

# A History of the Australasian Agricultural and Resource Economics Society

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## Abstract

Over the 67 years of its existence, the Australasian Agricultural and Resource Economics Society (AARES) has gone through many changes but has continued to be highly valued by its members. In this paper, we update and expand Keith Campbell's earlier history of the Society. Notable changes include, the slowly shifting emphasis of members' work from farm issues to resources, environment and development; changes to the name of the Society and its Journal; increasing internationalisation; the professional roles and interests of AARES members; the gender balance of the Society; and the number and types of awards given. Changes in government departments and universities have been major, with various impacts on AARES. The history highlights the intellectual and practical contributions made by AARES members and also the camaraderie that is a key benefit of being part of the Society.

## Introduction

The Australasian Agricultural and Resource Economics Society (AARES) serves professional economists in Australasia and around the world who work in the areas of agriculture, agribusiness, natural resources and the environment. Since its establishment in 1957, it has provided avenues for publishing research, opportunities for showcasing and debating ideas, networking and friendship, recognition of outstanding service and performance, training and outreach to non-economists.

Profound changes in the economy and society since the 1950s have brought similarly extensive changes for the agricultural and resource economics profession and the organisation of AARES, its membership, the issues that they focus on, and the policy contexts relevant to AARES. The Society has survived through dramatic changes in technologies affecting research, publication and conferences; major changes in agricultural institutions and markets; the emergence of natural resource and environmental issues as major topics of economic analysis; and a global pandemic that precluded face-to-face meetings for two years. In this paper we seek to capture the evolution of AARES in response to these changes and others, by updating and expanding the brief history that was prepared

by Keith Campbell in the late 1990s (Campbell undated). In doing so, we are conscious that memories of the changes in AARES and what was behind them are easily lost, as also are lessons learned. Few of the original founders of the Society are still with us, and even most of the second generation of members from the 1970s and 1980s are no longer active in the discipline or the Society.

AARES grew from people's interest, curiosity and passion for agricultural, resource and environmental economics. It fostered ideas and traditions, values and a positive culture among members and their colleagues. Camaraderie and mentoring became hallmarks. Living professionally off the human capital of mentors while becoming life-long friends is what belonging to the AARES has meant for many members.

We both joined the Australian Agricultural Economics Society (AAES<sup>1</sup>), as it was then, in the early 1980s. We have been active participants in the Society ever since, including attending almost every annual conference and serving as Presidents. This makes us two of the longest-serving active members, so we feel at least somewhat qualified to prepare this updated and expanded history of a Society that has been important to us for over four decades.

## **Outline of AARES history**

In his history of the Society, Keith Campbell recorded that 120 people turned up to hear the cowbell signal the start of the inaugural annual general meeting of the AAES in February 1957. The state of agricultural economics in Australia, survey methods, agricultural finance “and other timeless subjects” were discussed. In addition, “those present agreed to form an Australian Society. An interim Council was elected and entrusted with the task of drawing up a constitution to be ratified at the next meeting a year later”. The inaugural Australian Journal of Agricultural Economics (AJAE) was soon out, immediately seeing off attempted censorship and setting off a debate of long standing in the Queensland rural press. At issue was whether agricultural economics is best served by primarily agriculturalists who know some economics or primarily economists who know some agriculture. The traditionally agricultural-science-dominated agricultural bureaucracies along with farm industry ‘leaders’ and agri-politicians believed they already knew what was best for agriculture and were not easily convinced that there was any need for analysis of agricultural policy issues using economic principles and research techniques.

The Society established Branches in the five largest states and the Australian Capital Territory. There was also an additional Branch at the University of New England, reflecting its role as a significant centre of agricultural economics in the Society’s early decades. There was only briefly a branch in Tasmania and there has never been one in the Northern Territory.

Agricultural economics grew apace in the decade from the mid-1950s. The University of New England became a stand-alone institution and agricultural economics staff and

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<sup>1</sup> See the Appendix for a list of acronyms used.

students in the major Australian Universities grew from their previous minor presence. The Rural Credits Development Fund, put in place by the Reserve Bank in 1959, funded Universities to establish professorial and other positions in agricultural economics as well as funding research and agricultural extension programs. These initiatives, and the high-quality training that resulted, contributed greatly to the successful establishment in Australia of the agricultural economics discipline and the Society.

In the 1960s and 1970s, research and analysis by AAES members focussed strongly on issues at the farm level, such as farm management and risky decision making by farmers (Polyakov et al. 2016). Over time, the range of topics addressed by members expanded, moving beyond the farm gate and, eventually, beyond agriculture.

A landmark publication produced for the International Association of Agricultural Economists (IAAE) conference in 1966 was the book *Agriculture in the Australian Economy*, edited by D.B. Williams and K.O. Campbell and comprising chapters on all the important topics by prominent members of the Australian profession of the time (Williams and Campbell 1967). This book ran to equally significant 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> editions (Williams 1981; Williams and Begg 1993). In many ways, the history of the interests of the agricultural economics profession in Australia up to the early 1990s is in these writings.

