earlier on the Tasmanian mainland, all the presentations were filmed by a professional video producer. The video was then edited to capture each presentation separately, with its accompanying discussion.

At the King Island forum, each presentation was projected from the video to a large screen. Video presentations were interspersed with two live presentations from local specialists in energy efficiency and renewable energy who were able to answer questions on both their own and the video presentations and engage in discussion about the renewable energy initiatives on King Island.

### Alternate forages for hotter, drier summers

In this session, all the speakers came on-line to give their presentations. Each speaker's power point presentation was shown on screen by the facilitator at the forum venue in conjunction with the lecture on Skype. The speaker's image on Skype was displayed in a smaller, insert screen until the time came for discussion, when the image filled the screen. Each speaker gave twenty minute presentations with ten minutes for discussion. There were no technical problems throughout the session. From our observations the members of the audience were not inhibited by the virtual presence of the speakers and engaged well with them in the discussion periods.

## Discussion

This method of extension provided a number of benefits:

1. The cost of the forum was markedly reduced. The video cost \$1110 to produce and the cost of the flights came to \$1400, a total of \$2510. This compares with the

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periods.*



potential cost of \$3000 for consultancy fees and \$4,050 for flights, a total of \$7,050 if all the participating speakers had been physically present.

2. In their evaluation of the forum the farmers expressed satisfaction with the methodology because it allowed a total of seven speakers to participate in the forum which gave them more information and the opportunity to engage with many more specialists than they normally experienced in an extension event on King Island. Our concern that the “virtual” presentation, in place of physical presence, might compromise the interaction between the speaker and the audience appeared to be groundless.
3. Skype is free, compared with the cost of a commercial webinar service and it is robust due to its long period of use, large user community and redundant services.
4. The speakers themselves were pleased with this mode of delivery because it meant their time was not taken up with travel, waiting to deliver their presentation, and then more waiting for the return flight. For those that were delivering on-line, the forum took up no more than thirty minutes of their time and it allowed them to remain in their offices.

There are, however, some challenges to the use of this methodology:

1. Testing is required of the entire operation before the event because of possible incompatibility of connections and the possibility of poor strength of the internet connection, especially in a remote regional area.

2. Every speaker will need to be connected to Skype on their own computer. However, it is an easy process to download Skype.
3. Even with Skype, a robust and well used service, there can be breaks in the connection where the video can become unfocussed or even disappear for a time. However this is unlikely to happen with the audio connection, so that the speaker’s voice is still heard by the audience. We did not experience this problem but were aware of it.
4. If the event is a field day with on-farm demonstrations or discussions in the field with the speakers, this method would not be feasible. It is only suitable when the event is a forum or seminar at a venue with an internet connection.
5. A video camera needs to be linked to the computer at the extension venue to scan the audience so that the speaker on Skype is able to see everyone there and see who is asking questions. A portable microphone is necessary to hand to the questioners especially in a large audience. However, this is not a big cost.

### Conclusion

The use of “distance extension” proved to be successful on King Island and it indicates that it is feasible for future extension events in remote regional areas where internet connections allow it. It offers the means of extension outreach where resources are limited.

You can contact Marion at:  
[Marion.Titterton@utas.edu.au](mailto:Marion.Titterton@utas.edu.au)

*“My interest is in the future  
because I am going to spend  
the rest of my life there.”*

**Charles F Kettering**



*“Change is the  
law of life.  
And those  
who look only  
to the past  
or present  
are certain  
to miss the  
future.”*

John F Kennedy

## Book Reviews

### ***Shaping change: Natural Resource Management, Agriculture and the role of Extension***

*Edited by Drs Jennings, Packham and Woodside*

Shaping Change is a collection of contemporary papers on “extension” in the agricultural sector. This book may serve as a catalyst to trigger a move to smarter innovation processes that draw the elements of research, development and extension into one integrated project plan.

This is a great resource for anyone interested in shaping individual and/or community level change within challenging and often conflicted social and political environments, in pursuit of better lifestyles, livelihoods and landscapes for all of us, now and in the future.

