

# News & Views

May 2021 Volume 33 Issue 2



# AARES

AUSTRALASIAN AGRICULTURAL &  
RESOURCE ECONOMICS SOCIETY

## AARES

### Federal Council Members

**President** Gavan Dwyer

**President Elect** Frank Scrimgeour

**Past President** Sarah Wheeler

**Secretary** Sayed Iftekhar

**Treasurer** Emilio Morales

#### Promotions & Development

Sorada Tapsuwan

**Investment Committee** John Rolfe

**AJARE Editor** Tiho Ancev

### Branch Councillors

**SA** Lin Crase

**WA** Claire Doll

**ACT** Tim Capon

**NSW** Michael Harris

**QLD** Gabriela Scheufele

**VIC** Nick Tsaktsiras

**UNE** Oscar Cacho

**North America** Mariah Ehmke

**East Asia** Yu Sheng

**NZ** Zack Dorner

**ECR WA** Claire Doll

**LOC** Emilio Morales

### Executive Support

#### AES Office Manager

Mersine Dandas

#### Strategic Communications

Deborah Peterson

#### Software Committee

Rod McInnes

## A word from the President

Dear AARES members,

I am very honoured to be serving as your new President. I have been involved in AARES for many years primarily through the Victorian Branch and have had a wonderful time in the society getting to know so many of you. 2021 will be an exciting year for AARES as we emerge out of the COVID and I look forward to helping lead a number of initiatives that will improve outcomes for members and continue the reforms initiated under the strategic plan.



### Incoming Council

I am looking forward to chairing the incoming council. I am pleased to welcome new President Elect Frank Scrimgeour to Council. I am very grateful to Sarah Wheeler for all her hard work last year and look forward to working with her and receiving her wise counsel as Immediate Past President. John Rolfe will be remaining on Council and we will value the opportunity to continue to draw on his deep council knowledge and experience.

## **AARES Conference**

A big thank you to Rod McInnes and the Sydney LOC for the 2021 AARES Conference. The Conference was successfully run online for five days. This was a big step for AARES and in response to the unprecedented COVID situation.

Thank you to those of you who completed the survey on the outcomes of the 2021 Conference. A summary of the survey results is provided in a later section of this news and views. We received some very positive feedback on the conference that was held under difficult circumstances. Our members were very positive on the whole regarding the content of the conference program and its operation. Some many of us have gotten used to life online – and we appreciated your patience with the inevitable technical challenges that can happen with bringing such a large number of people together in a digital environment.

There seems to be a desire among many of our members to have the best of both worlds. Quite a number of people felt they were able to participate in the digital conference when they would have been otherwise been unable to so if it was held on location.

AARES understands the importance of face-to-face conferences and the networking and social opportunities that come with them. A wonderful feature of our society is that we genuinely enjoy each other's company and hanging out together. Hopefully with the evolving COVID situation we can move from COVID normal to AARES normal.

Our New England Branch has commenced planning for the 2022 Conference. The LOC is planning to hold the Conference as an online presence which will be supported by a short format physical presence hosted by the New South Wales Branch. More information will be provided on this shortly.

## **Heading North**

The 2020 Travelling North Award was impacted by COVID and we expect it to also be impacted in 2021. The AAEA is planning a conference with an online and some physical presence but the opportunities for international participation have be affected. As a consequence, Council at its last meeting resolved that no physical presence funding will be provided in 2021 and instead agreed to sponsor a modified Heading North Award which will provide funding for:

- An awardee to be recognised as the Winner of the Heading North Award and a grant to cover the cost of their online-only participation in the conference, and
- Grants to high calibre applicants for the Award to also fund the cost of their online-only participation in the conference.

Total award funding to be distributed to fund online-only participation will be capped at the annual cost normally incurred by AARES to support physical participation.

Calls for the Heading North Award applications will open next week.

## **Strategic Plan**

Past Councils have made some significant steps in progressing the AARES Strategic Plan. I am eager to understand what has worked well and what areas and issues require further effort. We also need to start preparations for the next Strategic Plan so we can continue on the positive directions initiated by the last. I will be leading this issue forward at our next Council meeting.

## **Communications**

An important part of the Strategic Plan has been the focus on improving the communication with members. I will be working with News and Views Editor Deb Peterson and President Elect Frank Scrimgeour to bring some new initiatives forward.

## **Vale**

I regret to advise that two former valued members Neil Sturgess and Oliver Gyles passed away recently. Our sympathies have been passed on to their families and you will be receiving some information on the contribution each made to the profession shortly.