The AAES headed into its third decade in 1980 a mature professional organisation replete with agricultural economic character, and characters, known for the rigorous rationalism of its members and their ready engagement with the public policy issues of the day. As the 1980s unfolded, there was plenty for the members of the AAES to be going on with. Small farm and rural adjustment issues, the result of many decades of closer land settlement programs, lingered (Edwards and Bates 2016). Recurring widespread and severe drought renewed focus on drought policy (Freebairn 1983), while microeconomic reform, which commenced with the deregulation of the banking system and the exchange rate, caused ripples of change. Protection policy, tackled first in the 1970s (Edwards 1977), came under renewed scrutiny in still-regulated industries: milk, eggs, sugar and wheat, along with the wool industry's reserve price scheme (Richardson 2001). Solid economic arguments for the discipline of market prices over the politics of protection, crafted in prior times by the leading lights of the agricultural economics profession, were re-prosecuted in increasingly receptive environments.

Much of the research on the need for reform, effects of reform and how to do it for dairy, wheat, sugar, wool and other products was done by AAES members and debated at conferences and meetings. By 2000, the production and marketing of milk, wool and eggs were again the province of free choices between the consenting participants to deals. By 2010, the Australian Wheat Board was no longer in the domestic wheat market. Members of AAES played important roles in achieving these outcomes and contributed to the growing worldwide pressures for reform in international trade.

In 1995, 'and Resource' was added to the name to create AAES, reflecting the broadening scope of applied economists' interests to encompass the natural environment, water,

fisheries and minerals. Issues in these areas increasingly concerned the public and policy makers and were being taken up by AARES members, who were soon helping to develop, and sometimes hinder, proposed national and state policies (Bennett and Randall 2016; Pannell et al. 2016).

Starting in the 1960s, members' interests in farm economics and agricultural economics led some to work with small-holder farmers and the challenges of pursuing economic growth in developing countries. Over time, this focus increased and broadened, supported by institutions like the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) and the Crawford Fund, and Australian agricultural economists and technologists built a deserved regard for their work in international development.

This was also part of an increasing internationalisation of the Society over time, with strong branches being established first in New Zealand in 1975 and later the United States in 1998 plus growing links with Asia. This trend culminated in the Society changing its name to 'The Australasian ...' in 2017.

## **Topic focus**

The focus of research conducted by AARES members has evolved substantially since 1957 (Figure 1). In the early years, the main focus was on agricultural issues, largely at the farm level. Prior to 1970, around 60% of papers published in the Australian Journal of Agricultural Economics (AJAE) were about Farming, Cropping, Livestock, Productivity or Risk (as determined in a machine learning analysis of complete article texts conducted by Polyakov et al. 2016).

After 1970, research on agricultural/farm-level issues shrank as a proportion of publications, declining to around 25% by the 2010s. It was replaced by research on agricultural policy and, later on, resources, environment and food security (including international development). In the past 20 years, international development has become an increasingly prominent topic of presentations at AARES annual conferences, due in part to support from ACIAR. The change in the Society's name by including 'and Resource' was mirrored by a similar change in the Journal's name in 1996. The proportion of publications on resource and environmental issues, which had already been increasing, grew even more rapidly after that.

An efficient way to understand the range of topics of interest to AARES members would be to peruse all the past Annual Presidential Addresses to the Annual Conference, most of which have been published in AJAE or AJARE. This collection of writings encompasses many significant concerns of Australia's agricultural and resource economists, including theoretical, methodological, practical and policy issues. It indicates the wide breadth of topics, the rigorous analytical rationality, and the concerns with real world issues that AARES members they have brought to bear on agricultural, agribusiness, resource and environmental issues.

## Publications

Following its establishment in 1957, the AJAE operated in parallel with, and complemented, the *Review of Marketing and Agricultural Economics* (RMAE), which had in 1945 grown out of market reports published by the New South Wales Department of Agriculture. Until the 1990s, the AJAE was run by the (usually two) Editors and published by the AAES in a low-cost 'backyard' operation (literally – back issues were for many years stored in one member's garage). It was more focused on academic research than was the RMAE, which, along with industry-focussed applied research, included a broad coverage of agricultural economists' perspectives on policy and industry and marketing issues. When the AAES took over editing and publishing the RMAE from the NSW Department of Agriculture in 1989, the intent was to continue these complementary styles and scopes to serve different readership and membership segments.

