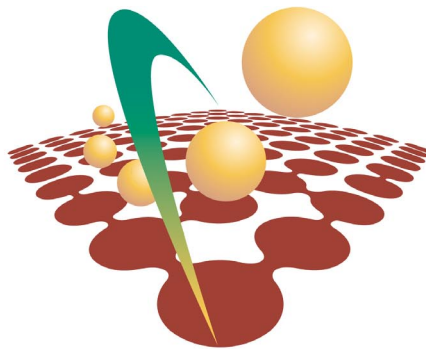


Institute for

Rural Futures

Mission, Program Themes and Objectives

2002 - 2006



INSTITUTE FOR

Rural Futures

UNE
The University of
NEW ENGLAND

Summary	1
Mission	5
Focus & Objectives	6
Research Themes	7
Corporate Strategies & Activities	11
Senior Staff	19

Foundation

The Institute of Rural Futures was founded in August 2000 as an independent research centre at the University of New England, focusing on issues affecting the future of rural Australia, its communities and resources base.

The formation of the Institute has brought together two organisations with established reputations in their own fields of research. Staff of the Institute have come from the Rural Development Centre and the Centre for Bioregional Resource Management. The Rural Development Centre was founded as the Kellogg Rural Adjustment Unit in 1976, its purpose being to encourage the exchange of information and views relating to structural change in rural industries and the effect of this on rural communities. In the 1980s, with the end of Kellogg Foundation funding, the Rural Development Centre began to undertake applied socio-economic research and consultancy. During the 1990s, the Centre broadened its expertise to include professional staff with experience in such areas as agricultural economics, agricultural extension, farm management, agricultural education, social welfare and service delivery and rural environmental policy.

The Centre for Bioregional Resource Management was established in 1997 to study and advance policies for integrated management of whole landscape regions. Bioregions have common social and ecological attributes. The Centre quickly gained recognition for innovative research and “on-ground” work, in bioregional planning, landscape futures analysis. It is one of three internationally recognised UNESCO research centres based in Australia.

The Institute, building on the synergies of the now incorporated UNESCO Centre for Bioregional Resource Management (CBRM) and former Rural Development Centre (RDC), together with collaborators provides a specialised focus within the University for inter-disciplinary research activities and integration, which cross traditional disciplinary and ‘School’ boundaries. The Institute contributes relevant outcomes to the UNE strategic plan and Research strategy and plans.

In its first two years (2000–2002), the Institute has invested considerable efforts in building profile and projects, regional engagement on rural issues. It has built excellent relationships with a wide range of government (at all levels), industry and community clients. This strong client base has strongly endorsed the direction and focus of the Institute. Indeed, several key clients (i.e., MDBC, LWA AFFA, DoTARS and UNESCO) sponsored an International symposium, run by the IRF, on these focal themes. The IRF has also contributed to facilitation of multi-disciplinary, cross School/Faculty large research projects. These activities have benefited the whole University.

Focus

The focus of the Institute is on *Change* – in identifying and documenting the social, economic and environmental impacts of

change. It is only through the understanding of the processes and impacts of change that rural and regional communities can plan for the future.

Therefore, the Institute undertakes applied inter-disciplinary research across the social, economic, environmental and resource issues affecting the future of rural Australia. It contributes knowledge, policy analysis and adaptive capacity to meet identified and predictable pressures of change on rural Australia. The IRF designs projects, seeks funds and manages projects delivery. Many projects involve interdisciplinary teams, including extensive collaboration with academics and practitioners from across the University and with Partners outside UNE.

Research programs

Key research program areas of the Institute for the five years (2002-2006) were strategically identified to target prevailing rural issues and research funding opportunities. A fourth area of developing strength is targeting an emerging “over the horizon” area to build on existing strengths in positioning the IRF and UNE for future leading edge research and funding. These key areas are :

1. Change in Rural and Regional Communities, and Industries.
2. Social Impacts of Change in Rural Australia
3. Environmental Impacts of Change
4. Landscape Mosaics – Integration, synthesis and innovation through action research within complex, linked social-ecological systems.