Gavan Dwyer

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## AARES 2021 Conference: Ed Barbier Paper Now Available

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Professor Ed Barbier presented the Keith Campbell Address at the 64th AARES Annual Conference in February 2020 at the University of Western Australia, Perth. Professor Barbier's paper, 'The Evolution of Economic Views on Natural Resource Scarcity,' is now published in the Review of Environmental Economics and Policy, volume 15, number 1, winter 2021 [https://economie.esg.uqam.ca/wp-content/uploads/sites/54/2020/11/Barbier\\_Edward\\_Nov2020.pdf](https://economie.esg.uqam.ca/wp-content/uploads/sites/54/2020/11/Barbier_Edward_Nov2020.pdf)

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## Updates from Federal Council

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Federal Council's last meeting was Friday 16 April 2021. At that meeting, Council considered the following key issues:

- The 2022 Conference theme will be '*Resilience in a Time of Uncertainty*'.
- Council discussed the importance of having some physical presence as part of the 2022 conference format. A working group subsequently met with the New England Branch and the NSW Branch and agreed on some principles to enable the branches to progress planning whereby a limited physical presence will occur in Sydney for a short defined period to complement the online conference program.
- Council reviewed the results of the 2021 Conference Survey - 92 responses received out of 416 registrants. About two thirds were returning attendees, and one third were new attendees. We will provide a separate communication on the detailed survey results.
- Past Presidents John Rolfe and Sarah Wheeler have been approved to further progress implementation of strategic plan and commence planning for the refresh of the plan. As part of this exercise they will be conducting interviews with members and surveying members that did not attend the conference.
- Council invited the Editors of the Journal to present to August Council on options to deal with the increased volume of submissions and planning for any refresh of the Editorial Board.
- Council recommitted to promoting and hosting Federal Webinars. Ideas for presenters can be passed on to Sarah Wheeler and Sayed.

At the previous February meeting the incoming council discussed the following matters:

- Incoming Council members will undergo Director duties training.
- Review of the 2021 conference – survey of participants is being undertaken and the results of the survey will be shared with members when completed. The President and Past President will meet the LOC Chair and members to gather insights on the operation of the conference which will be shared with the New England LOC.
- The New England Branch will host the 2022 Conference – the conference will be held online due to venue COVID management constraints. Discussions are occurring with some Branches to potentially host a physical presence component to the Conference.
- Next steps with the implementation and review of the Strategic Plan were discussed. The two recent last Presidents are leading a series of internal discussions on preparing away forward and will report back to Council. They are also holding conversations with potential service providers to support internal and external communications and promotion activities.
- Options were discussed to enable local branches more just in time access resources for hiring venues and funding events.
- Next steps to update and maintain the website and incorporate online resources developed during the 2021 conference was also discussed.
- The European Association of Agricultural Economists has reached out to AARES and is interested in holding an AARES hosted seminar at their Annual Conference.
- Council noted with sadness the passing of Neil Sturgess and Oliver Gyles.

## AARES Western Australia Branch Activities



The WA Branch was highly engaged in the AARES 2021 Virtual Conference week, with members amending talks, presenting, and hosting organised sessions. We were fortunate to be able to end the conference with a dinner to connect and share highlights of the week. Many thanks to the RAID Network for sponsoring this ECR networking dinner and to the NSW LOC for all their conference planning efforts!

The Branch also kicked off their Semester 1 weekly seminar series, jointly hosted with the Agricultural and Resource Economics group at the University of Western Australia, on March 5th. Seminar recordings can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/user/AREatUWA/videos>.

We're looking forward to planning more professional development sessions and networking events in 2021.

Claire Doll, WA Councillor

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## NZARES 2021 Conference 2nd-3rd September

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Photo Credit: Tamzin Henderson *Looking Out Over Nelson City at Sunset with Sheep*

The 2021 NZARES conference will be held in Nelson on Thursday 2nd and Friday 3rd September at the Beachside Conference and Events Centre. A pre-conference event will also be held on Wednesday 1st September. There will be more information to come regarding the pre-conference event and the conference.

### **COVID-19 Contingency Planning**

Given the changing environment with COVID-19, there is some uncertainty around whether an in-person conference will be able to go ahead. The committee will monitor the COVID-19 alert levels and will make changes to the conference format accordingly. We hope that the conference will be able to go ahead in-person, however, we are preparing a contingency plan to look at other options if necessary.