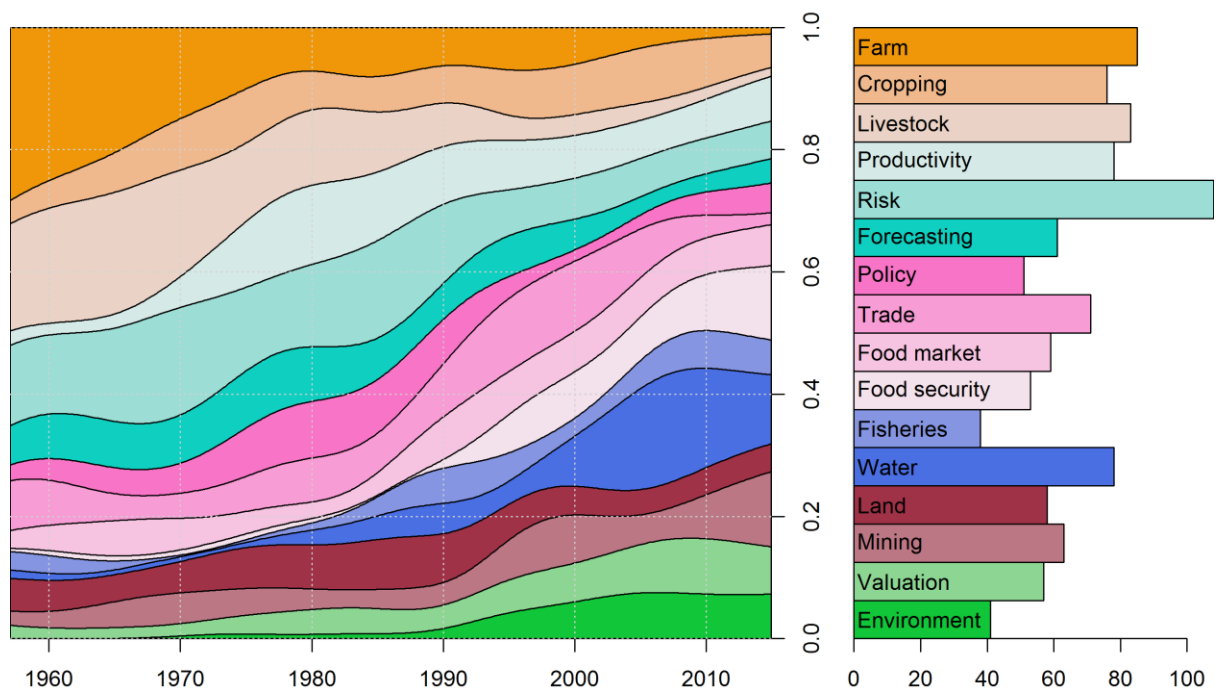


Figure 1. Smoothed proportion of papers published by the Australian Journal of Agricultural Economics and the Australian Journal of Agricultural and Resource Economics by topic and year. (Source: Polyakov et al. 2016, supplementary information)

Amidst a wave of changes sweeping the Society in the mid-1990s, a new journal was established, the *Australian Journal of Agricultural and Resource Economics* (AJARE), and responsibility for publishing the journal was passed over to a major international publisher. The new journal replaced and aimed to encompass both previous journals, with RMAE-style content intended to be represented in a Policy Forum section. Although some Policy Forum

articles were published in early years, they became scarcer over time and have now essentially disappeared, which, at least to us, is disappointing.

A basic web site for AARES was first created in 1998 and a comprehensive one in 1999 and innovations in communication followed.

Attempts were made by AARES members to provide a renewed outlet for RMAE-style policy and perspective pieces relevant to members. *Connections* was a cross between the RMAE and *Choices*, the outreach magazine of the (then) American Agricultural Economics Association. Its purpose was to be a vehicle for promoting accessible versions of the findings from authors of their sometimes-arcane research published elsewhere. Produced jointly with the Australasian Agribusiness Association, *Connections* flourished briefly (2001-2003). Later an AARES blog was established, but it too died quickly. These days, members wishing to publish this type of material have a range of non-AARES options on the internet, including *The Conversation* (<https://theconversation.com/au>), *Policy Forum* (<https://www.policyforum.net/>) and publishing a blog of one's own (e.g., John Quiggin <https://johnquiggin.com>; David Pannell <https://www.pannelldiscussions.net>; Tiho Ancec <https://envi-economics.sydney.edu.au>).

In 2006, the Society scanned all issues of AJAE and RMAE back to 1949 and made them freely available on the AgEcon Search open-access repository. This increased accessibility was a boon for researchers, resulting in 706,000 downloads of articles from AJAE since then, and 851,000 from RMAE.

Another important event in that era was the renegotiation of the Society's contract with Blackwell to publish AJARE in 2010. The new contract, negotiated by then-president Phil Pardey, regained ownership of the AJARE name, allowed the Society to publish past articles from AJARE on AgEcon Search after three years, and improved the share of journal revenues allocated to AARES. This experience highlighted the importance of negotiating an appropriate contract with publishers.

For more immediate communication to members, the AARES has long provided a regular newsletter. This was originally in the form of a mailed-out paper copy before becoming an electronic version emailed to members and archived on the AARES web site.

## Events

Conferences have always been central to the life and success of AARES, particularly the Annual Conference held for the 68<sup>th</sup> time, in Canberra in February 2024. The importance members place on the conference is reflected in the fact that the Society continued with online conferences during the COVID-19 pandemic rather than forgo conferences entirely.

Since starting as a simple meeting in the 1950s, the format for the Annual Conference has seen several innovations over the years. As well as invited and contributed papers and a Presidential Address, there now are mini-symposia, pre-conference workshops, posters, a

three-minute thesis competition, sessions organised by the AAEA and the European Association of Agricultural Economists (EAAE), an early-career event, a mentoring scheme, a formal conference dinner and prize ceremony, and prizes for best first-time presenter and best poster.

The AARES has twice taken on the hosting of the triennial conference of the IAAE, in 1967 (Sydney) and 2006 (Gold Coast). The Sydney conference attracted 219 Australian and New Zealand participants and 501 delegates from over 30 countries in total. Just over 100 participants came from North America and there were 86 Europeans in attendance. The 2006 conference in Australia was attended by 987 delegates. These large conferences with predominantly international delegates gave AARES members an opportunity to expand their networks and raised the international profile of Australian agricultural and resource economics and economists.

A landmark in AARES history was the Conference on Global Agricultural Science Policy for the 21st Century, held in Melbourne in August 1996. Organised by leading AARES members, Julian Alston, Phil Pardey and Mike Taylor, this event brought together a who's who of global experts, resulting in multiple books and a special issue of AJARE.

