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# **THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF THE AUSTRALIAN AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS SOCIETY: IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

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NSW 2006

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\* We would like to thank a number of people for their assistance in the preparation of this paper. In particular, the encouraging number of members who took the time and effort to reply to our long survey, particularly the person using the pink pen whoever he/she may be. In addition, we would like to thank the Past Presidents who responded to an additional survey, and the group of people who provided comments on a pilot study. We would also like to thank Andrew Arch and Vic Wright for their responses to our numerous requests for information, and David Matruglio for his assistance in processing survey responses. Finally, we gratefully acknowledge useful comments and suggestions from Christopher Locke, Roland Stanmore and Stephen Whelan. The usual caveats apply.

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# **The Political Economy of the Australian Agricultural Economics Society: Implications for Future Directions**

*Let us not be deceived. It is in ourselves that the weakness is. It is in ourselves that the real fight must take place between the Old and the New.*

William Lane

There has recently been much soul searching among US agricultural economists concerning future directions of the American Agricultural Economics Association (AAEA). In Australia, however, little direct attention has been paid to the Australian Agricultural Economics Society (AAES). Utilising a political economy-industrial organisation framework, this paper seeks to investigate issues pertaining to the structure, conduct and performance of the AAES. To that end, a survey of members was recently undertaken. This information, along with the views of past presidents of the AAES, minutes of previous annual general meetings and student feedback on the future direction of the profession, is used as the main database for the analysis. The results suggest that, while demand for the product mix of the AAES is generally strong, supply constraints are impinging on the performance of the Society. Alternative approaches to overcoming these constraints are explored.

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## **Introduction**

The external environment impinging on the agricultural economics profession has been widely studied previously by a number of the members of the AAEA (see for example, Bromley 1992, Houck 1992, Schuh 1986, Paarlberg 1992, Beattie 1991, 1992, Just and Rausser 1992). This literature has highlighted the nature of forces underlying the eventual decline of agriculture and agricultural economics associations and suggested various strategies to foster the profession's legitimacy, relevance, vitality and growth. Following Coase (1937), who argued that the very existence of the firm was the result of the authority or command features of its internal organisation, we propose that factors internal to the profession also warrant critical assessment to ensure future survival.

Accordingly, the underlying motivation of this paper is to examine the internal landscape of the AAES and to provide insights on its organisational structure. The main database for the analysis includes the AAES Constitution, minutes from all the Annual

General Meetings (AGM) since inception, and surveys of both members and Past Presidents of the Society. Fourth year students in Agricultural Economics at the University of Sydney in 1994 were also asked to reveal their views on the future of the profession, yielding a fifth source of information.

Despite the size of the database, it is necessary to underscore the limited scope of the paper. The analysis is not meant to account for the AAES's contributions to the Australian agricultural economy, nor does it seek to present a comprehensive survey of the Society's services to its members and its relationships to the agricultural economics profession as a whole. More importantly, the paper is not intended to question the good intentions, integrity and professionalism of those very dedicated members of the Society who, since 1957, have so generously given their time to this area of service. They all have made a great contribution to the Society and, we are certain, that they will continue to receive the full acknowledgment and appreciation of the entire membership and the community of economists here and abroad. Our sole aim in this investigation is to critically look at certain features of the internal organisation of the Society which are, nevertheless, of utmost importance to the resilience of the profession<sup>1</sup>.

Consistent with standard practices in applied economics, we have identified a research problem (the political-economy of the AAES) and seek to examine the dynamics of this organisation by appealing to economic theory to formulate hypotheses to explain this problem and, eventually, to develop policy alternatives aimed at enhancing the Society's performance<sup>2</sup>. We hope that the members of the AAES (including previous and current office bearers) and the Australian and New Zealand agricultural economics profession will welcome this effort and help us to further develop this research<sup>3</sup>.

The member survey was conducted in October/November 1994 and involved sending a two-part mail questionnaire to 535 members of the AAES. A reminder letter was also sent to members. In total we received 141 replies back, giving a response rate of over

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<sup>1</sup> Not responding to our AAES Member Survey, a member has found the survey questions "too philosophical" and suggested that we are "questioning its [the Society's] basic foundations" and that we may have "a hidden agenda". While rejecting the suggestion of us having a "hidden agenda" categorically, we are not ashamed or afraid of challenging status quo modes of thinking and strongly believe that, as academic researchers and ordinary members of the AAES, one of our central professional duties is to openly question the philosophical foundations of all economic, political and social entities including our own Society.

<sup>2</sup> Not responding to our Past President Survey, and returning it blank, a Past President has questioned "under what auspices" we are conducting this research. As practicing agricultural economists, the sponsor for all our research endeavours is economic theory and this one is no exception to that rule.

<sup>3</sup> Another Past President has suggested that this exercise is "hardly productive agricultural economic research". We decline to make any comments and let the members of the profession judge for themselves.

26 per cent, which was considered good given the length and complexity of the survey. At the same time, 20 Past Presidents were sent a separate (and shorter) survey to canvas their views on the Society and some of the issues that have arisen in the past. We received 13 responses to this survey (and the subsequent follow-up letter), yielding a response rate of 65 per cent. The student survey involved 53 final year BAgrEc students from the University of Sydney who responded to a question regarding the future prospects of the profession. The results from these surveys are presented throughout the analysis as a source of evidence for some of the critical issues we examine in this paper. The results of the second part of our member survey pertaining to the comparative analysis between the AAES and the AAEA are not reported here.

A political economy-industrial organisation framework is employed to achieve the main objective of the paper. Issues concerning the organisational structure, conduct and performance of the Society are detailed below. The implications of the analysis for future directions are then explored, prior to concluding comments.

### **Industrial Organisation of the AAES**

According to the Coasian view, the internal organisation of the firm is important and must be studied separately from, although in conjunction with, other micro-macroeconomic coordination mechanisms. A corollary of this proposition is that the nature of the institutions and coordination mechanisms that make up the economic environment affects the firm's choice of organisational structure. Organisational structure consists of the rules and regulations that determine which positions exist in the firm, what constitutes their formal function, who carries them out and when, the channels of communication within the firm and how participants' behaviour is to be controlled through incentives, authority and normative means.

As applied to professional societies, the theory of industrial organisation may become both fuzzy and controversial. However, the concepts of market structure, conduct and performance embody the causal hypotheses of economic theory. Theory tells us that the structure (the organisational environment) influences conduct (the behaviour of agents within that environment) and thereby affects the level of performance<sup>4</sup>. Working backwards, if we are concerned with some dimension of performance, our trinity of concepts offers us an inventory of the aspects of behaviour and the elements of structure which might determine how well a professional organisation such as the AAES performs in that dimension.

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<sup>4</sup>The theoretical framework used in this paper follows those of Caves (1972), Scherer (1980) and Tirole (1989).

