

Obituary

Alan Grahame Lloyd (1926–1999)

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Alan Lloyd, who died in Melbourne on 29 July 1999, made an outstanding contribution to agricultural and resource economics in Australia over half a century. Alan was perhaps the last of the great all-rounders in Australian agricultural economics.

People who knew Alan were privileged in a rare and delightful way. Alan had a strong commitment to his discipline and education in its broadest sense — with catholic tastes in music, literature, bridge and sports. In the last of these areas, Alan was a talented participant in athletics and tennis in his younger years — and a sociable and increasingly eccentric spectator of football and cricket as he became older.

Professionally, the content and style of Alan Lloyd's contribution to agricultural and resource economics in Australia reflect the agricultural history of Australia over the period; they cover the entire history of agricultural economics as an organised discipline in Australia and reflect Alan's

approach to economics, his temperament and attitudes, and, most notably his egalitarianism, tolerance and remarkable public-spiritedness.

Alan graduated in economics from the University of Sydney in 1947, joining the Division of Marketing and Agricultural Economics (DMAE) of the New South Wales Department of Agriculture in 1949. Alan always acknowledged his good fortune in being able to work with highly talented colleagues in DMAE in the first part of his career, emphasising the stimulus that was provided by responsibilities to prepare material for Departmental publications. Alan was a skilled writer, distilling the essence of argument with frequent flashes of genuine wit and, though occasionally unnerving to his collaborators, a chilling ability to work at feverish pace close to a deadline. His earliest tasks in DMAE involved preparing monthly notes for the *Agricultural Gazette of New South Wales* in a section entitled 'The business of farming'. These efforts included pieces such as 'Export contracts for farm produce', 'Changes in the utilisation of milk', 'Table margarine in Australia' and 'Farm management and farm records'.

The Division had its own (refereed) house journal — the *Review of Marketing and Agricultural Economics* — publishing substantial papers prepared by DMAE staff and outsiders. Alan's first contribution was an 86-page blockbuster in 1950 entitled 'The marketing of dairy produce in Australia'. The importance of another *Review* article 'Agricultural experiments and their economic significance' (1958) in shaping the views of several generations of agricultural scientists and economists ought not be understated. Even more so than other notable contributors to Australian agricultural economics from the DMAE, Alan's approach was always distinguished by his ongoing interest in applications of economic theories and research methods to important policy problems. His predilection was to concentrate on the policy significance of economic problems rather than theory or technique *per se*. When it came to the education of agricultural students, farmers and politicians, Alan referred to this approach as 'teaching economics by stealth'. His Presidential Address to the Society in 1970, 'Some current policy issues', was typical of Alan's approach. In directing attention to 'serious confusion and economic illiteracy in the minds of many influential farm leaders' on a number of key issues of the time, not only did he seek to educate farm leaders in economic logic but also to alert professional colleagues to the importance and power of political constraints on policy.

By today's standards and the situation in other states at the time, there do not appear to have been severe constraints on the research agendas and the writings of DMAE staff. However, it was inevitable that DMAE staff would be attracted by the growing opportunities for agricultural economists in Australian universities. Alan moved to Melbourne in 1959 following his

appointment as Senior Lecturer in Agricultural Economics in the School of Agriculture of the University of Melbourne. He was promoted to Reader in Agricultural Economics in 1967 and Professor in 1969 — a position he held until his retirement at the end of 1991.

Alan's eclectic interests in agricultural economics led to his vigorous involvement in numerous controversies in both his official and unofficial capacities. These controversies included arguments over price and marketing policy — especially for wool and dairy products — and land and environmental economics. One of the most notable was the celebrated argument over plans for closer settlement of the 'Little Desert' in western Victoria. The economics of agricultural research also claimed Alan's attention; and, more and more in later years, Alan launched himself with characteristic rigour and enthusiasm into the controversies concerning the effects of assistance and protection given to agriculture and other sectors of the Australian economy. In all these debates, Alan brought a powerful logic to bear on the question, and displayed an eagerness to engage other specialists and the public at large in economic arguments concerning agriculture, with frequent contributions to newspapers and journals of opinion.