Funding

Over the last 2 years (2000-2002) up to 15 professional staff and 2 PhD students have been employed on 52 projects – many of which are undertaken with collaborators from across the University. This represents some \$2.8M in external research funding. This is quite an achievement, considering more than 95% of all staff salaries, on-costs, operating and maintenance are paid from external sources and the Institute contributes a proportion of its research earnings to central administration. Nevertheless the corporate strategy of the Institute is cognisant of the considerable pressures of change in research funding and increasing competition, which requires very careful and realistic management of staff time and commitments.

Staff develop and undertake projects with real community engagement (as communities, local government, local agencies etc as part of the entire project) in order to best transfer skills and build rural human capacities. Many of these projects are truly engaged “on-ground” models and take an enormous amount of time. However the majority of staff time is unfunded for this activity, again requiring careful monitoring and management. Several undergraduate honours projects and an increasing number of postgraduate research projects are also being supervised by senior staff.

Since 2000, IRF staff have also contributed to more than 60 publications, several national and international conferences, and for the second time organised and run *Landscape Futures II* (December

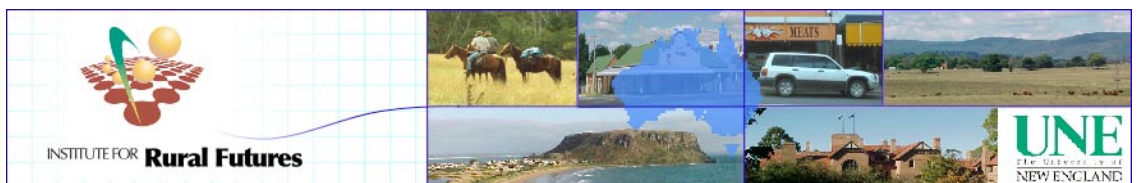
2001), an international inter-disciplinary symposium. This conference, like its predecessor was very successful and contributed not only to raising the profile and interest in the capacities of the Institute and wider UNE, but also to building and maintaining links with a broad client base. The Director, David Brunckhorst has received a UNESCO medal and a Landcare Australia research award. He was recently invited to give two invited papers to a significant national policy forum, the Fenner Conference "Agriculture for the Australian Environment" and was nominated for a Eureka Science Prize for his innovative research.

**Regional
engagement**

The Institute undertakes and contributes a tremendous amount in regional engagement activities. Projects are developed with key stakeholders, community representatives, farmers and local government, for example.

Several projects exemplify a seamless engagement in understanding and building knowledge and 'action-learning' with communities. For example, the "opening the farm Gateway" project which gathers knowledge on IT needs of farmers and rural services, while providing hands on assistance with problems, The Tilbuster Commons project, the Guyra small business study and, the Tamworth and regional rural industry clustering project. Issues of the ageing population of rural communities and farmer retirement have been the subject of another study and video production with local communities. Such regional engagement activities are important but are difficult to fund because they require a considerable investment of staff time. The Director has contributed to several forums and submissions on this issue and has met with Federal and State Ministers to seek funding for community and regional engagement activities.

David J Brunckhorst,
Professor in Rural Futures,
Director, IRF



The **Mission** of the Institute for Rural Futures (IRF) is based on the words penned by retired Aboriginal drover and author, Herb Wharton, who wrote:

“...learn from the past, try to understand the present, and feel inspired to help plan a better future for all Australians.”

To Learn from the Past

Public policy making on rural issues often ignores the lessons of history in the need for immediate action. The Institute's research is informed by an understanding of the origins of today's rural issues in the history of rural Australia and in the policy decisions of the past. These manifest themselves in the interrelated resource and environmental, social and economic pressures rural Australia now faces.

To Understand the Present

The issues that face rural and regional Australia are complex and difficult to resolve. The processes of change that lead to the emergence of these issues are not well understood. The Institute aims, through its research work, to contribute to equitable and effective policy-making and program delivery through research that improves the understanding of these processes of change.

To Help Plan a Better Future

A better future for rural Australia can be achieved, not only through more effective and informed policy-making, but also through meaningful community participation and learning. The Institute aims, through the development of innovative participatory and ‘action-learning’ research processes, to assist rural communities in more satisfying and effective engagement with the issues that affect them.