If we can uncover reliable links between the elements of structure and elements of performance, we have a powerful tool for economic analysis and policy formulation that can give some guide to predicting the performance of the AAES. More importantly, if we can carefully examine some features of structure or conduct, we may find the key to designing policies to change the environment and raise the level of performance. This paper is designed to make a contribution in this area.

## Structure of the AAES

We define structure as the relatively stable features of the internal environment which influence the relationships among the forces operating within the AAES. Economic theory suggests that such features of the internal environment include the number and relative size of the service providers and service users, whether established players possess advantages which newcomers do not, whether the services of suppliers are perfect or imperfect substitutes for one another and the nature of demand for membership and how it is changing. Each of these features is considered below.

- *Concentration*

A central objective of the AAES is "to facilitate contact and discussion among those studying the problems or extending the knowledge of agricultural economics" (AAES Constitution). The Society currently has approximately 500 ordinary members, the majority of whom are academics and public servants, and have at least one degree in agricultural economics, and a small segment comprises student members. The governing body of the Society is the Council which is composed of the President, President Elect, Immediate Past President, Secretary, Treasurer, Editors of the AJAE and RMAE, Business Manager and State Councillors (of which there are 9).

To examine the level of concentration, we need a measurement tool which takes into account both the number and size distribution of suppliers of services, yet presents the result in a form simple enough to be easily interpreted. The most widely used device is the concentration ratio. Applying the concept to the AAES, we need to look more carefully at the Council of the Society and the procedures and processes of appointing/electing its members. Is there concentration of power within the Society? If so, how persistent is it?

A casual look at the minutes of the AGM of the AAES over the period 1957-1993 indicates that during the first 37 years of its life, the Society has received precisely 37 nominations for President Elect and, on each occasion President Elect has become President. It is also noteworthy that the nominations for President were usually made by the retiring President and the nominations for President Elect by President or another

member of the Council. More importantly, despite the fact that, following much debate (see Ahmadi 1992a, Edwards 1992), this procedure was constitutionally disbanded by majority vote at the 37th AGM in Sydney, the practice continues to persist<sup>5</sup>. The only difference is that a nominating committee has come up with a single candidate for both 1994 and 1995. This is hardly conducive to fostering a competitive solution.

The election of Council members follows the same procedure, the only difference being that some members manage to retain their positions for many years. There are instances of office holders maintaining the same position for over a decade. The State Councillors are similar and some have remained on the Council for a number of years, being reappointed either in the same position or in a different one.

Consistent with this practice, the positions on *ad hoc* committees have been filled from the same pool. For instance, the Nominating Committee in 1993 comprised the President Elect, one of the Editors of the AJAE and two Councillors (NSW and Queensland). In 1994, the Committee comprised the Immediate Past President, a Past President, the Immediate Past Secretary and a member. Similarly, the sub-committee to "begin work on expanding and developing the membership of the Society" (see NEWS 1994a) is composed of the immediate Past President, President, President Elect and the same member, who was also the nominator of the President Elect. Similarly, a quick look at the programs of the previous Annual Conferences provides evidence that a considerable proportion of the invited papers are solicited from Council members, including Past Presidents.

This issue received considerable attention from the members of the society responding to our survey. More specifically, some of the main weaknesses of the Society were suggested to be that it was an "Old Boys Club" (10 responses), "reluctance to change, staid" (10 responses), "too concentrated" (7 responses), "not open" (6 responses), "no young blood" (4 responses). Other members identified "clique" (5 responses) and "no young members" (4 responses) as main threats to the Society.

Thus, it appears that not only is there concentration of power in the Council, but also this concentration is persistent. This concentration must be fundamentally broken to ensure the continued welfare of the Society. We shall look at the underpinning forces giving rise to this concentration in more detail below.

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<sup>5</sup> The relevant motion reads as follows: "President Elect shall be elected each year by a postal ballot" and "that it operate from 1994" (AAES Policy File 1993).

- *Barriers to Entry*

Concentration is an important element of the AAES' organisational structure. It provides a major feature of the professional environment of the AAES. It effectively dictates the kinds of actions the AAES might take in the future. Barriers to entry comprise another major element of the environment of the AAES which should be carefully examined.

For a new member, even though he or she may have a wealth of professional and organisational skills and experience, receiving support from the respective AAES branch is the key to sit on the AAES Council. The main barrier is that the election/appointment procedures and processes at the branch level are fundamentally the same as those at the federal level and almost impossible to bypass unless one could meet the high sunk cost of building loyalty and support. It appears that for a member to be considered "active", maintaining contact with a branch is essential.

Despite this observation, a number of Past Presidents have raised concern about the fact that not many members are willing to stand for the various offices of the branches of the Society. We suggest that historical concentration and asymmetry of information may, in part, be responsible for the apathy exhibited by these members. It appears, then, that concentration and asymmetry of information constitute two important barriers to entry into the Council or the State Committees.

- *Product Differentiation*

Although not explicitly specified as an objective, the AAES has been able to differentiate its key products and services from other professional organisations or providers of research in Australia such that it now maintains the position of the main supplier of academic agricultural economics research in Australia.

A second objective of the AAES is to "publish the results of research and such other material as may be relevant to the objects of the Society" (AAES Constitution). The Society has sought to achieve this objective via the publication of the *Australian Journal of Agricultural Economics* (AJAE) and more recently the *Review of Marketing and Agricultural Economics* (RMAE). In 1989, the Society commenced publication of a newsletter entitled AAES NEWS as a means of communication between the Council and membership. Both the AJAE and RMAE are recognised amongst the highly regarded international scholarly journals and have further enhanced the standing of the AAES in the professional community. A third objective of the AAES is to "stimulate analysis and discussion of policies and programs affecting the economic welfare of



farmers and farm industries" (AAES Constitution). This objective can also be met by the publication of the AJAE and RMAE.

In addition, the Annual Conferences are the other key service of the Society to the profession and the agricultural economy. These Conferences are also used to achieve a fourth objective of the Society which is to "provide a link between agricultural economists in Australia and agricultural economists in other countries" (AAES Constitution). Overseas scholars usually present papers at the Conference and also publish their research works in the two outlets of the Society. Further, the Society organises workshops to address research and policy problems, some of the proceedings of which are published in the special issues of the RMAE. A final product of the AAES is the Directory, which has, so far, only been published twice (in 1980 and 1989).

- *Nature of Demand for Membership*

The demand facing the Society, as a professional organisation, is a segmented one. Student members are clearly most responsive to membership fees followed by those in the private sector, public sector and academics. Corporate members are clearly the least responsive to membership fee changes but are not considered in this paper. The survey of members identified a number of factors influencing their decision to renew their membership including; receipt of the Journals (70 responses), contact with others in the profession (49 responses), the prestige of being in a professional Society (30 responses), the range of activities the Society offers (30 responses), the cost of membership (24 responses), the access to research (18 responses), keeping up to date with professional developments (7 responses) and remembering or habit (8 responses)<sup>6</sup>.

