

# Voices in ALMS

Number 9, December 2008

## Your e-newsletter from the Australian Landcare Management System Group

### Voices in ALMS

*Voices in ALMS* is produced by the Australian Landcare Management Group. For information about the ALM Group and ALMS go to the ALMS [website](#)

### THANKS TO OUR SUPPORTERS

On behalf of the ALM Group, thanks to all who have worked with us this year. In particular we acknowledge landholders who have been prepared to give it a go, to move beyond the conventional 'wisdom' that it is too hard. Governments, industry organisations and the community at large owe these rural leaders their respect and support.

### CHRISTMAS WISHES

Best wishes for Christmas and for 2009 from the ALM Group to all of our readers.

### MEMBERS MEET ONLINE

Don't forget the ALM online forum. You can talk with other ALM Group members, no matter where they are! Just log in and "chat" to ALMS members across Australia.

Swap notes on experiences with EMS; ask questions of ALM Group management; alert each other to upcoming events or amazing things you have just heard about; and get benefit from the fact that we are all on

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### Highlight for 2008

The highlight for 2008 is that extensive surveys of participating landholders clearly show that they reckon preparing an ALM Plan for their property using the *myEMS* software is not difficult, is highly useful and improves their understanding of natural resource management.

Landholders express a high level of satisfaction with the design of ALMS and with our software and training package. For example, landholders in the Hunter and Central Rivers Region of NSW commented:

*'This is the next step in NRM'; 'Pleased about integrating environment and production'; 'We need to move on from our former negative experience with cattle-care'; 'It is good that the software is easy to use and applies whole-of-farm across industries'; and 'It is vital the program gains wide recognition with industry groups and major food producers and supermarkets'*

Understandably it is not all perfect and participants are quick to point out how the software could be improved and how they need more support and recognition.

The positive assessments from surveys were reinforced mid-year when the ALM Group received the South Australian *FarmBis* Merit Award for training excellence in the category of Natural Resources Management.

### Challenge for 2009

The challenge for 2009 is to maintain and improve support for our growing but still small membership base. Why this is a challenge is not too hard to

this journey together.

If you get stuck, or just feel that somehow you are missing out on something important, contact Bruce at (08) 8538 705  
bruce@clearconnections.com.au

### **ALMS BOARD**

ALMS board members are:

John Drinan (Chair)  
Jock Douglas (Inaugural Chair)  
Darren Marshall  
Tony Gleeson (CEO)  
Bruce Munday  
Geoff Penton  
Nelson Quinn

### **ABOUT THIS NEWSLETTER**

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grasp. No emerging organisation can effectively operate and grow on revenues from membership services alone and this is particularly hard where the costs of producing public goods and of managing externalities cannot be fully captured by individual land managers.

ALMS is Australia's unique whole-of-farm, catchment-linked, externally audited environmental management system that complies with internationally recognised management standards. It provides a basis for recognition from the market place, as is happening for wool, and from the public, as is happening through a small number of NRM Boards/catchment management authorities. We need to use and improve this system for environmental improvement and recognition. Good environmental managers and those wishing to improve need rewards. It is that simple!

### **Reflections from Syria**

*ALM GROUP CEO, Tony Gleeson, reflects on a recent trip to Syria and Lebanon.*

I spent November in Syria and Lebanon, both great places to visit. However, it is impossible not to be affected by the ever-present air pollution in the major cities, the plastic bag plagues and the desertification. All of that, and the freedom from emails, enabled me think afresh about how we go about environmental management in rural Australia. But first an aside: ironically I came back to what I thought would be a relatively pristine farm environment only to be smothered in the smoke from the burning of the clear felled timber on an adjacent 800 hectares, clear felled for planting a hardwood monoculture.

My first reflection is that we need to more strongly celebrate our great capacity to 'get it right'. Relatively speaking, we have an abundance of healthy landscapes, of natural resources, of human capabilities and of institutional capacity.

Second, those not engaged in land management need to stop micro-managing. We do need continuous improvement and, although I'm getting to hate the phrase, we do need to be 'outcome focused'. However, we need to be less prescriptive about how land managers should operate. We need to learn from our failed experiences in promoting certain land uses and/or 'best' practices. The damage done by our past

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land policies and programs should make us humble about our capacity to be 'all-knowing'.

Third we should avoid fragmentation of ecosystems into component eco-services, of approaches which reject multi-use options and of approaches which are overly obsessed with pricing as a driver for protecting landscapes and biodiversity. We need the beliefs, values and aspirations that drive our public research and policy agendas to be explicit and hence open to debate and challenge. No amount of expert analysis will by itself drive land managers to better manage their environmental impacts. No amount of central 'business plans' will negate the problems inherent in lots of small, short-term, issue-by-issue, competitive projects which inherently are poorly managed.

Fourth, we need to accept that our global opportunities (and responsibilities) extend far beyond food and fibre production. Food and fibre production will remain dominant. However, it seems the 'global food crisis' will unleash another wave of agricultural fundamentalism based mainly around the myth that Australia should produce more food for the starving billions even if it is not profitable and causes environmental harm to do so. As well argued recently by the Crawford Foundation this is not the best response. I would go further; it is not a sensible response. We need to face the fact that the real gross value of agricultural production has not increased over the past fifty years or so notwithstanding enormous growth in agricultural production. We need to move into differentiated higher priced food and fibre markets and to do this we need in part to build on our environmental credentials. More broadly we need integrated policies and practices that reflect the multi-functionality of our rural landscapes. We need to make room for economic activities in our rural landscapes beyond agriculture (and mining) and for non-economic values.

We can do it better now if we want to. We have the necessary tools, we have the necessary funding and, generally, Australian land managers have the necessary aspirations. But what we don't have is the necessary leadership and policies to establish mechanisms to directly enable and support effective and accountable land managers.