Focus

The Focus of the Institute is on:

Change – in identifying and documenting the social, economic and environmental impacts of change.

Aims

With collaborators the Institute Aims to:

Build an integrated understanding of complex and interrelated social, economic and environmental issues, and seeks to build knowledge based policy and solutions for rural areas.

Objective

The decade long Objective for the Institute is to:

Contribute knowledge, policy analysis and adaptive capacity to meet identified and predictable pressures of change on rural Australia.

It is only through the understanding of these processes and impacts of change that rural and regional communities can plan for the future. The Institute's work will assist rural communities to engage and adapt more satisfactorily with the issues that affect them.

Applied research

The Institute for Rural Futures (IRF) undertakes applied interdisciplinary research across social, economic, environmental and resource issues affecting the future of rural Australia. With collaborators it aims to build an integrated knowledge base and understanding of complex and interrelated social, economic and environmental issues, and seeks to build knowledge based policy and solutions for rural areas. It therefore fills an important gap in an area not traditionally or adequately dealt with through standard disciplinary research structures – a point noted and appreciated by many of our clients.

Whilst contributing knowledge based policy analysis and adaptive capacity to meet these pressures in rural Australia is a long-term objective for the Institute, key research program thematic areas for the five years 2001-2005 were strategically identified to target prevailing rural issues and research funding opportunities.

A fourth area of developing strength is targeting an emerging “over the horizon” area to build on existing strengths in positioning the IRF and UNE for future leading edge research and funding. It will build techniques and applied models for more seamless integration and synthesis of knowledge and innovative solutions that can be tested with communities and partners.

These four key thematic areas are described below.

Change in Rural and Regional Communities

Through its predecessors, the Institute has a long-standing interest in issues relating to change in non-metropolitan Australia. This interest necessarily extends to the main cause of such change – structural adjustment in agriculture. Project areas include farm adjustment behaviour and policy, including the social and family dimensions, innovative behaviour by farmers, and value adding by farmers. Issues relating to change in other industries that are important in rural Australia, such as forestry and mining, have also been addressed. Changes in rural industries are just one of the factors that have led to significant changes in the economic and social condition of rural and regional communities, and the Institute has conducted a wide range of projects relating to the economic development of these communities. One important emerging area is that of rural industry clusters for regional development.

Social Impacts of Change

The myriad forces and factors which are changing the face of rural Australia have many social effects. Some of these forces are national and international in origin, while others are regional or local. In sum, they are changing the social well being of, and opportunities for, rural people in often systematic ways.

This raises a number of research and policy issues that are the focus of Institute projects. These include the access of rural people to human services, the effects of the ageing of the population on rural communities and industries, crime in rural communities, and the role of social capital in the development of rural communities.

Environmental Impacts of Change

Change in rural Australia affects the environment, and the responses by the environment to past land use also forces change on rural communities. There is general agreement on the need for better ways of enabling governments and communities to work in partnership to manage the land and water resources on which society depends. A number of research projects are being undertaken by the Institute on resource and environmental policy, catchment management and environmental planning issues.

Synthesis and innovative understanding leading to “break through”, however, is often difficult to achieve. One primary reason is the mismatch of scale and function of agricultural systems including their (local) socio-economic characteristics with natural systems, which is a critical factor in poor policy and planning. These issues together with entrenched, narrow (rather than integrated) and fragmented management, continue a downward cycle which effects other industries in and around rural towns and contributes to sometimes inappropriate local planning (urban fringe development of agricultural land, lack of biodiversity integration, run down in quality and quantity of water and further externalisation of “triple-bottom line” costs) leading in turn to a lack of regional development opportunities and synergies that might contribute regional ecological, social and economic sustainability.

Landscape Mosaics

Developing a more cohesive understanding of the combined and complex manifestation of social, ecological and economic change across rural landscapes and communities is the evolving “integrated systems” research program at the Institute. This leads us to an emerging area of research program development, Landscape Mosaics, as a more seamless synthesis of the above three areas for integrated natural resource management, resource governance, and landscape design (clearly inclusive of human communities, land-use, industries and infrastructure). This encompasses groundbreaking work to which a new UNE Post doctoral position will contribute.