There is evidence that the membership, in particular student membership, is declining. For instance, in 1985 student membership stood at 84 while in 1994 it stood at 22 (a 72 per cent decline). Although the overall demand for membership remains strong relative to that for other small international societies (such as the Canadian Agricultural Economics and Farm Management Society (CAEFMS) with only 400 members despite the larger size of the Canadian agricultural economics profession), ordinary membership which was 591 in 1985 reduced to 498 in 1994 (a 16 per cent decline).

Of these members, a significant fraction (10 per cent ) have either terminated, or are contemplating terminating, their membership for a variety of reasons. They include

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<sup>6</sup> As some respondents have indicated multiple reasons for renewing membership, the number of responses may add to over 141.

“unsatisfactory content”, “my interests lies with more extension”, “agricultural economics doesn’t inspire”, “I don’t believe that Society funds should be used to fund travel by people to IAEA meetings”, “I found the articles in the AAES Journal becoming increasingly irrelevant, a perfect example of the sophisticated pursuit of the trivial”, “very narrow, ‘public service’ like discussions rather than business oriented”, “published works becoming less relevant; cost of membership”, “low value, cost was okay, nothing received to help build my business or career”.

There are also many other concerns raised in the two surveys. A significant number of the members and some Past Presidents have noted a gap between the academic and non-academic segments of the AAES. Nearly 33 per cent of respondents (42 of them) identified the “over academic” or “too academic” nature of the Society as a main weakness or threat to the Society. This rift is also evidenced by concerns raised by many members about the two publications of the AAES and whether they address contemporary issues or whether they are sufficiently readable.

More specifically, members have indicated that the AJAE is “too theoretical” (15 responses), “lacks relevance” (9 responses); they want “more resources [Resource Economics]” (5 responses), improved “readability” (4 responses), “agribusiness issues” (4 responses), “more Australian issues” (3 responses), “less mathematical modelling” (3 responses), “improved frequency and timeliness” (2 responses). More specific comments on the AJAE are presented in Appendix 1.

With respect to the RMAE, they desire “more policy” (19 responses), “more marketing” (6 responses), “more resources” (5 responses), “more viewpoints” (4 responses), “more international” (4 responses), “more non-neo-classical” (3 responses) and “more business” (3 responses). Further comments regarding the RMAE are displayed in Appendix 2.

On the whole, however, the majority of respondents give both outlets strong support. In responding to the question of how well the AJAE achieves its objectives, 14 per cent indicated that it does it poorly, 23 per cent satisfactorily, 31 per cent well, 30 per cent very well and 2 per cent excellent. The corresponding numbers for the RMAE are 13 per cent poorly, 15 per cent satisfactorily, 34 per cent well, 30 per cent very well and 8 per cent excellent.

### *Synthesis: A Political Economy Perspective*

Dealing first with the issue of concentration, it would appear that the organisational structure of the AAES flies in the face of long established economic principles. Economists are unanimous in their opposition to protectionism in almost all its forms.

Agricultural economists in Australia and New Zealand have a long history in the fight for liberalisation of market forces, with a significant number of the members of the AAES (including some Past Presidents and other Council members) making major contributions to the literature in this area. This literature has attributed disregard for policy conclusions from economic theory by both the public and private sectors to a lack of economic education. However, a closer look at the AAES seems to suggest that organisational practices in this organisation are also inconsistent with the tenets of competition.

More specifically, we postulate that the procedures of appointing/electing office holders of the Society are compatible with a quota-type organisational model.

Appointing/electing an office holder, say a President Elect, in the absence of alternatives, is effectively similar to the allocation of a quota. In other words, since this quota is solely based on scarcity and not intrinsic value (which necessarily arises from competition for the position), it can constitute economic rent. These rents generally refer to honour and prestige derived from the Presidency or the other office positions of a professional organisation, and have existed in the Society throughout its life given the procedures outlined previously.

The important question is who has captured the rents? Given that these quotas are allocated according to historical precedent, seniority or State branch representation, it appears at first glance that those who are fortunate enough to be granted a position have captured the available rents. However, it should be stressed that those members of the Council (for example, Past Presidents) with national or international standing have produced benefits for the Society at least as much as (and perhaps even more than) they have gained. Clearly, the Society itself has been very fortunate to have been governed by these outstanding professionals. It is easy to speculate that, had quotas been allocated via, say, election by postal ballot, the outcome would have been most likely the same, given the high standing of these professionals. That is, they would have been elected by the membership at large anyway.

The central issue, however, is that even in the case of a much larger or more established agricultural economics association, such as the AAEA, the pool of outstanding candidates to fill all available offices is rather small and may get smaller over time. Further, since not all outstanding members may have a claim to the position of President, or as localism gets in the way and Councillors are appointed by State branches from a limited local pool of willing members, then political expediency may potentially become the rule of the game. If this happens, rents will be captured by office holders and the Society may lose in the long run. This may explain why the AAEA and the CAEFMS abolished this system of office allocation many decades ago.

The opportunity costs of the quota-type procedure used by the AAES warrants careful examination. There are strong indications that State branches find it hard to fill positions on State Committees. This probably stems from "lethargy of members", as identified by ten respondents to our survey. Another reason, as indicated previously, is asymmetry of information about these positions. Regardless of the cause, the eventual outcome of this "shortage" is that the Society may not be able to attract the best and most qualified professionals to serve on its State Committees and on the Federal Council, as the pool of local candidates is being slowly depleted and practically little or no competition occurs.

There may also be opportunity costs incurred by State Committee members or the Council members. That is, those State Committee or Council members who are forced to maintain office for a long time, for example, because of the absence of other candidates or in an attempt to help the branch from eventual collapse, may indeed lose and the longer their service, the higher their losses. Whether the Society will gain from the service of these individuals is uncertain, and depends on the resilience and commitment exhibited by these individuals over time.

The most significant costs are probably the increasing apathy and disinterest of the membership at large, who, given the above scenario, may experience a stagnant organisation with no clear sense of direction. A large proportion of respondents identified "lack of relevance" (16 members) "no direction" (11 members) and "smugness" (4 members) as some of the weaknesses and threats to the AAES. The type of organisational structure portrayed here appears not to be exciting or glamorous. The most it could do is to help normal office holders who behave in normal ways to complete routine tasks successfully during their term of office. The concentration of power is so central to this type of organisation that highly motivated or inspired behaviour is almost irrelevant or impossible. Managerial practices must be as close as possible to fail-safe and risk-free. This means that they cannot be dependant on the unusual or hard to obtain - which requires leadership; a fundamentally different concept.

Similarly, the relatively young members of the Society will lose the challenging opportunities that could potentially develop their leadership skills in such an environment. The Society should endeavour to make young members (including students) visible in all its activities (for example, by inviting them to present Conference papers). The membership at large, rather than State Committees or the Council, should be able to judge for themselves who has potential. This implies that the Society and its branches should be made more contestable. Just as we need more

ordinary members to provide leadership in the Society, we also need more executive members to develop the culture that will create that leadership.

