

Skilled people help ABA put strategy into action

When Mark Dennis took on the role of Chair of the Advisory Board of Agriculture (ABA) in August 2006, he wanted to ensure the continued value of the Board and the Bureau network to rural South Australia. To help achieve this, the Board agreed to review its strategic plan. Five key targets were defined and are now at the heart of the ABA's activities.

The five targets are to:

- ★ be more proactive in communicating rural issues to government agencies;
- ★ become a recognised and accessible point of reference for the media and government agencies on rural matters;
- ★ raise the profile and promote the Advisory Board of Agriculture and Agricultural Bureau movement;
- ★ develop a strategy for the ABA and Agricultural Bureaus to remain relevant and grow;
- ★ promote sustainable and profitable practices by identifying research and training needs and working in collaboration with other groups.

"Having skilled people on the ground is vital if we are to put these strategies into action," explained Mark Dennis.

"To support the skills of the current Board we now have three part time staff members, supported by PIRSA or Rural Solutions SA, in place of a full time Executive Officer."

Helen Lamont - Strategic Support, is working at a strategic level on high profile issues. She is helping the ABA identify priorities, develop policies and set its strategic direction. Helen has already instigated two surveys gathering members' feedback on their situation and needs after the 2006 season and the second relating to rural communities in the River Murray corridor. Helen brings considerable experience to this role as previous positions held by her including being Leader of the Lower Eyre Peninsula Bushfire Recovery Program.

Georgia Gowing – Communications Support, is a relative new comer to PIRSA having previously been a freelance journalist. She is already working hard to raise the level of media coverage achieved by the ABA.

Anne Madden who has devote many years of service to the ABA and Ag Bureaus will continue to provide administrative support and act as the first point of call for the ABA and Ag Bureaus. Anne can be contacted on 1800 652 258

With many parts of the State facing a second year of drought conditions due to low rainfall or severe irrigation restrictions Mark Dennis believes the role of the ABA and Ag Bureaus is as vital as ever.

For example, in 2006 the ABA via the Ag Bureaus provided funds for community events to help rural communities come together to support each other and to learn about the support mechanisms available.

"The ABA provides rural communities with a bipartisan voice in the Ministers ear; as the organisation title implies we are here to provide advice and the Board members representing the 14 regions are producers from a diverse range of commodities and active members of their rural communities.

"All Ag Bureau members are encouraged to share their thoughts and needs with their regional board member; their contributions will be incorporated into ABA discussions with government agencies and Ministers. ."

At the AGM Peter Rose was appointed as the new member for the Murraylands region.

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Photo Caption ABA Board members L to R Richard Murdoch (YP and Hummocks), Trevor Wilksch (Barossa Valley), Chairman Mark Dennis (Lower EP) Deputy Chairman Neville Ferne (Upper North) and Heather Baldock (Eastern EP) taking time out during the recent Agricultural Bureau Waite Campus open day, organised for Bureau members to catch up on the latest research developments relating to their industry sector.