### Contact Details for the NZARES Committee for 2020-2021:

| Position        | Name                | Email                              |
|-----------------|---------------------|------------------------------------|
| President       | Ramilan Thiagarajah | T.Ramilan@massey.ac.nz             |
| President Elect | Nazmun Ratna        | Nazmun.Ratna@lincoln.ac.nz         |
| Past President  | Anita Wreford       | Anita.Wreford@lincoln.ac.nz        |
| Treasurer       | Yvonne Matthews     | yvonneresearch@gmail.com           |
| Secretary       | Rachael David       | Rachael.Davidson@mpi.govt.nz       |
| Committee       | Zack Dorner         | Zack.Dorner@waikato.ac.nz          |
| Committee       | Femi Olubode        | Femi.Olubode@waikatoregion.govt.nz |
| Committee       | Darran AusPn        | Darran.AusPn@mpi.govt.nz           |
| Committee       | Tony Schischka      | Tony.Schischka@mpi.govt.nz         |
| Committee       | Meike Guenther      | Meike.Guenther@lincoln.ac.nz       |

The committee welcome any suggestions and ideas leading up to our conference in early September.

Ngā mihi,  
The NZARES Committee

## Upcoming Awards

### NZARES Post-Graduate Awards

Each year NZARES offers up to three awards of \$1,500 each to NZ-based post-graduate students with a study programme whose primary focus is: agricultural economics, natural resource economics, environmental economics, farm management, agricultural systems, or agricultural extension.

Nominations are now open via Universities. Contact your Head of Department if you would like to be nominated. More information including eligibility criteria is available [here](#).

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## AARES Members Feature on List of Top Researchers in Agricultural Economics and Policy

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A paper by Ioannidis et al. (2020) provided a global ranking of researchers in many discipline areas, including for a category titled “Agricultural Economics and Policy” (actually including environmental and resource economists). Several AARES members are featured in list of the top 106 names (the top 2% out of 4900 researchers included in the category). They were David Pannell (UWA) at #25, Quentin Grafton (ANU) at #28, David Zilbermann at #36, Jikun Huang at #54, Julian Alston (UC Davis) at #82, Ric Scarpa (Università degli Studi di Verona) at #85, and Alan Randall (Ohio State) at #87. John Quiggin (UQ) was ranked at #137 in Economics, but if he’d been included in the Agricultural Economics list he would have been at #10. It shows that AARES members have a significant global profile. Rob Cramb was included in the ranking under Agronomy & Agriculture, coming in at #827 on that list. Congratulations to all these members.

It is also notable that a number of recent keynote speakers at AARES conferences are high on the list, including Professor Ed Barbier (Colorado State University) at #1. Professor Barbier presented the Keith Campbell Address at the 64th AARES Annual Conference in February 2020 at the University of Western Australia, Perth.

### Reference

Ioannidis, J.P.A., Boyack, K.W. and Baas, J. (2020). Updated science-wide author databases of standardized citation indicators. PLoS Biol 18(10): e3000918.  
<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pbio.3000918>

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## Looking Back: AARES Conference Held in February 2021

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Due to the disruption of COVID-19, the 65th Australasian Agricultural and Resource Economics Society (AARES) Annual Conference was held virtually via an online platform and was free for AARES members. The AARES 2021 Conference took place on the 8th - 12th February 2021 and featured a workshop on effective regional biosecurity for a changing world, mini-symposiums on adaptation, biodiversity, agricultural total factor productivity and the environment, market microstructure in water markets and many more.

Keynote speakers included Robert Chambers (University of Maryland); Dawn Thilmany, (Colorado State University); Marc Bellemare (University of Minnesota); Janine Dixon (Victoria University); Eli Fenichel (Yale); Susan Hester (University of Melbourne); Paulo Santos (Monash); and Glyn Wittwer (Victoria University).



A symposium organised by Steve Schilizzi. “Auctions for natural resource management and conservation programs: Potential vs Reality”, featured Vernon Smith (photo), the 2002 Economics Nobel Laureate. This session was partly in recognition of the 2020 Economics Nobel Prize awarded to Milgrom and Wilson for improvements to auction theory and inventions of new auction formats.

## Oliver Gyles: 1941 - 2021

Time beats everyone. On March 3rd 2021, Time was called on the life of Oliver Gyles after a long illness. Ollie, B.Sci. (Melb), M.Econ. (UNE), was a long-standing member of the Victorian branch of AARES and masterly long serving agricultural economist with the (variously titled in recent years) Victorian Department of Agriculture. His most important recent contribution was to question the sense of substantial public expenditure on private irrigation infrastructure in the name of water saving.