Although membership is overwhelmingly supportive of the current branch structure (80 per cent for maintaining the current structure, 3 per cent against and 17 per cent not sure), and is divided roughly 50-50 on the issue of electing the Councillors nationally, we suggest that the branch structure be dismantled and that the number of State Councillors be reduced from the current 9 to 3 or 4, voted in by all the members. This would overcome the previous problems, including the "lethargy" of the branch structure and ensures that there is a much larger national pool of committed individuals to choose from for the Federal positions.

A second major barrier to entry identified previously is asymmetry of information. In the absence of State branches, assuming that they are all abolished, we argue that the NEWS be used as a vehicle to partially rectify this market failure. In other words, various organisational and managerial matters of the AAES, including positions available on the Council, can be formally announced in the quarterly issues of the newsletter of the Society. Similarly, the viewpoint section of the NEWS could be more actively used by members to air various controversial professional issues.

Another issue relates to the differentiation between the AJAE and RMAE. It is imperative that the objectives for each of the Journals be clearly explained to members - a large proportion of respondents to the survey were unaware of them. It is also apparent that the RMAE is the key vehicle of communication to the non-academic members of the Society. To this end, it is crucial that the editorial policy of the RMAE reflect this, increasing the focus on contemporary policy issues. Changing the RMAE to a Choices type magazine, as suggested by a respondent, may also warrant consideration. The AJAE should remain the key academic outlet for the Society, and while its articles should become more relevant and readable, the high level of rigour in this Journal should never diminish. It is also important to continue to ensure the timely delivery of both publications.

These suggestions are consistent with the desires of the overwhelming majority of respondents. Of those who answered a question pertaining to this issue, eighty per cent of respondents (70 responses) thought it desirable to have the AJAE and RMAE as the publications of the Society. Twenty per cent (17 responses) did not share this view. The two diverging views also made some specific comments (see Appendix 3).

With respect to product differentiation, three additional issues deserve consideration; the first is that of agribusiness which could have been accommodated by the AAES;

however, the opportunity was lost in 1989 when a new professional organisation entitled the Agribusiness Association of Australia and New Zealand (AAANZ) and subsequently a new journal entitled "Australasian Agribusiness Review" (AAR) came into being. The AAANZ has a membership close to 500, a majority of whom are non-academic agribusiness people. The AAR contains research results which could have been readily published in the RMAE. Thus, it appears that the AAR is now used by agribusiness people and firms as a substitute for the AJAE and RMAE. Whether the AAANZ could potentially become a substitute for the AAES is yet unclear and depends on the future strategies of the two organisations with respect to the growing agribusiness sector.

A second issue is that of a name change for the AAES. This issue was raised by Trewin (1992) and a motion to change the name of the Conference to the Australian Agricultural and Resource Economics Conference was defeated in the 1993 AGM in Sydney. Our survey indicates that the majority of respondents are still not convinced that a name change is necessary (80 members want to keep the same name and 44 wish to change it to the Australian Agricultural and Resource Economics Society). This issue, however, deserves further attention as it assists the Society in further differentiating itself and, at the same time, broadening its scope. Failure to adequately address this issue may potentially see a loss of members interested in resource economics to a new society in a similar way to those members interested in agribusiness.

A third issue is that of the Australian Institute of Agricultural Science (AIAS) and how to deal with competency standards developed by the AIAS (see Sturgess 1993, NEWS 1994b). A Past President has suggested that the Society needs "to keep a watch over the AIAS to ensure they don't encroach on our turf". As noted by Sturgess (1993), the AAES has in the past worked with the AIAS to achieve its fifth objective; namely, "to co-operate with scientific and other organisations and institutions engaged in similar or related activities in Australia" (AAES Constitution). However, it appears that the issue of competency standards has remained unresolved and may potentially damage the cooperation between the two professional organisations. Nine members of the Society have identified the AIAS issue as a main threat to the Society and another three suggested competency standards as a main threat.

The final structural feature of the AAES, the nature of demand for membership, will be further discussed below.

## Conduct of the AAES

Having mapped the key elements of the structural environment of the AAES, we can now look at the way in which these elements induce the Society to behave. We define conduct as the behaviour in setting membership fees, demand-inducing policies and promotion, setting and controlling the quality of AAES products and services, and policies aimed at coercive behaviour. These features of AAES conduct are presented below.

### • *Membership Fees*

Given the segmented nature of the demand for membership, the Society uses a discriminatory approach to pricing membership. Student members, for example, pay one half of that paid by ordinary members. Although the Society is a non-profit organisation, this is an efficient pricing policy, as it is aimed at enhancing the overall demand for membership.

Table 1 displays membership fees for the AAES and those for the AAEA and CAEFMS over the period 1985 - 1994.

TABLE 1  
*Membership Fees for Agricultural Economics Associations, 1985-1994.*

Year	AAES	AAEA	CAEFMS
	(A\$)	(US\$)	(Can\$)
1994	75	75	45
1993	65	75	45
1992	55	60	45
1991	55	60	45
1990	38	45	35
1989	36	45	30
1988	36	45	30
1987	36	45	30
1986	36	45	30
1985	36	45	25

According to this table, the fees for the three professional organisations are generally comparable from 1985 to 1990. In 1991, the AAES fee increased by 50 per cent, while those for the AAEA and CAEFMS went up by 33 per cent. This difference is probably due to the fact that in 1991 the Society took up the publication of the RMAE which used to be published and supported by the NSW Department of Agriculture and Fisheries. However, it is difficult to justify the 45 per cent fee increase over the period 1992 to 1994, as opposed to 25 per cent for the AAEA and 0 per cent for the CAEFMS.

The data reported in Table 1 imply that the unit cost of operation for the AAES has consistently been higher than that for the CAEFMS. The CAEFMS imposes page charges for the articles published in its Journal, thus reducing the membership fees. We suggest that the Society consider this option as an efficient mechanism to keep membership fees low and to end the current cross-subsidisation between members. The AJAE and RMAE could well become self-supporting if page charges were to be introduced. It may also be wise for the Society to examine its overall cost structure and to design alternative approaches to minimising its expenditure. A significant number of members surveyed (24) identified the membership fee as a main factor influencing their decision to renew their membership. Thus, the upward trends in the AAES fees appear to be inconsistent with their demand response and, if not arrested, may result in the loss of these members.

- *Demand-inducing Policies and Promotion*

Generally speaking, membership fee structure (price discrimination) is the central mechanism used by the Society to maintain or enhance demand for membership. However, despite this structure, both student and ordinary memberships are declining. Twenty respondents identified declining membership as a main threat to the Society. Following some initial discussion at the AGM in 1994, the Society appears to be taking this matter more seriously in that a sub-committee has been formed to "begin to work on a range of issues related to expanding and developing the membership of the Society" (NEWS 1994a). This issue is of utmost importance, particularly in view of the fact that a newly established professional organisation such as the AAANZ has succeeded in attracting over 500 members. Whether the AAANZ has gained members at the expense of the AAES is unclear. However, the emergence of this new association implies that the Society should actively develop demand-inducing schemes to maintain or enhance membership.