Within this program area, the Institute is endeavouring to initially develop three capacity building sub-programs. They will complement each other and contribute to building research capacities in accordance with the UNE strategic plan. The first is in Geographic Information Systems (GIS), focusing on spatial, social-ecological systems synthesis and modelling. Secondly, a policy and resources management relevant area of capability development of the Institute is in the area of adjustments towards more capable institutions to deal with resource issues and externalities of property rights and resource governance across rural and natural landscapes. An ARC Discovery project has provided funding for a Post Doctoral Fellow to work in this area. The third is in the area of design of integrated rural industry biosystems using a combination of landscape ecology, systems ecology, resource economics, institutional organisation and cluster industry theories, and applications through experimental models developed with local industries. An ARC SPIRT Post Doctoral fellow is also starting work in this area.

Institute Research Program

The Research Program of the Institute must remain flexible to the funding environment, government policies and directions, while also being 'forward looking' in building capacities both, for the Institute, UNE and Rural Australia. The following section outlines the IRF corporate strategies and activities to manage such change and opportunities. This section provides more detail on the research programs within our four key themes.

As described above, three key thematic areas have been identified that target prevailing rural issues and research funding opportunities, and a fourth area of developing strength is targeting an emerging area to build on existing strengths in positioning the IRF and UNE for the future.

Research programs areas are listed below under each of the four themes.

Change in Rural and Regional Communities, and Industries

For example:

- structural adjustment in agriculture;
- farm adjustment behaviour and policy;
- social and family dimensions of farm adjustment;
- communications and the internet;
- innovative behaviour by farmers;
- value adding by farmers;
- change in other industries that are important in rural Australia, such as forestry and mining;
- changes in rural industries, including forestry and mining, leading to significant changes in the economic and social condition of rural and regional communities;
- rural industry clusters for regional development.

Social Impacts of Change in Rural Australia

- Understanding the social effects of the myriad forces changing the face of rural Australia;
- social well-being, and opportunities for rural communities;
- structure of farms, family industries and rural communities;
- access of rural people to services;
- farmer retirement;
- rural and farm family adjustment;
- the effects of the ageing of the population on rural communities and industries;
- effects on social and human capital;
- civic engagement and common areas of community interest in rural affairs;
- changing attitudes on the land and in communities;
- crime and social cohesion in rural communities.

Environmental Impacts of Change

- Understanding how responses by the environment to past land use also force change on rural communities;
- knowledge enabling governments and communities to work in partnership to manage the land and water resources on which society depends;
- resource and environmental policy;
- catchment management and environmental planning issues;
- understanding change towards 'green' rural industries and organic production;
- analysis for synthesis and understanding innovative policy "break through";
- understanding scale and function of agricultural systems including their (local) socio-economic and community characteristics with natural systems;
- ecosystem health, landscape connectivity, externalisation of environmental costs and the "triple-bottom line";
- analysis of scenarios and synergies that might contribute regional ecological, social and economic sustainability.

Innovation and Integration through Landscape Mosaics

- Building a cohesive understanding of the combined and complex manifestation of social, ecological and economic functions and influences operating across rural landscapes;
- building on developing area of *Panarchy Theory* – understanding combined systems failure, resilience and critical pressure points for change;
- developing an "integrated systems" approach to provide transition options for land management, services and communities;
- bioregional planning, alternative landscape futures analysis and, landscape redesign;
- development of methodologies, institutional and policy frameworks for seamless integration of natural resource management, resource governance, and landscape design;
- Knowledge building and analysis (in above areas) through technological and analytical development; for example, Geographic Information Systems (GIS), focusing on spatial, social-ecological systems synthesis and modelling;
- understanding adjustments towards more capable institutions to deal with resource issues and externalities of property rights and resource governance across rural and natural landscapes;
- understanding applications for design, planning and establishment of combined rural industry biosystems delivering socio-economic benefits and ecosystem services at landscape scales.