Starting in the early 2000s, the AARES held a series of one-day Symposia on a range of important national and international issues. Themes for these Symposia included taxation reform, deregulation and rural Australia, public funding of environmental issues, property rights and the environment, and farmer adoption of new farming practices. The symposia were generally successful, bringing in large audiences and introducing many non-economists to the insights of agricultural economists. They have become less frequent in recent years, though intermittent online webinars are held on diverse topics.

Another successful brief experiment in the 2000s that has since faded out was E-CREW – a multi-day workshop/conference with early-career researchers. As well as providing opportunities for presenting their work, this initiative brought in senior AARES members to provide detailed feedback and advice to presenters. This was highly valued by participants.

Complementing these national or international events are regular Branch seminars and, in some cases, Branch conferences and public lectures.

## **Membership**

In earlier years, the membership of AAES seems to have been broader in one sense than it has since become; it included people from a range of agricultural service industries. These days, most members are from universities, government departments and government-adjacent organisations, such as research organisations and research funders, and some from the consulting profession.

Our perception is that membership from state and federal government agencies was previously far stronger than today, with members from larger state departments of

agriculture with many more economists being the driving force of highly active branches. While this is still true to some degree in some states, the declining role of agricultural departments and evolving cultures and pressures in such agencies, have perhaps reduced the appeal of 'economics' and the rigorous analytical methods used in many of our journal articles and conference presentations. Whatever the reason, there seems to be less active support from agency managers for their staff to contribute work time to AARES.

Nevertheless, a viable level of membership has been maintained, albeit with significant fluctuations (Figure 2). In the 12 years to 2010, average membership numbers were almost 600, but in the 13 years since then the average has been around 450 (Figure 2). Numbers have recovered from a low point in 2017. Our perception is that membership numbers are responsive to initiatives undertaken by AARES to provide members with benefits and opportunities.

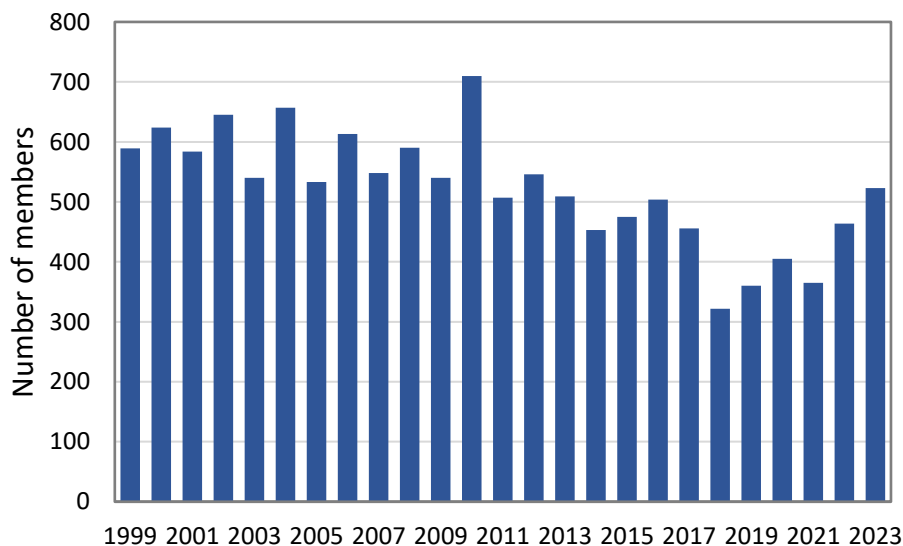


Figure 2. Total membership of AARES, 1999-2023.

Over the past four decades AARES has experienced a high turnover of membership. There has always been a core of long-term members, but many others come and go on short time scales. A long running scheme rewarding outstanding undergraduates in agricultural economics courses in the Universities with an initial free membership has reaped little or no harvest in terms of ongoing membership. Short duration of members participation probably reflects the shifting priorities of those members, perhaps due to changing employment.

In its early years, the gender balance in the AAES was almost exclusively male. The culture of the Society we joined in the early 1980s was highly 'Australian male' and cannot have felt welcoming to young women contemplating a career in the subject. It took almost 40 years for the first female president to be appointed: Carolyn Tanner in 1995. Deborah Peterson



followed her a decade later, and was followed by another decade of men. However, since 2016, four women have been President. Other signs of the changing gender balance and culture of the Society include the growing prominence of women speakers at AARES conferences, increasing numbers of women in post-graduate study in the area, a Women in Economics session at recent conferences, and the growing number of women in senior leadership positions in AARES and in employer organisations. In most institutions where AARES members work, as in the wider economy, the gender balance still markedly favours males at senior levels. We are optimistic that the slow change away from male dominance will not reverse.

## **Internationalisation**

Although the AARES started in Australia, near neighbour New Zealand has played an important part in its history. As well as an independent New Zealand Agricultural and Resource Economics Society (NZARES), there is also a New Zealand branch of the AARES. New Zealand has long been a much-anticipated part of the regular cycle of AARES conference locations, most recently in 2023. Annual prizes provide funding support to early-career members based in Australia to attend the annual the NZARES conference (the Heading East Award), and *vice versa* (the Heading West Award). In large part, the decision to change the Society's name from 'The Australian...' to 'The Australasian...' was motivated by a desire of the membership to recognise the importance of New Zealand to the Society (as well as our growing links to Asia).

Members of the agricultural and resource economics discipline in North America also make important contributions to AARES. Since the 1950s, many Australian and New Zealand agricultural and resource economists have gone to the US for their PhD training. Those who came home brought philosophies, perspectives and methods that have been applied and built on in local research and analysis. The fact that it is not just a one-way intellectual flow is reflected in the fact that around 10 AARES members of Australian or New Zealand origin have been honoured as Fellows of the AAEA.