A key message from the member survey and in particular the student survey is that the Society and the profession should foster relevance. Eighteen respondents have



identified irrelevance as a main threat to the AAES. Another sixteen have identified lack of relevance as a main weakness of the AAES. Given that there are three broad groups of members - academic, public and private - the Society has to ensure that the products and services it offers have relevance to each of the groups as well as to other potential members. At present, it appears that there is a clear bias toward the academic and public members of the Society. Thirty three respondents identified the over-academic nature of the Society as one of its main weaknesses. This creates ill-feeling within the Society and also curtails demand from private members. The central vehicles for reaching the private members seem to be the RMAE and the Annual Conferences. As such, their relevance and vitality should be enhanced.

A promising segment in which demand for membership could be increased is that of student membership. We argue that this is the responsibility of the academic members of the Society, although the Council should also assist in making the student population more aware of the Society and its activities and services, and also more aware of the undergraduate prizes that are available. Both the student survey and casual discussions with the undergraduate students at the University of Sydney indicate a very low level of awareness of the Society in general and even a lack of awareness that the Society publishes the AJAE and RMAE. To partially rectify this problem, we suggest that the Society launch a poster promoting its objectives and activities and undergraduate and postgraduate (Masters and PhD research) awards and benefits of membership across Australia and New Zealand and perhaps overseas. Another approach is for the Departments of Agricultural Economics (or other relevant degrees) to pay membership fees for top undergraduate students in each year of their degree program for only one year and to encourage them to continue their membership from their own funds subsequently. Certificates of membership could be presented by the President to the students in formal ceremonies organised by the Departments to enhance the profile of the Society.

Another objective (sixth) of the AAES is "to promote the profession of agricultural economics in Australia and to foster, in all sectors of the economy, interest in and understanding of the economic problems of agriculture" (AAES Constitution). However, other than a number of agreements with other sister societies (for example, the AAEA), no other formal mechanisms exist for the Society to promote itself and its publications. This lack of public profile was identified by a Past President as an important issue faced by the Society (Sturgess 1992). However, it appears that not much was done to address it. Respondents to our member survey have provided very many insightful ideas to rectify this problem, the entire set of which is presented in Appendix 4. We hope that the sub-committee in charge of promotion will carefully

consider these suggestions and formulate potent promotion strategies for the Society to pursue. In the meantime, we would also like to make a number of suggestions pertaining to this issue.

In responding to our survey, a Past President noted that in the early 1970s the ABARE Outlook Conferences took the place of the AAES Annual Conferences as an important meeting place for people concerned with the economic problems of the farm sector. The AAES may be able to win back some of these people by having the ABARE allocate time for the President of the Society (or his/her nominee) to speak to the large audience attending the Outlook Conference every year. In addition, the Society should have a table and display promoting its publications and other services. New literature including posters, fliers and brochures promoting the Society and Annual Conference should also be distributed at this table.

The same approach could be applied to the AAANZ Annual Conferences on a reciprocal basis. More importantly, however, the AAES should organise joint workshops and even Conferences with the AAANZ. One page advertisements highlighting the objectives and activities of the Society should also be published in the AAR. More generally, workshops and conferences should be arranged jointly with other professional organisations (for example, the Economics Society and Econometrics Society) with other providers of research (for example, CSIRO, ABARE, Research and Development Corporations, State Departments of Agriculture, private companies) and with academic institutions on specific topics of policy or research interest.

It may also be fitting to utilise public media to enhance the profile of the AAES. While not supporting the idea of "issuing press releases" by the Society (suggested by a respondent), we do believe that, as professional economists and concerned citizens, members of the Society including Council members should not shy away from entertaining public debate (for example, "on Nightline" as suggested by another respondent) on various issues of importance to the Australian economy. In fact, this is probably the most effective way to meet the promotional goals of the AAES. While identifying their affiliation with the AAES, these members do not necessarily express the overall views of the Society in their debates or interviews; they will, however, promote the public profile of the AAES and most certainly themselves.

- *Quality Control*

The seventh and final objective of the AAES is "to encourage the study of agricultural economics in Australia, and to promote high standards of accomplishment in research, teaching and extension in this field" (AAES Constitution). Matters of quality control and enhancement are administered by the Council. For instance, the Editors of the AJAE and RMAE through refereeing procedures ensure that articles of high quality are published.

Outstanding research (AJAE and RMAE articles and PhD and Masters research) and undergraduate student performance is recognised through a set of awards. It appears, however, that outstanding "teaching and extension" in agricultural economics are not equally recognised. This is a serious anomaly which needs to be addressed by the Society. A motion to introduce a teaching award was defeated in the 37th Annual Conference in Sydney (see Ahmadi 1992b for justification for introducing such an award). Outstanding teaching and extension awards as well as best book review or best referee awards are worth considering seriously.

We suggest that enhancing the quality of various products and services of the Society may be the most effective tool for curtailing the supply of potential rivals or rival products (say, another new society such as the AAANZ or new journal such as the AAR). To that end, we should be prepared to reward those members of the Society with an ability to transform agricultural economics knowledge into teaching or extension as well as others with abilities to grasp or transform this knowledge into research reports or publications.

- *Coercive Behaviour*

Any types of conduct patterns that worsen the structural position of some rivals can be called coercive. Although theoretically possible, coercive behaviour does not appear to apply to the AAES, but the Society may itself be subject to coercive behaviour by rival societies. It is important to note that coercion can occur without the coercer actually having any vicious intentions.

The issue of competency standards may be consistent with this definition and, as such, should be taken very seriously. The likely outcome of such standards may be more monopoly and possibly other distortions (see Sturgess 1993). We suggest that a close look be taken at the issue of professional standards, both to hinder the AIAS from imposing these standards on the Society, and also to satisfy member concern that the

AAES take some role in the establishment and maintenance of professional standards within our discipline.

- *Synthesis*

The preceding observations fail to provide compelling evidence that the conduct of the AAES is consistent with the changing environment around it. In particular, we highlighted a number of concerns including the recent membership fee increases, lack of effective demand-enhancing schemes and absence of recognition for excellence in teaching and extension. In addition, the Society appears to be under pressure to adopt AIAS competency standards. This conclusion implies that the AAES is reacting to this complex environment rather passively, and has yet to develop potent strategies to enhance future vitality and growth.

### **Performance of the AAES**

Defining performance as the appraisal of how much the results of the Society's behaviour deviate from the best possible contribution it could make to achieving full employment of available professional resources, efficiency in using these resources, progressiveness and equity, we are now able to examine the impact of AAES structure and conduct on performance. Each of these criteria is considered below.

- *Full Employment*

Full employment of resources lies at the heart of all economic analyses, including this one. The underlying rationale is that we waste resources even more by leaving them idle than by using them inefficiently. We might ask whether a concentrated environment with high entry barriers and asymmetric information would contribute more to maintaining or enhancing a high and stable level of employment of professional resources. We have already ventured some hypotheses on this question.