When, on his retirement in 1991, the University of Melbourne bestowed on Alan the title of Professor Emeritus, the Minute of Appreciation drew attention to the contributions of major consequence he had made in a number of areas, including public commentary. The debate he initiated in *Quadrant* in 1991–92 with 'Protection policy, flat earth economics and level playing fields', which spanned four issues, is a notable example. In the course of this debate, one of the contributors (Fisher) captured the essence of Alan's standards and his motives in trying to clarify issues in the public mind: 'Professor Lloyd's exposition of the losses which derive from protection (in a variety of forms) is elegant and clear — and irrefutable. It has certainly been left unscathed in the dissenting responses'

Alan's passion for public debate and improving the economic literacy of the public gave rise to a long string of 'letters to the editor', mostly to *The Age* and *The Financial Review* ('Mr. Disgusted of East Keilor', Alan called this persona). Colleagues recall vividly Alan assiduously harvesting an extraordinarily large collection of press cuttings on a diverse range of topics. Items in the collection were there to be used, and were quoted with varying degrees of praise or condemnation, in student lectures, public talks and common-room discussions. Alan's interest in public discussion also resulted in some memorable television appearances. In those days smoking on television was acceptable and Alan's (unintended?) gamesmanship with a cloud of pipe smoke and rattling matches, whether to gain time for thought or to unsettle an opponent, was unsurpassed.

Alan was enthusiastic and meticulous in his approach to university teaching, with a firm belief in the relevance and usefulness of training in economics for all agricultural science students. He paid students the compliment of introducing them to the major debates in the subject and the economic principles that would enable them to understand the issues involved. Whatever their initial reluctance, students were usually won over by his rigorous yet friendly approach. From 1970 to 1973, Alan was Warden, Mt. Derrimut Agricultural Research Station, University of Melbourne, a position that brought him into even closer contact with students. A feature of Alan's tenure of this post was the monthly dinner at which students were asked to wear shoes and listen to a diverse range of after-dinner speakers, including Jim Cairns, B. A. Santamaria, Arthur Calwell and Ian Sinclair. Alan may not have agreed with all the views expounded in these talks but it was of paramount importance to him that students should have the opportunity to hear them first-hand and to meet some of the people who were — for good or bad — influencing the affairs of the nation.

Alan collaborated closely with scientific colleagues in multi-disciplinary research on problems such as the economics of stocking rates, drought strategies and agricultural research. Members of his stable of talented post-graduate students were also encouraged to focus on topical 'problems' in agriculture rather than 'applications' of theory or analytical tools. In 1987, Alan was appointed to a three-man Policy Group of the Australian Institute of Agricultural Science to produce a White Paper on Agricultural Science and the Future of Australian Agriculture. His work for agriculture and agricultural science was recognised when he was made a Fellow of the Institute.

As an academic, Alan Lloyd applied much the same principle that characterised his professional work in agricultural economics. Being right was more important than winning. He was a stickler for proper procedures and an obstinate opponent of those who cut corners on academic issues. Too often, he was on the losing side. Alan was also a civil libertarian. He supported opponents of conscription and gave practical support to draft resisters during the Vietnam years, but at the same time insisting that all classes that were scheduled be delivered for students who held opposite views on these matters. At times, he was as unpopular with radical students and Vice-Chancellors as he was with special interests in agricultural industries: situations that would lead Alan to observe that 'the popular economist/academic is like the popular tax collector — it means he is not doing his job'.

Alan Lloyd's career covers the period of agricultural expansion following the Second World War to the contraction of agriculture that has occurred in recent years. He was Secretary of the Wool Industry Conference during the

early 1960s and a Commissioner of the Industries Assistance Commission from 1973 to 1977. Alan worked on major inquiries into agricultural research, promotion of agricultural products and rural income fluctuations. In one sense, Alan was the quintessential IAC type with his opposition to special deals and fundamental support for public inquiry processes and transparency in decision-making. Alan's broad view of economics did make him less sceptical about the opportunities for a positive role for government than many staff and colleagues in the IAC.