Those of us who were fortunate enough to work with and be mentored by Ollie were in awe of his intelligence, decency, humour and great company. As Ollie's long-time boss in the DPI, Peter Doyle put it:

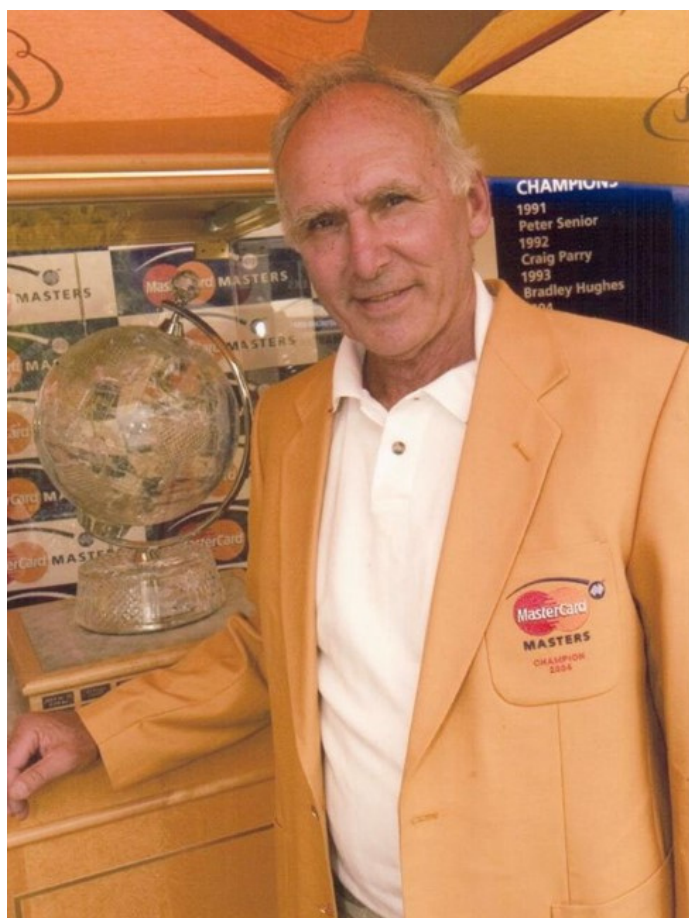
*People with Ollie's incredible brain and humour don't come along too often. He would be the only economist/scientist I ever recruited for projects and excused from the onus of report writing. Mind you I expect I'd still be waiting for the reports as Ollie would have moved on to something more interesting.*

Ollie was a proper public servant – he believed his role was to serve the interests of the public. He was far too smart to bother with mindless bureaucracy or take those who engaged in it seriously. He would just decide, rightly, that there are much more interesting things to do and more important problems to solve. And he would do this in his highly technically competent way, confident enough in his own training and knowledge to be unfazed by fashion and political whim.

Living in the Goulburn Valley irrigation district, Ollie naturally turned his mind to questions about water. On hearing about Ollie's passing, Al Watson observed that 'it was a great pity that Ollie's original ideas on the concept of water issue efficiency did not have more influence on Victorian water policy. His ideas are now generally accepted across the agricultural economics community. A lot of economic waste could have been avoided, especially in his own local area'.

In his paper to the 47th annual conference of AARES, 'Valuing benefits of increasing water use efficiency', Ollie said pretty much what was needed to be said, emphasising differences between engineering ideas of water efficiency, and those of hydrologists and economists.. Many so-called losses are recaptured for use elsewhere. This applies to return flows and outfalls from channels in gravity irrigation networks. Claimed losses may be available at a later date, such as when water that seeps from channels to groundwater is subsequently pumped for irrigation. Ollie's insights were informed by observations and experience of irrigation in the gravity irrigation districts of northern Victoria where one person's seepage was another person's allocation.

Following presentation of this conference paper, a crass attempt was made by someone on the periphery of the Victorian water bureaucracy to stop the subsequent publication of Ollie's paper in Connections, then a professional publication of the Australian Agricultural and Resource Economics Society.



We hope that this fool from the bloated public relations apparatus of the Victorian public service was acting on his own account, through ignorance of the issue. It would be more worrying if the instruction came from elsewhere.

Undeterred, and with a wry, grim smile, Ollie elaborated his thinking about the FBMP/NVIRP in an unsurprisingly unpublished letter to the editor of The Age. The letter was as follows:

The Editor

“The Age”

John Brumby’s claim that significant real water savings can be made will only stand up if he can either show how the water in irrigation channels that is not delivered to customers is irretrievably lost or where it is accumulating.