As indicated previously, Council and other office positions of the AAES have been captured by a small group of members, some of whom have held office for a significant number of years. Regardless of whether this stems from rent-seeking behaviour or lack of interest, we argue that it has resulted in underemployment or unemployment of professional resources in the Society.

To partially offset this problem, we suggest that the Society liberalise all its offices and advertise all the available positions in the NEWS. Further, the Nominating Committee should play an active role in encouraging nominations from members. The same approach should also be applied to invited Conference papers. That is, all members

should be able to compete for the limited pool of invited papers for Annual Conferences; an approach that is perfectly inconsistent with the past and current practices of the Society<sup>7</sup>.

- *Efficiency*

The foremost aspect of efficiency is how resources are allocated among the various types of products and services produced by the Society. This is, in effect, *the* economic problem of the AAES. The test comes in the satisfaction which resources produce - as measured by the returns which they earn - when used in various ways. For instance, if State branches were dismantled and replaced by *ad hoc* federal committees comprising a cross section of representative members aiming at a specific task (say, promotion), the worth to members of the extra output of *ad hoc* federal committees is likely to exceed the value of the foregone State branches.

The inefficient use of resources by the Society can take a number of other forms. We do not want a State branch to be inefficiently small so that, for instance, the size of the audience attending its meetings is smaller than the size of the State Committee. We do not want the Society to carry a large margin of excess capacity at times when other competing societies (say, AAANZ) are able to fully utilise their professional resources. Finally, we do not want inefficiency to burden members with membership fees higher than the minimum for the products and services it produces.

These flaws require detailed cost data to quantify, which may be available in the Business Office of the Society. We encourage the Society to undertake a study on the cost of products and services it provides. This study may help settle issues of concern such as the future of the RMAE as raised by a couple of Past Presidents. It could also identify areas where expenditures could be reduced so that some funds are used for promotion, a concern raised by another Past President.

- *Progressiveness*

Progressiveness refers to whether the Society is adding to its stock of professional resources, raising the quality and variety of products and services which it makes available, and improving the methods with which it manages itself. The publication of the NEWS and Directory along with fully sponsoring the RMAE, among others, provide evidence that the Society has attempted to meet this objective. However, progressiveness also implies that the Society should not be conservative in approach and unreceptive to new ideas, especially before they have been completely tested.

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<sup>7</sup> In a letter to the President, followed by a number of reminders, we offered to present this paper as an invited paper. To our great disappointment, we did not receive any formal response.

We do not have to extensively search for evidence to suggest that the Society may indeed be reluctant to improve the methods with which it manages itself. The case in point is, of course, the method of election of President Elect which, as indicated previously, was changed in 1993. To date, however, no postal ballots have been mailed to members seemingly because no more than one nomination has been made in 1994 and 1995. As a matter of fact, even the process for the operation of the identification, screening and election of candidates for President Elect is not yet part of the AAES Constitution (NEWS 1994c).

- *Equity*

The argument might be made that concentration of office holders of the AAES has had a detrimental impact on the distribution of professional opportunities in the Society. That is, those members who could potentially make a contribution have been deprived of the chance. This has resulted in an "old boys club" perception and apathy among these members. Obviously, this environment cannot persist and should change. Economists usually leave policy toward equity to the field of taxation. In a professional Society such as ours, however, we favour liberalisation as the optimal policy to address this issue.

- *Synthesis*

It appears that the performance of the Society falls short of satisfying the normative criteria (full employment, efficiency, progressiveness and equity) suggested by economic theory. As it is a difficult task to comprehensively evaluate the achievements of the Society relative to its objectives as presented in the AAES Constitution, we appeal to our member survey to canvas their views on this important issue. Of those who responded to the question of "How well does the Society achieve its objectives?", 11 per cent indicated that it does it poorly, 39 per cent satisfactorily, 27 per cent well, 21 per cent very well and only 2 per cent excellent. This implies that there is a large scope to improve on the Society's performance.

### Implications for Future Directions

The single most important conclusion emerging from this analysis is that a number of self-imposed supply constraints are impinging upon the performance of the Society. Various strategies were suggested to fundamentally alter the internal landscape of the AAES. We now attempt to highlight the main implications of the study for future directions.

A key implication is that the conditions for contestability are hardly present in the Society. To establish these conditions, we suggest that the election process for President Elect which was initiated in 1993 be expanded to include all State Councillors. This implies that the Councillors should be voted in nationally. The main purpose of this suggestion is to eliminate the obstacles to contestability based on full-employment, efficiency, progressiveness and equity criteria. The Society will clearly benefit from having a pool of potential candidates who can respond to professional service opportunities by entering the national competition.

Although survey respondents have indicated otherwise, we also suggest that all State branches be dismantled and replaced by national short-term committees to take up specific duties. Obviously local seminars or workshops can still be organised for members (possibly co-ordinated by universities, Departments of Agriculture or private companies). One purpose for such a suggestion is to further enhance the degree of contestability and to fully liberalise the AAES. Another purpose is to rotate positions and let members gain the experience of professional service early in their career.

Another main barrier to entry was identified as asymmetry of information. An effective vehicle to correct this market failure is the AAES NEWS. All positions available on the Council and committees to replace State branches should be advertised in the NEWS and nominations invited. We do not necessarily propose that all positions on the Council be elected. In fact, we suggest that all other officers including Secretary, Treasurer, Business Manager, Editors of the AJAE and the RMAE be appointed by the Council for a period of three years. The main aim of this suggestion is to foster efficiency and professionalism and to maintain continuity of service to the Society.

The key products and services of the Society are the AJAE, RMAE and Annual Conferences. Membership appears to be generally satisfied with these as indicated in our survey. However, whether these are the optimal product mix is unclear. In particular, the issue of product differentiation between the two publications warrants further consideration. The second part of our member survey (yet to be reported) is meant to pursue this issue further and may prove useful in settling the apparent debate in the Society pertaining to the two publication policy.

The declining demand for membership is another highly critical issue. The Society should reposition itself in the competitive market for professional associations. Price and quality appear to be important factors, but other considerations such as relevance, timeliness and readability of publications, and the presence of substitute societies and products are also beginning to prove significant. In this environment, the Society has substantial freedom of choice. The issue of promotion and public profile should be

addressed in this context. Similarly, the issues of competency standards and the emergence of new societies such as the AAANZ and new products such as the AAR should be tackled within this framework. This implies that the Society should give some thought to the modernisation of its Constitution. A number of the objectives within the Constitution appear to be outdated and fail to reflect the complexities of the Australian agricultural economy and the Australian agricultural economics profession. It may well be time to upgrade the Society's objectives.