Visiting agricultural economics scholars from abroad have been plentiful, with many internationally significant members of the global profession spending time meeting and working with the locals, to mutual benefit. Exchanges of speakers and delegates between AARES and AAEA conferences is a long tradition, one that increased following the establishment of the North American branch of the AARES, and the Australasian Section of the AAEA. As well as the annual Heading South and Heading North awards, which support conference attendance by early career professionals, a tradition has developed more recently of the Presidents of the AARES and the AAEA attending each other's conferences.

The Australian agricultural and resource economics profession has long been associated with the IAAE. As recounted by Keith Campbell, the meetings and discussions that led to the founding of the AAES were prompted by a 1956 visit to Australia by Jock Currie, the foundation secretary of the International Council of Agricultural Economists (ICAE), the

precursor to the IAAE. Campbell attended the 1958 ICAE Conference in Mysore, India and was the inaugural Country Representative for Australia on the ICAE/IAAE. He passed this role on to John Longworth who was followed by Roley Piggott and Mal Wegener. As noted above, the IAAE triennial conference has twice been held in Australia, organised primarily by AARES members. Two AARES Distinguished Fellows have been presidents of the IAAE: John Longworth and Will Martin.

Members of AARES in various capacities have actively contributed to every significant international agency concerned with agriculture and/or resource management. Examples include the FAO (e.g., Jock Anderson, Jack Duloy, Brian Hardaker, Doug McConnell, Jack Makeham), the World Bank (e.g., Kym Anderson, Jock Anderson, Will Candler, Graham Donaldson, Ron Duncan and Derek Byerlee), the GATT (now WTO) (Kym Anderson), and the CGIAR. Contributors to the latter have included John Crawford as first Chair of its Technical Advisory Committee, John Dillon in various Board roles, and many staff members of the various CGIAR centres, such as John Flinn at IRRI, Jim Ryan at ICRISAT, Grant Scobie at CIAT, Phil Pardey at ISNAR, Tom Nordblom at ICARDA, Derek Byerlee at CIMMYT and Jock Anderson, Phil Pardey and Will Martin at IFPRI.

The degree of international engagement by AARES and AARES members has grown substantially over time, particularly since the mid-1990s, as reflected in the adoption of an international publisher, the North American Branch, the four early-career travel awards, the number of international speakers and delegates at AARES conferences, and the number of international authors publishing in AJARE. The latter is illustrated in Figures 3 and 4.

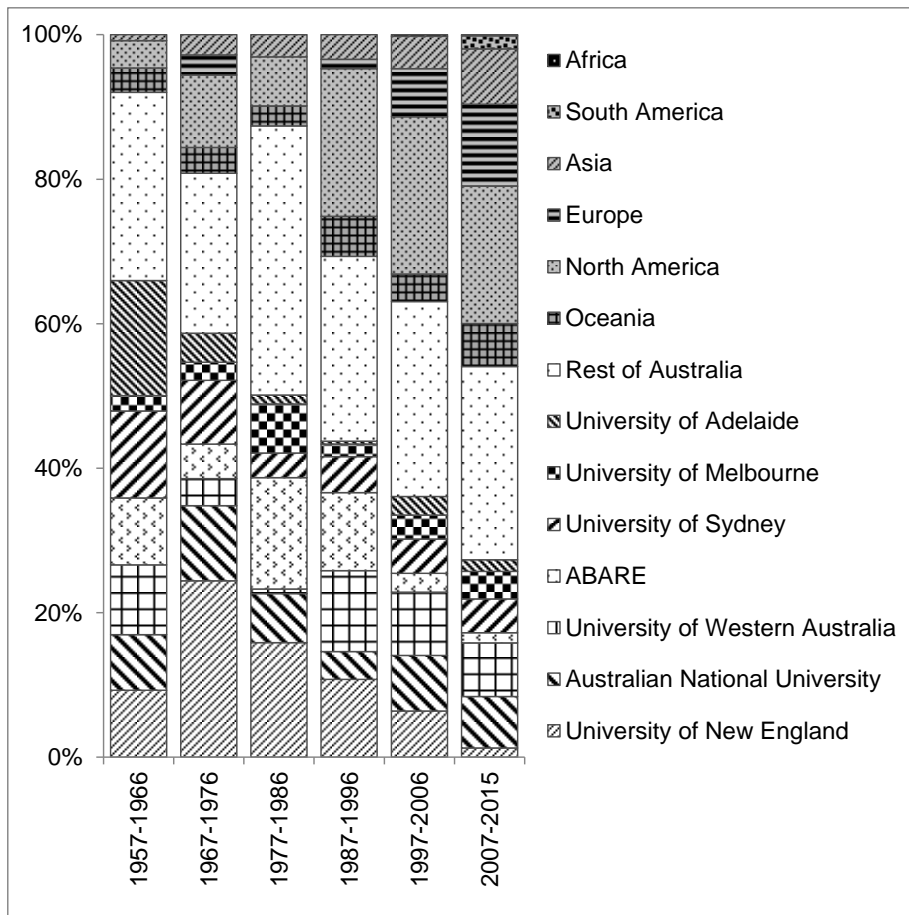


Figure 3. Publications by institutions and regions. Seven most productive Australian institutions are shown separately, the rest are grouped into regions. Source: Polyakov et al. (2016).