For more information and an order form to purchase this book email:

[info@apen.org.au](mailto:info@apen.org.au)

### ***Changing Land Management; Adoption of New Practices by Rural Landholders***

*Edited by David Pannell and Frank Vanclay*

Changing Land Management provides key insights from past and cutting-edge research to support decision-makers as they attempt to influence or assist rural communities adapting to changed circumstances, such as new technologies, new environmental imperatives, new markets or changed climate.

This book contains a broad survey of multidisciplinary literature in one collection. It supports policy-makers and decision-makers as they advise rural communities how to develop/adapt to a wide range of circumstances, both environmental and economic.

To purchase this book email:

[publishing.sales@csiro.au](mailto:publishing.sales@csiro.au)

**Editors' note – Have you heard or seen a great publication that is a must for extension officers? Write a review and/or let us know so we can share it with everyone in the next newsletter.**

## Useful Websites

### **The World Future Society**

Interested in how social and technological developments are shaping the future? The World Future Society is a nonprofit educational and scientific organization founded in 1966 in the United States.

The Society investigates how social, economic and technological developments are shaping the future. On the Society's Web site, it says that it seeks to help individuals, organizations, and communities observe, understand and respond to social change appropriately and investigates the benign effects of applying anticipatory thinking to society.

Through its magazine *The Futurist*, media, meetings, and dialogue among its members, it endeavors to raise awareness of change and encourage development of creative solutions. The Society takes no official position on what the future may or should be like. Instead it seeks to provide a neutral forum for exploring possible, probable, and preferable futures.

<http://www.wfs.org/>

### **Technology forecasting**

Technology innovation can be forecast both emotionally and empirically. While emotional involvement with a product or process can help in the initial growth stage, it can also be a barrier when negative emotions arise. Data based processes of forecasting prevent emotional challenges. This link takes you to an article that focuses on eight forecasting methodologies.

<http://www.realinnovation.com/content/c070416a.asp>

# New APEN members

If you've recently joined APEN, welcome! You'll reap plenty of professional and personal rewards. If you've been in APEN for a few seasons now, be sure to say hello to the new members.



## Greg Bath

**Position:** Industry Development officer (DEEDI, QLD)

**E-mail:** greg.bath@deedi.qld.gov.au

### Roles:

FutureBeef eExtension Team Specialist: Improve communication, knowledge, skills and information delivery to the Queensland Beef industry through accessible and innovative eExtension platforms.

Industry Development Officer: Build supply chain capabilities, enterprise competitiveness and identification of new business opportunities for Queensland Regional (& State) Intensive Livestock Industries (Cattle feedlots, Pork, Egg and Meat Chickens). To meet consumer and community expectations.

**Specific interests:** Video podcasts, Slidecasts, Webinars, Blogs, eSurveys, YouTube

Welcome to these new members who have joined since last edition. We're glad to have you all on board.

<b>Greg Bath</b>	<i>Qld</i>
<b>Allister Holmes</b>	<i>New Zealand</i>
<b>Glenn Ronan</b>	<i>NT</i>
<b>Jamie Bowyer</b>	<i>WA</i>



## Danielle England

Planfarm Pty Ltd, Narrogin WA

0429 676077 danielle@planfarm.com.au

Danielle has recently joined Planfarm as a project officer. In her new role she is the Relative Advantage project officer in WA for Grain and Graze 2, and supports Planfarm consultants and farmer groups across the state with communication and extension activities.

Danielle has over ten years experience in designing, managing, evaluating and reporting on agricultural extension and communication activities. After graduation from Muresk Institute of Agriculture in 1997, Danielle moved to SA where she worked for (what was then) PIRSA in their pastures group. In 2002 she became the SA/Western Victorian SGS Regional Facilitator and ran various extension activities from home on the farm.

In 2006 Danielle and her family moved to Western Australia where she worked for the WA Department of Agriculture and Food. In this role she worked with the agricultural industry in developing programs that provided traceability in international markets for sustainable food.

Danielle enjoys the lifestyle Narrogin offers their young family, and in her spare time enjoys swimming, horse riding and triathlons.