This undelivered channel water can only be truly lost from the integrated water management system of northern Victoria if it flows into a very saline water body or evaporates.

Otherwise it is already being used for environmental flows or irrigation.

G-MW and DSE’s own data show that aquifer levels are falling. Therefore any seepage from the irrigation system is being recycled by groundwater pumpers, including G-MW itself which is funded by governments to pump groundwater back into the channel system.

If surface water that has escaped from the channel system does not flow back to the river or is not diverted for irrigation it must either completely evaporate or accumulate. An 800 square kilometre lake would be needed to completely evaporate the 800 GL claimed to be “lost”.

Find us a vast area of evaporation surface Mr Brumby, or admit the ‘Food Bowl’ project is a scheme to appropriate 150 GL of irrigators’ bulk water entitlement.

Oliver Gyles

Agriform P/L, Shepparton

5th June, 2008

Dogged, among other virtues, Ollie gave a further paper to the 55th Annual Conference of AARES in 2011 entitled ‘More water for everything? The problem of bogus water savings in northern Victoria’. Again, he was right - and \$2-3 billion dollars later has been proven correct.

Gavan Dwyer summed up Ollie’s contribution to the public policy of burning more public funds on already flawed irrigation schemes by investing in on-farm and off-farm irrigation infrastructure, saying ‘He nailed the NVIRP in one, and set my course on water - one of those rare ones imbued with uncommon common sense’.

Ollie Gyles, archetypical Australian, last of the Melbourne Bitter drinkers. On his retirement from the public service and to mark his own long and deep friendship with Bill Malcolm, Ollie gave him a set of impressively bound volumes of the collected works of Banjo Patterson. His inscription, referencing some Banjo yarns about horse racing, read:

*Learn well the section on animal husbandry and business risk management commencing on p. 73.  
Lots of luck in the application.*

Ollie

So long Ollie, it’s been good to know you.

Bill Malcolm and Al Watson

## Neil H. Sturgess: 1939 - 2021



Neil Sturgess died on 10th February 2021 after a long and stoically borne illness, aged 81. Oddly, this was the day of this year's COVID affected AGM of AARES with decentralised Zoom-based meetings. With almost all of those present his former colleagues, ex-students and friends, Neil's death brought a pall of gloom to the Melbourne proceedings.

Neil was a former president of AARES and an esteemed agricultural economist who first worked for the (then) School of Agriculture of the University of Melbourne and later as a successful consultant in resource economics, locally and internationally. Neil had a particular interest in fisheries management and water use. Vic Wright summed Neil up perfectly: Neil Sturgess had serious class.

Neil studied for his B.Agr.Sc. at the University of Melbourne and then completed a M.Ag.Ec. at the UNE in the mid-1960s. He joined the School of Agriculture at the University of Melbourne in 1965 as lecturer, later senior lecturer.

For the next 23 years Neil taught and researched at the University of Melbourne, passionately, doggedly, drumming principles of production economics and management economics into undergraduate students of agricultural science and, importantly, equipping a varied and talented group of post-graduates students with his capacity for rigorous thinking that has assisted many successful careers. As one former student David Briggs put it: Neil taught me and, along with Alan Lloyd and Al Watson, triggered my early interest in economics. Neil was sort of cool too, not a characteristic typical of agricultural economists! Jane Branson added: he will always be my James Bond 007.

As president of AARES, his 1993 address was critical of the then push towards so-called competency standards for professions. This reflected his strong belief in professional independence. He later said he didn't want to write about competency standards in his presidential address but thought the potential damage was important. Otherwise, our independence would be threatened by external interference and government over-reach.

Included in Neil's professional work was a fruitful collaboration with Hesti Wijaya in research on share farming in Indonesia, whereby elaborate contracts had evolved to get around Islamic constraints on charging interest. The work was insightful in the way it illustrated the nexus between the economics of production and finance.

In the public domain, Neil was involved as Associate Commissioner in a 1984 inquiry into southern bluefin tuna by the then IAC. There was also valuable local work on the arbitration of tomato prices where he applied straightforward economic principles. He observed that there was a queue of famers on the lookout for contracts, suggesting tomato growing was a profitable activity. Neil certainly did not endear himself to leading lights of the tomato-growing region of Victoria when he reduced the contract price for tomatoes.

Neil was an understated and generous man. For many years, he contributed his time and administrative ability to a small charity involved with disability services in suburban Melbourne. Neil Sturgess was a friend to many and a fine scholar, admired across the agricultural economics profession.

Bill Malcolm and Al Watson