The proportion of authors from Africa, Asia, Europe and the Americas publishing in AJAE and AJARE has increased almost every decade (Figure 3). This figure does not fully reflect the growth in international authorship, as the total number of publications has also grown, particularly since the establishment of AJARE. Papers with international co-authors, or even inter-state co-authors, were rare in the first two decades of AJARE, grew in the second two decades, and increased substantially after that (Figure 4).

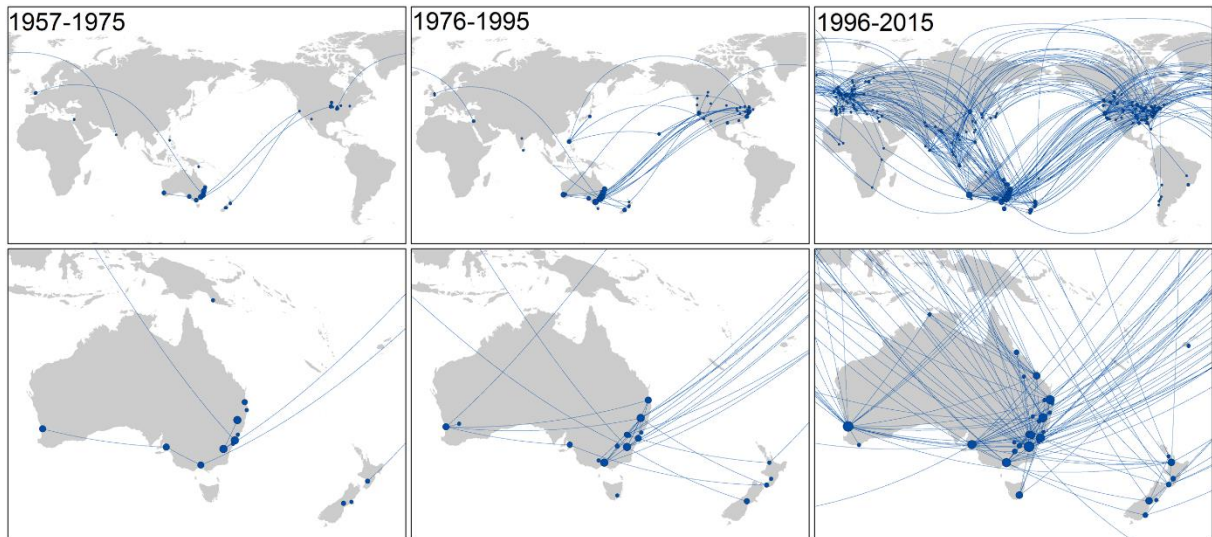


Figure 4. Spatiotemporal patterns of authorship and collaboration for papers published in the AJAE and AJARE. Size of the dots represents number of authors and papers in each location. Lines represent collaboration connections. Source: Polyakov et al. (2016).

A final feature of internationalisation that stands out is the growth in the number of international PhD students in agricultural and resource economics studying at Australian and New Zealand universities. In recent years (apart from during the pandemic) PhD students from Asia and Africa have far outnumbered domestic students. Their presence has broadened the perspectives of their supervisors and the range of issues canvassed at AARES conferences.

## Changes in related organisations

Given the enormous changes that have occurred in the significance of agriculture in the economy and in organizations servicing agriculture and the natural environment, it is perhaps surprising that AARES is still a going concern. When agriculture was a larger percentage of the national GDP, State Departments of Agriculture were one of the foundation stones of the Society. They employed much larger numbers of agricultural economists than is currently the case. Scholarships were provided by some State Departments to train university students in agricultural economics, and then, to send the most promising students to the top universities overseas for PhD training. Managers in State Departments were strong practical supporters of staff involvement in the AAES/AARES. Now the voluntary contributions of State Agency members are done mostly in their own time.

The Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences (ABARES) is a good example of the changing institutional landscape and its effects on AARES. The Bureau of Agricultural Economics (BAE) was established as part of the Australian Government in 1945, preceding the birth of the AAES by more than a decade. It also preceded the AAES in

adding 'and Resource' to its name (the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics – ABARE), doing so in 1988. Up until the mid-1990s, the BAE/ABARE played a strong role in the AAES, providing many speakers at conferences, volunteers in the AAES organisation and papers in our journals (see Figure 1). After that, however, the priorities of the organisation moved. In its current guise as ABARES, it plays a smaller role in the Society: a reflection of the changing importance of agriculture in the economy and influences and priorities of governments in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Another significant change affecting AARES has been the decline in university departments devoted to agricultural and resource economics. When we joined the Society, departments or groupings of academics with 'agricultural economics' in their name were present at the University of New England (UNE), University of Sydney, University of Melbourne, La Trobe University and the University of Western Australia (UWA) along with a small group at the University of Queensland. The UNE Department had been internationally renowned since the 1960s and all these institutions had rich intellectual cultures, talent, and resources, with scholars and 'public intellectuals' known nationally and internationally. Today there is only one named agricultural and resource economics department, at UWA. The other departments and groups have been absorbed into broader schools of business (UNE), economics (Sydney) or agriculture (Melbourne) or just closed (La Trobe)<sup>2</sup>. Smaller groups of agricultural and resource economists in teaching-and-research positions continue to operate at these universities as well as at the University of Adelaide and the Australian National University. In addition, applied economists operating at many other universities are working on issues that fall within the broadened the scope of AARES, including water, climate change, energy, minerals, and nature conservation. Only a subset of these are members of AARES, some identifying more closely with the Australian Economics Society.