## Glenn Ronan

Glenn Ronan returned to public service in late 2010 after a 12 month retirement, following several decades as a rural scientist and agricultural economist with primary industry and economic development agencies in South Australia and Victoria. This time it is in the Northern Territory with the Department of Resources as Principal Economist, located at the Arid Zone Research Institute at Alice Springs. Major interests in Glenn's career have been working with farm families and rural communities in business management and adjustment coordination, regional development, supply/value chain management and analysis in agrifood and wine, as well as public policy impacts on farm

sector performance and structural adjustment. For Glenn, his new position is a return to service in the NT primary industries after a forty year break – he worked as a 'casual' with DPI's agronomy team in the top-end for several months in 1970-71! Glenn worked with the Victorian Department of Agriculture as a beef cattle officer at Hamilton Pastoral Research Station and after post-graduate studies in agricultural economics was a district economist before joining the economics and marketing team in SA's Department of Agriculture. His involvement in the BTEC disease eradication program in the far-north of SA in the early 1980s, assessing the financial capacity of cattle stations to cope with the program and adjustment coordination work with farm families in financial difficulty in the early nineties' crisis were defining experiences, culminating in a book, A positive approach to farm adjustment. After working with SA's regional development team in the Economic Development Authority, Glenn returned to primary industries to focus on agri-food public policy challenges: rural adjustment scheme review; dairy deregulation; chicken meat industry legislation, and pig industry crisis inquiries. In 2008-09, Glenn was project catalyst in an Adelaide Thinkers in Residence program, Food and wine value chains: prosperity through collaboration. In 2010, DPI Victoria invited Glenn to return to his origins at Tallangatta, in NE Victoria, to speak at an AgFutures Forum, fifty years after he started at the local high school! In his first half year at AZRI, Glenn's projects, with others, include reviewing NT drought assistance arrangements; evaluating RD&E programs and chain mapping and analysis with a fodder-live cattle export industry network.



# 2011 APEN National Forum

## 28 to 30 November, Armidale NSW

### NextGen Applications Called For



## Fast Tracking the Next Generation of Regional Change Professionals

This project is supported by funding from the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry under "Australia's Farming Future".

The project will provide a bursary for 10 young extension professionals from regional Australia to attend the 2011 APEN National Forum (<http://apen.me/HitTargets>) and participate in the APEN Mentoring Program. This will provide young professionals with the opportunity to network with their more experienced peers and continue their person and professional development through participation in the APEN Mentoring Scheme.

Applications will be accepted from extension professionals in the 18-30 years age group. The APEN executive will select 10 applicants who best demonstrate that their involvement in the project will produce benefits for themselves, the community and the primary industries in which they work.

Contact Roe Currie, [info@apen.org.au](mailto:info@apen.org.au) for an application form. Applications close: August 26th 2011

### WHERE TO CONTACT APEN:

#### MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

**Austin McLennan** (President)  
Ph: 0488 764 592  
[austin.mclennan@nt.gov.au](mailto:austin.mclennan@nt.gov.au)

**Tracey Gianatti**  
(President-on-Leave)  
[president@apen.org.au](mailto:president@apen.org.au)

**Kate Ambrose**  
(Vice-President & WA RC)  
Ph 08 9368 3650  
[kate.ambrose@agric.wa.gov.au](mailto:kate.ambrose@agric.wa.gov.au)

**Greg Mills** (Treasurer & NSW RC)  
Ph 02 6750 6312  
[greg.mills@industry.nsw.gov.au](mailto:greg.mills@industry.nsw.gov.au)

**Sophie Folder**  
(Secretary & Tas RC)  
Ph: 0407 367 909  
[sfolder@serve-ag.com.au](mailto:sfolder@serve-ag.com.au)

**Neale Price** (Past President)  
Ph 07 3893 3358  
[nealeprice@carbongrazing.com.au](mailto:nealeprice@carbongrazing.com.au)

**Kate Charleston** (Editor)  
Ph 07 4688 1314  
[kate.charleston@deedi.qld.gov.au](mailto:kate.charleston@deedi.qld.gov.au)