For someone who had little interest in administration himself, Alan had considerable faith in the quality of public administration. There is a consistent thread in many of his policy prescriptions where he advocated policies that also rely on the objectivity and transparency of public decision-making as well as the purely economic ingredients of the situation. Thus, Alan was one of the few agricultural economists who gave initial support to the Reserve Price Scheme for wool — a proposal that perhaps might have succeeded if its management had been left to people like himself. Once the scheme failed, Alan was quick to recognise the changed economic circumstances and administrative arrangements that eventually led to its downfall. Recalling his earlier position, he remarked that it was yet another case of 'Ye of little faith, ye were right again.'

Similarly, Alan was a qualified supporter in the 1970s of the principle of tariff compensation to redress the damage done to lightly-assisted agricultural industries by assistance to manufacturing (and some agricultural industries). Again, apart from theoretical arguments concerning, among other things, the daunting information needs of such a policy, successful application of tariff compensation would have also relied on the good faith of administrators and their freedom from political interference.

As a citizen of Victoria, the high points of the Lloyd 'agenda' were his participation in the controversy over the Little Desert in the late 1960s and his conduct of the Rural Economics Study of 1985–86. Proposals for clearing the Little Desert were the last Victorian attempt to apply the closer settlement and development ethos that had dominated Australian agriculture until the last twenty-five years. Political opposition to the scheme came mainly from conservationists. With his colleague the late Jack Holden, Alan provided convincing economic analysis that demonstrated the losses that would have been a consequence of the scheme. The upshot was that the scheme was abandoned, with new arrangements put in place designed to evaluate trade-offs between economic and environmental objectives. The vigour of Alan's participation was sharpened once he realised that political pressure was being applied to public servants preventing them from revealing the economic and agronomic deficiencies of the scheme. Alan Lloyd justly deserves to be remembered as a pioneer of environmentalism in Australia

long before it was fashionable. However, he had no sympathy for the exaggerated non-scientific claims and lobbying tactics of latter-day conservationists.

The Report of the Rural Economics Study conducted by Alan Lloyd is a coherent statement of the issues confronting the Victorian rural sector and a useful summary of his own broad interests in agricultural economics. There are few students or practitioners of agricultural economics who would not benefit from careful examination of its contents. This is not the place to comment in detail on the Report. The most personally pleasing aspect of the exercise for Alan was his opportunity to work closely with former students. From all accounts, participants in the study managed to have a good time under Alan's typically convivial management style.

Despite the professional quality of the Report, it was not received enthusiastically by the Victorian Government of the day — perhaps most obviously because its emphasis on the international and macroeconomic dimensions of Victorian agriculture set clear limits on what it was possible for a State government to achieve. There were essentially three other main reasons for this less than enthusiastic response. First, Alan did not disguise his disdain for the emphasis on infant industries and so-called value adding that had distorted the traditional objectives and priorities of the Victorian Department of Agriculture, as elsewhere. Characteristically, his inability to convince politicians on this point subsequently led him to publish his views to a wider audience ('You can always tell a politician — but you can't tell him much' was another of Alan's jocular laments). Second, and in a related way, Alan was concerned with the cuts to research that have occurred in State Departments of Agriculture. At the same time, Alan did not please the farming lobby by pointing out that as the principal beneficiaries of agricultural research, farmers should be prepared to increase their contributions to it. Alan continued his support for maintaining the research base in his subsequent collaboration with colleagues from the Australian Institute of Agricultural Science. Finally, the Report was critical of the broader role of the Victorian rural adjustment authority that was engaging in commercial lending activities beyond its original objectives.

The Australian Agricultural and Resource Economics Society honoured Alan in 1991 with Distinguished Life Membership for his contributions to the profession. His contributions to the study of agricultural research were further recognised by the establishment of the Alan Lloyd Fellowship, designed to enable outstanding international scholars to visit Australia and interact with Australian agricultural and resource economists, and to deliver the Alan Lloyd Address at the Society's annual conference.

Alan Lloyd was an extremely fair, kind and generous-spirited man. His humour, friendship, support and advice will be missed greatly within this

Society and the economics profession at large. The Society expresses heartfelt condolences to Alan's wife, Lola, and sons Murray and Chris, and thanks them with deep gratitude for their care and devotion to Alan in his long and painful illness — during which time, typically, Alan remained ever-stoic, more concerned for everyone else than for himself. Humanity by example is an apt legacy of one of the last of the great all-rounders.