Compensating for the loss of State and University departments, to some degree, has been the establishment of new research centres at universities, including the Centre for Global Food and Resources at the University of Adelaide, the Centre for Water Economics, Environment and Policy at the Australian National University, the Centre for Environmental and Economic Research at the University of Melbourne, the Centre for Environmental Economics and Policy at the University of Western Australia, and the Centre for Agricultural Economics and Development at the University of Western Australia. While individual research centres tend to be less enduring than university departments, the existence of a suite of such centres creates opportunities and generates resources that can help maintain the operations of AARES.

There has also been growth in employment of agricultural and resource economists outside the university sector and policy-oriented government agencies. In 1980, CSIRO employed almost no economists, but now they have 40 or more working on issues relevant to AARES. In New Zealand, the former Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR) was split

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<sup>2</sup> Important changes continue to occur at these universities. While we were preparing this history, we learned that the University of New England will cease to offer a Bachelor of Agricultural Economics in coming years, and that La Trobe University is planning to appoint a new Professor of Agricultural and Resource Economics.

in 1992 into several Crown Research Institutes, including AgResearch, Landcare Research and Scion. A number of these are employers of AARES members.

ACIAR, established in 1982, has also been important to AARES and AARES members. Indeed, it was established on the recommendation of Sir John Crawford, the second president of AARES and an Honorary Life Member of the Society<sup>3</sup>. The ACIAR has funded many research projects on agricultural production, agricultural economics and agricultural trade in developing countries, many of which projects have included AARES members as researchers or as supervisors of PhD students from developing countries. It delivers the John Dillon Fellowship, named for another AARES stalwart and Honorary Life Member, Professor John Dillon from UNE. The Fellowship provides professional development to mid-career researchers, including economists, to provide more effective agricultural research in developing countries. The ACIAR features prominently at AARES conferences, through support of delegates, funding of research that is presented, and sponsorship and organisation of sessions. The new Chief Executive Officer of ACIAR, as of August 2023, is Professor Wendy Umberger, a Distinguished Fellow and former President of AARES.

A key development in Australia since the early 1990s has been a set of programs that fund national and multi-institutional research centres, often inter-disciplinary in nature. Examples include Cooperative Research Centres (CRCs), Australian Research Council Centres of Excellence, and National Environmental Science Program Hubs. CRCs, in particular, have been important sources of employment for early-to-mid career agricultural and resource economists, and several AARES workshops, symposia and mini-symposia have resulted from CRC resourcing. The latest round of CRCs, announced in December 2023, includes the CRC for Zero Net Emissions from Agriculture – the largest CRC yet, with Australian Government funding of \$87 million. One of its four programs is devoted to agricultural and resource economics issues and will be led by AARES member Marit Kragt. (Agricultural and resource economists are involved in other parts of the CRC as well.)

Overall, there have been extensive and sometimes rapid changes in the institutional environment within which AARES sits. Some changes have been disadvantageous to the operation of AARES while others have been beneficial. Although AARES is less able to depend on a stable core group of university departments and Federal and State government agencies than it previously could, the diversification of employers of AARES members can be seen as an advantage. In terms of numbers of AARES members, the negative forces affecting

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<sup>3</sup> Sir John Crawford's extraordinary contributions to AARES, agricultural economics, agricultural policy and international development (Anonymous 1983) warrant their own history. He played a key role in the establishment of the Agricultural Economics Section in the NSW Department of Agriculture in 1941, was the first director of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics in 1945 and became Secretary of the Department of Commerce and Agriculture in the Australian Government in 1950s. He spent 1960 to 1983 at the Australian National University, first as Professor and Director of the Research School of Pacific Studies, and subsequently as Vice Chancellor and Chancellor. As well as recommending the establishment of ACIAR, he was a strong and effective advocate for the creation of the CGIAR. He was named Australian of the Year in 1981. He is honoured through the naming of the Crawford School of Public Policy at the ANU, the Sir John Crawford Memorial Address, and the Crawford Fund, which supports training, capacity building and career development in agricultural research in developing countries. He truly was a remarkable person.

membership have not notably outweighed the positives. Indeed, the high membership numbers from 1999 to 2010 (Figure 2) are for a period after the bulk of the institutional changes we have described occurred, and a membership of around 600 is probably about as high as the Society has ever had. The biggest impact on the operation of AARES from the broader institutional changes is probably the increased difficulty of identifying volunteers who are available to undertake core functions. Nevertheless, with effort, the Society continues to find willing and competent volunteers who keep the ship afloat. The ship, though, has fewer sails than it once had, with valuable initiatives like the AARES Symposium now rare, and E-CREW non-existent, presumably due to the requirement for volunteer time and effort to organise these events.

## **Administration, organisation, finances and strategy**

The organisation of the AAES in its first three decades had a decidedly do-it-yourself feel, with conferences and journal publication being managed completely in-house. Journal issues were smaller than today, and the publication schedule was somewhat erratic.

The suite of changes that swept through the Society in the 1990s included increased professionalisation in various respects. Notably, with the creation of AJARE, we moved to professional publishing, initially with Blackwell Publishing, currently with Wiley. The Annual Conference increasingly relied on professional conference organisers, although it still relies heavily on the Local Organising Committee, a team of member volunteers. The AARES' central office services and secretariat shifted from being delivered by a dedicated AARES employee housed at one of the universities to a commercial service that specialises in supporting professional societies. To assist with organisation and policy consistency, a Policy File was created and continues to be updated regularly as policies are determined. Supporting the Policy File there is a Calendar, which guides office bearers on necessary tasks and their timing.