Finally, with respect to apathy and disinterest of members, we suggest that membership may occasionally require a burst of energy. We need to motivate and inspire members; not by pushing them in the right direction as control mechanisms do but by satisfying their basic professional needs for achievement, a sense of belonging, recognition, self-esteem, a feeling of control over their life and the ability to live up to their ideals. Such feelings touch us deeply and elicit a powerful response. This applies, in particular, to younger professionals and students. The students in our survey were unanimously optimistic about the continuation of their discipline. Many identified a declining agricultural sector as of concern to the future strength of the discipline; however, many others saw an optimistic side to this decline as farmers and agribusiness became more concerned with the economic dimension of their business in the face of growing international competition and domestic cost pressures. It is this optimism which should be focused on in any future recruitments of students to the Society.

### Concluding Comments

As economists, we advocate competition because it decentralises and disperses power. Under competition, the resource allocation and income distribution problem is solved through the market and not through the conscious exercise of power by big players or government hands. Limiting this power is one of the oldest and most fundamental goals in the liberal ideology. More importantly, when the no-barriers-to-entry condition of competition is satisfied, individuals are free to choose limited only by their own talent and skill. The agenda we have attempted to develop here seeks to foster competition in a professional economic organisation. While seemingly inconsistent with the current structure of the AAES, it is most certainly consistent with the ideals of all members. Our hope is that this agenda will prove useful in the Society's soul searching for future directions.



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## Appendix 1

### AJAE Survey Response

- Disappointed not to see more ABARE involvement.
- In the past, it has often been late.
- It attempts to be too good and therefore culls 'non perfect' articles which could advance the profession.
- Book reviews are usually very good. Need to retain contributions from older players in the profession who tend to drop out in their 50 plus.
- Both the AJAE and the RMAE suffer from difficulty in having papers that address "contemporary issues" published in a timely fashion.
- I think the main problem is just that agriculture is too small a pool from which to draw papers.
- Timeliness
- Should publish original research
- Could be more current in its papers, timing etc.
- Can there be a balance between academic theorising and model development with papers that agricultural economists outside Universities might find of interest.
- A bit high brow for me.
- Its quality is getting better.
- Too much emphasis on abstract mathematical economics. Whatever happened to agriculture?
- Good academic publication.
- It's very mathematical but it has high standards.
- A well recognised journal not fully supported by members.
- Better material than the American journal and others.
- Is changing with the time - could be a little more rapid, but you don't want to lose readership.
- Provide a forum for the communication of more advanced research.
- Again, objectives are not immediately apparent but meets objectives of providing a forum for academics and a high level of intellectual debate and study.
- Not sure on objectives but I guess they are OK.
- Black boxes talking to black boxes.
- There is no scope for less formal publications which maintain interest in the activities of the Society.
- Keep relevance of contents to members in mind.
- AJAE used to be very good for its more practical orientation than say the JAE. Presently looking its way.
- Too dense. Clearly directed only at econometricians.
- I don't know what they are but the substance of the activity is not reflected in its name.
- It is good to have some things published for posterity.
- I am no fan of the AJAE. The journal is neither fish nor foul with truly leading papers, of which there are few, will always go to more prestigious journals. The AJAE will get the dregs, albeit dressed up with mathematics.
- Have not been a member for a while, but tended not to read the AJAE. The material must be readable for busy people and say up front why has this paper been written.
- Is communication meant to be with other agricultural economists or with the human race?

## Appendix 2

### RMAE Survey Response

- Disappointed not to see more ABARE involvement.
- Good to get young contributors from conference contributed papers.
- The RMAE appears to be becoming more academic and theoretical in its flavour.
- Should be reviews of major areas of interest.
- Not required therefore second rate papers.
- Attempts to meet industry requirements.
- Needs to be less theoretical.
- Could be more topical and readable. Improve the layout, the layout before 1983 was much better
- Much improved in recent years, whilst still maintaining its traditions.
- Could improve. Don't want too much similarity with AJAE.
- Provides a forum to communicate research with application orientation and for good reviews.
- Not sufficiently different from AJAE.
- Lacks proper focus - 'dustbin' for rejected articles.
- From recent experience it took one year to review an article, which is too long and doesn't enthruse one to publish.
- The last couple of issues have been very good.
- I feel the RMAE is more accessible to a more general readership - and so it should be.
- It's no wonder that companies such as Elders are producing their own magazines and commissioning articles from agricultural economists. It is no wonder the level of corporate sponsorship is abysmally low. The review period is terrible and a poor reflection on the Society
- Forum section is a good idea.
- One practical, one academic statistical.
- Hard to understand it when it is at such a high level. If as an economist I find it hard, non economists will similarly find it difficult and even worse.
- In my work, I find RMAE a far more useful publication than AJAE. Its value would be diminished, however, if it became an overflow for AJAE.

### Appendix 3

#### Two Publication Policy Survey Response

- My view is that there is a stronger case for retention of the RMAE than the AJAE. The Australian profession does not have sufficient people in its ranks capable of generating the "cutting edge" material the AJAE imagines it is providing. The vast majority of material in the AJAE is irrelevant to the Australian membership.
- One publication should be able to reflect Society contribution to the world at large.
- I could survive with only the RMAE.
- If you only have one then the junk of the AJAE would be all that we get and membership will really be questionable.
- It can aim at 2 different readerships ie. the RMAE should be relevant to everyone and concentrate on policy issues while AJAE can be for the more theoretically minded individuals.
- RMAE should not be at the expense of AJAE.
- Provided one can be more academic in orientation and the other more applied (ie RMAE).
- I am an American and see this as an AAES strength relative to AAEA.
- Bit difficult to distinguish between the 2 perhaps - a stronger identity for RMAE would be useful making it more industry based.
- May make sense to amalgamate them unless they are differentiated more than is currently the case
- Provided their respective roles are more clearly defined. Need for both outlets.
- More effective to have them as a single publication. Maybe AAES should look at the worth of a Journal such as the AIAS Agricultural Science.
- Perhaps one could be more an academic journal and one a practical journal with less rigorous guidelines.
- The RMAE should have a clear agenda, not an overflow for AJAE. Not a journal of last resort.
- It appears that the prime discriminating factor between the 2 journals is the empirical content of the article. I question the appropriateness of this distinction.