**Gerry Roberts** (Editor)  
Ph 07 4650 1210  
[gerry.roberts@deedi.qld.gov.au](mailto:gerry.roberts@deedi.qld.gov.au)

#### Regional Coordinators

QUEENSLAND  
**Greg Shannon**,  
Ph: 07 4776 8200  
[gshannon@bses.com.au](mailto:gshannon@bses.com.au)

SOUTH AUSTRALIA  
**Lauren Thompson**  
Ph 08 8373 2488  
[lauren@srhs.com.au](mailto:lauren@srhs.com.au)

NEW ZEALAND/OVERSEAS  
**Ian Tarbotton**,  
Ph: 64 7 858 3750  
[ian.tarbotton@dairynz.co.nz](mailto:ian.tarbotton@dairynz.co.nz)

VICTORIA  
**Mike Weise**  
Ph: 03 5592 2477  
[mike@westvicdairy.com.au](mailto:mike@westvicdairy.com.au)

NORTHERN TERRITORY  
**Warren Hunt**  
Ph: 08 8999 2143  
[warren.hunt@nt.gov.au](mailto:warren.hunt@nt.gov.au)

#### CLUSTER COORDINATORS

Far North Queensland  
**Rosalie Anderson**  
Ph 07 4064 1197  
[rosalie.anderson@deedi.qld.gov.au](mailto:rosalie.anderson@deedi.qld.gov.au)

SE Queensland & N NSW  
**Warwick Waters**  
Ph 07 4698 7839  
[watersw@internode.on.net](mailto:watersw@internode.on.net)

Western Queensland  
**Gerry Roberts** Ph 07 4658 4410  
[gerry.roberts@deedi.qld.gov.au](mailto:gerry.roberts@deedi.qld.gov.au)

NSW, ACT, NT, SA  
**Vacant**

Tasmania  
**Sally Murfet**  
Ph 03 6257 5234  
[sally@ruralconnections.com.au](mailto:sally@ruralconnections.com.au)

Melbourne  
**Vacant**

Rutherglen (Victoria)  
**Carole Hollier** Ph 02 6030 4500  
[carole.hollier@dpi.vic.gov.au](mailto:carole.hollier@dpi.vic.gov.au)

Western Australia (Agriculture)  
**Pamela l'Anson** Ph 08 9690 2201  
[pamela.ianson@agric.wa.gov.au](mailto:pamela.ianson@agric.wa.gov.au)

Western Australia (NRM)  
**Amrit Kendrick** Ph 08 9383 4438  
[amrit@westnet.com.au](mailto:amrit@westnet.com.au)

Policy  
**Greg Leach** (Qld)  
Ph 07 3211 4404  
[gleach@seqcatchments.com.au](mailto:gleach@seqcatchments.com.au)

#### APEN SECRETARIAT

Rosemary Currie, PO Box 1239,  
WODONGA VIC 3689, AUSTRALIA  
Ph: 02 6024 5349, Fax: 02 6056 1967, [info@apen.org.au](mailto:info@apen.org.au)  
**APEN Website** [www.apen.org.au](http://www.apen.org.au)

### Guidelines and deadlines

*Submissions should be made in MS Word 6.0 with minimal formatting. A portrait photograph of the author is required. All photographs, figures and/or tables ought to be provided as separate files (preferably TIF or JPEG; photos scanned at 300 dpi). Feature articles should be around 1000 words and minor articles 500 words. The editor reserves the right to edit submitted material to meet space restrictions. Letters to the editor or general items of news of interest to the network are welcome. Articles should be submitted at least four weeks prior to publication.*

*Preference is given to articles that are grounded in some form of project or event.*

**Editing: Kate Charleston and Gerry Roberts**

**Layout: Ross Tasker, Snap Printing Wodonga, Victoria.**

**Production management: Rosemary Currie, APEN Secretariat, Wodonga, Victoria.**

*Opinions expressed in ExtensionNet are not necessarily those of the Australasia-Pacific Extension Network (Inc.) unless otherwise stated.*

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