In common with the Australian Federal tradition, and ignoring the myriad inefficiencies of this structure, when the AAES was established it was a given that each State would have a branch in a Federal structure. The AARES continues to operate as a Federal body with multiple branches. Changes in legal structure were made and the peak management body moved from Council to Board whilst the not-for-profit, tax-exempt status has been retained.

Unlike some professional societies, AARES has not taken on a role in providing professional certification. When in the early 1990s the AIAS proposed that AAES join it in developing a set of competency standards for agricultural economists, there was a strong reaction against this proposal by AAES members, notably from President Neil Sturgess (Sturgess 1993), resulting in successful motions at the 1993 Annual General Meeting that the AAES should 'have no part' in the proposal and should 'resist as strongly as possible the AIAS move to include interdisciplinary areas of agricultural economics in the definition of competency standards'. It was seen as a resource-wasting power grab that would lead to welfare-reducing constraints on the labour market.

The Society has also chosen to maintain its independence from industry and politics. It has not promulgated positions on policy issues – even those that have been important to its members. Rather, its role has been to foster independent debate, awareness and evidence-based analysis.

## Awards and fellowships

A key function of a professional body like AARES is to recognise and honour the achievements of its members. There has been a steady growth in the number and range of awards and fellowships offered and presented at the Annual Conference Dinner (Table 1). The first was created in 1965, for the best masters research thesis completed in the previous year. This was followed by prizes for journal articles, Distinguished Life Memberships and Distinguished Fellowships for outstanding career achievements and contributions, a PhD prize, travel awards, communication awards, and, most recently, early- and mid-career versions of several of the awards.

Table 1. Awards and fellowships presented by AARES.

Year of introduction	Prize topic
1965	Masters thesis
1970	Best article in AJAE (and later AJARE)
1970	IAAE travel grants
1976	Distinguished Life Members
1985	PhD thesis
1986-1995	Sir John Crawford Exchange Award
1988	Undergraduate student prizes from each branch
1998	Distinguished Fellows
1990-1996	Best article in RMAE
2000	First-time presenter
2000	Best conference poster
2002	Heading North and Heading South
2005	Heading West and Heading East
2006	Quality of Research Communication
2006	Quality of Research Discovery
2013	Henry Schapper Fellowship
2013	Combined thesis award (masters and PhD)
2013	Donna Brennan International Travel Grant
2022	Research Communication for EMCRs
2022	Research Discovery for EMCRs
2022	AJARE best article for EMCRs



## In Sum

Who and what is AARES? Clues to the answer to this question are found in the history of the Society. An awareness by members of what a professional society has done, can do and should do surely helps the Society in its struggles to remain relevant and to continue along righteous pathways. Recording the critical information about the AARES as it happens and preserving it as an accessible public resource can be a valuable to counter all sorts of faddish revisionism.

The AARES can be seen as a club whose existence owes much to the effects of forces it cannot control. The history of such a club, as described here, is inevitably interpreted from the perspective of the time when it is written and read. In 2024, much that was relevant to and influential on the agricultural and resource economics profession in earlier decades has either disappeared or is greatly changed. Professional societies, like the people in them, respond to their changing contexts and so look and behave somewhat differently at different times.

If two outstanding characteristics of AARES were to be put forward as the keys to its success and survival, they would be its intellectualism and camaraderie. The tradition of the willing debate, and the pleasure of meeting fellow members even intermittently, are genuine benefits rated highly by members. For these reasons our annual conferences, in particular, are keenly awaited. Passion, rigour, rationality, friendship: agricultural and resource economics has it all.

## Acknowledgements

The authors are grateful for advice, ideas and reminiscences from John Longworth, Alister Watson, Rob Fraser, Vic Wright, John Quiggin, Kym Anderson, Ross Kingwell, Jock Anderson, Mal Wegener, Bob Farquharson, Garry Griffith, John Mullen, John Freebairn, Phil Pardey and Julian Alston.

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## Appendix: Acronyms used.

AAEA	American Agricultural Economics Association or Agricultural and Applied Economics Association
AAES	Australian Agricultural Economics Society
AARES	Australian Agricultural and Resource Economics Society
ABARE	Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics
ABARES	Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences
ACIAR	Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research
AJAE	Australian Journal of Agricultural Economics
AJARE	Australian Journal of Agricultural and Resource Economics
ANU	Australian National University
BAE	Bureau of Agricultural Economics
CGIAR	Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research
CIAT	International Center for Tropical Agriculture
CIMMYT	International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center
CRC	Cooperative Research Centre
CSIRO	Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation
DSIR	Department of Scientific and Industrial Research
EAAE	European Association of Agricultural Economists
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
ICAE	International Council of Agricultural Economists
IAAE	International Association of Agricultural Economists
ICARDA	International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas
ICRISAT	International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics
IRRI	International Rice Research Institute
IFPRI	International Food Policy Research Institute
ISNAR	International Service for National Agricultural Research
NZARES	New Zealand Agricultural and Resource Economics Society
RMAE	Review of Marketing and Agricultural Economics
UNE	University of New England
UWA	University of Western Australia
WTO	World Trade Organization