## Appendix 4

### Member Suggestions to Enhance Demand

#### Relevance:

- By providing forums for consideration of current issues.
- More good meetings on topical subjects with top speakers.
- Increase relevance of professional development - support workshops and conferences.
- Be more productive in terms of promoting member interests.
- Hold workshops of relevance to non-econometric types.
- Increase relevance of published works to management of businesses.
- Increase the appeal to practicing agricultural economists as opposed to academics.
- Become relevant to society and current developments.
- Give it a more practical focus rather than the current statistical trend.
- Make it more relevant to the real world.
- Make the journal material more accessible to the average person, both physically and especially intellectually
- Increase practical bias of journals and meetings. Less esoteric academia.
- Greater accessibility. More emphasis on current issues less emphasis on mathematical models.
- Make research more relevant to industry (less esoteric). Make activities more topical and relevant.
- By encouraging non-classical economics contribution in journals and conferences.
- Broaden the scope of agricultural economics - stop sneering at the more applied workers. Write readable articles in your journals.
- In the circles I mix - mainly farm management and environmental economics - Society is not well known, probably due to its city focus.
- Maybe offer benefits to people not agricultural economists themselves but involved in agriculture.
- Perhaps the annual conference is now too cluttered. Specialised focus, but this does create difficulties in a voluntary organisation.
- Better address needs of members - focus.
- Become more accessible to practitioners rather than simply academics.
- Apart from the annual conference, provide something that a non-academic staffer has some interest in.
- Make it more relevant to business community and those of the profession in private industry.
- Increase relevance. Updating the knowledge of agricultural economists in the workforce.
- Ensure activities and papers are practical and relevant to current and future issues and avoid status seeking wanks.
- Relevance.
- Making AAES more relevant to membership. Encourage debate/contributions to contemporary issues through RMAE.
- The journal has to become more relevant and the conferences have to be more relevant.
- Get relevant with issues, rather than rewarding minuscule advances in techniques.
- RMAE should be more farm problem based. Farmer audience would increase.
- Publish a new journal like Choices of AAEA. Lift the profile of the Society.

#### Promotion:

- Personal contact - more publicity for conference. More publicity at economics conferences and ABARE Outlook.
- More promotional publications.
- Marketing and public relations.
- Need more publicity.
- Communication with prospective members stressing role of AAES.
- Promote its activities - become more involved at a regional level in economic forums and debate.
- Increase profile of AAES.
- We need to raise the public media profile of the AAES. Do the media ever approach the AAES for comment on issues, or do politicians ever seek advice from the AAES? A start would be for the AAES to start issuing press releases commenting on topical issues in agriculture and the environment.
- Lift the public profile in media. Publish to a broader audience. Sponsor public debates on issues. Actively encourage members to enlist colleagues - become evangelistic.
- Better promotion.
- By increasing profile at its major activities.
- Push benefits. Membership drive.
- Promotion is the role of State branches and is not an issue for me in Victoria.
- Appropriate publicity, searching out special interests of potential members.

- Have Federal council more politically active ie lobby governments on agricultural economics issues, raise profile.
- Conduct annual awareness drives at major institutions at a branch level ie mail outs etc. Sponsor branch teams in corporate sporting events (eg marathons, fun runs etc.). Provide society goods such as t-shirts, ties, etc. and devise a better logo (competition?).
- Promotion and marketing.

#### **Broaden Scope (Include Resources):**

- Appeal. Include natural resource issues and management and policy issues.
- Broaden to include resource economics.
- Greater emphasis of resource economics may attract more members. Broaden appeal - maybe combine with mining as ABARE has done.
- Make it more proactive in matters relating to the profession and in management of Australian resources.
- Expand scope away from traditional focus of agriculture - in fact I think that this is already happening, judging by content of conference papers.
- Make it less egalitarian and open to broader disciplines. Changing the name to include resources.
- Name change ie branding refocus - include wider scope of agribusiness.
- I think the time is to broaden scope of AAES. Its areas of resource economics, environmental economics, regional development, trade.
- Perhaps by broadening the areas of interest/ involvement, but don't lose focus.
- Raise its profile by adopting or recommending particular stands on issues within the areas where AAES member disciplines could legitimately be expected to have a valid contribution eg. landcare, environmental issues affecting the Australian agricultural sector.
- Expand activities in agricultural resources, environmental health and appeal more to current issues.
- Personal mail invitations to past members and new graduates.

#### **Student Membership:**

- Be in tune with the needs of new graduates.
- Greater targeting of undergraduates and provision of a newsletter indicating career changes.
- Talk to students. When I was a student I didn't know anything about it. Actually, I hope the venues for contact between members improve because I am beginning to doubt whether being a member is worthwhile.
- Student section activities at AAES conferences.
- Target University students.
- More aggressive recruiting of students.
- Student membership gratis one year at graduation.
- You need to make the society appeal to younger members. Especially university students and graduates.
- Promote the association amongst students and encourage them to join.
- Use the alumni associations of the universities with agricultural science and agricultural economics degrees to trace past graduates, and send them information on Society. This should focus on the range of topics covered and quality of journals. Same could be done with economics graduates and members of the Australian Economics Society and subscribers to related international journals.
- Recruitment drives at end of university degree.
- Encourage membership for students at university.
- Think of innovative ways to keep post graduates looking to AAES for relevant articles, publications and perhaps seminars.

#### **State Branches More Active:**

- Increase its activities. Various state branches organise more meetings, social activities, more interaction between members.
- Encouragement to the local branches to provide more in the way of activities - professional and social. Its at local level that membership pressure is best exerted.
- More active state branches.
- Have dynamic branches producing provocative meetings.
- Strong journals, active meetings.
- There needs to be an increased number of branch meetings which discuss significant policy issues. Media could be invited. A press release should be issued with each journal to advertise the profession.
- More active branches which recognise the importance of social activities.
- By publishing good journals and organising good seminars and conferences.
- More active branches with relevant activities.

**Economic Suggestions:**

- Decrease the cost. Increase the quality of journals and the annual conference.
- Keep membership fees low.
- Must produce tangible incentives. Show the value of being a member - is a professional member better off than a professional non-member. This should be shown clearly.
- Basically there are two issues to consider. Imperfect knowledge - do potential members know the AAES, its role, values etc. And 2, quality - is value offered.
- Keep annual fee low or reduce it.
- Reduce Fees

**Change Current Mentality:**

- Make sure all professional members are contacted.
- By relating to the interest and social positions of potential members more closely. May be seen as a boys club with narrow, dry ideas.
- Missing out on young ones - it's an old persons club - sales push needed here.
- Identify where and why membership is falling off - if its the younger ones not coming through, perhaps they see the AAES as being too traditional and staid. It may be because the AAES is not relevant to the needs of (potential) members. Does the society address the needs of all potential members?
- Get rid of the cliques and cliches.

**Others:**

- Involvement in job placement like AAEA. Should organise mini conferences on various topics throughout the year. Prizes to teachers, researchers, journalists and public figures for contribution to agricultural economics.
- The only untapped market is in private industry. Attracting these people might require a business management journal and special sections at the annual conference.
- Private sector recruitment.
- I don't think increasing demand is a worthy aim per se. If membership is shrinking AAES has the choice of a smaller organisation with a tight focus or growing but maintaining the focus as I have suggested. I would favour the latter.
- Make sub-section of Economics Society.
- External attractions of members beyond academics and public servants.
- Perhaps reach out to non traditional audience through publications of a Choices type magazine.
- Increase the dissemination of ideas. Have noticeboard on e-mail. Issue more newsletters or even a magazine rather than just journals.
- Less formal and more topical publications on a more regular basis ie monthly.

**Hard to Categorise:**

- Fly buys!!!
- Free steak knives.
- Talk to a marketing consultant, not me.