The Institute for Rural Futures (IRF), building on the synergies of the now incorporated UNESCO Centre for Bioregional Resource Management (CBRM) and the former Rural Development Centre (TRDC) provides a specialised focus within the University for inter-disciplinary research activities which cross departmental and faculty boundaries.

Contributions

Over the past two years the IRF has contributed substantially to outcomes of the UNE Strategic Plan, the UNE Research Plan, as well as communication and regional community engagement of innovative and international leading edge research. Specifically in the medium to longer term, the Institute aims to:

- Contribute to building specified UNE research strengths, particularly in rural-regional research and engagement, and related inter-disciplinary areas that will further strengthen these nominated emerging areas.
- Contribute to outcomes for the UNE 2002-2006 Strategy, and the UNE Research and Research Training Management Plan (2001-2003) and related Research Investment Plan.
- Continue to build a collective and strong capacity for the UNE and IRF in “big picture” rural-regional issues through “grounded” multi-disciplinary applied research, as well as related “over the horizon” emerging trans-disciplinary areas.
- To contribute knowledge and policy analysis in State, national and global contexts, to guide development of future sustainable landscapes, communities, resource use, enterprises and industries in non-metropolitan regions.

Research service

The Institute also provides a mechanism through which the University can offer an effective and efficient research service to multi-disciplinary and rural research funding bodies, government departments and agencies. Over its first two years, the Institute has operated effectively and efficiently in a very “turbulent” and intensely competitive environment of contract research, building on over two decades of experience of TRDC and has acquired the reputation, skills and knowledge that is necessary to continue to adapt and grow in this difficult and challenging environment. The IRF has developed a capability statement and project sheets for the information of funding agencies and potential clients. It has also produced some capability statements which are industry specific (e.g. for MLA, GRDC, L&WA, RIRDC), drawing together capabilities from across the entire University.

Funding

For eight years, up until 1996-1997 the former Rural Development Centre (this became the Institute in 2000) received \$160,000 per year base funding from the former Department of Primary Industries & Energy (now AFFA). This support stopped at this time with the transfer of rural development policy and programs from AFFA to DoTARS. While this contributed to staff time in extension and regional engagement activities, attempts to have the funding reinstated have so far been unsuccessful. Several other (State and Federal) government departments have also been approached as

well as foundations such as *News Limited* and the *Thomas Foundation*. Implementation of this strategy helps balance this shortfall, however some baseline funding of staff salaries, or proportion thereof would provide more flexibility and strategic development opportunities.

The Institute therefore derives almost all of its income by undertaking contract research for competitive research grant bodies, the ARC and various R&D Corporations, and departments and agencies of Commonwealth, State and Local governments. The Institute derives more than 90% of its salary and operating costs from external income. Since 2000, the Institute has attracted more than \$2.5M in (external) research funds. Therefore it makes a significant financial contribution to the University (through RQ and other contributions) for little cost, as well as a very substantial contribution in profile and professionalism. The Institute has devoted a great deal of effort to developing and implementing a corporate strategy which is intended to promote the achievement of the Institute's mission and to foster its reputation for conducting superior research on rural issues, while juggling financial sustainability.

Consequently, the Institute's corporate strategy has been formulated clearly bearing in mind the fact that it must compete for research funds. The intensity of this competition, the regular Figureemergence of new competitors for research funding, the rapid shifts in funding priorities, especially within government departments and agencies, and the changing approaches of competitive grant bodies to identifying research priorities and allocating research expenditures, mean that the Institute operates in an environment which is somewhat unpredictable and subject to sudden change. Current directions in research funding sit well with the Institute's multi-disciplinary focus and range of capacities and methodologies. Nevertheless, the general unpredictability of research policy and funding has the potential to translate into substantial variations in revenue.

Given these circumstances, the Institute has adopted a corporate strategy that is designed to maintain and promote the flexibility of the Institute and facilitate the achievement of its mission. This strategy consists of two main components, which are discussed in more detail below.

Identifying and creating pockets of stability within the research-funding environment

Implementation

Implementing this strategy involves identifying major funding bodies that support research in the domain covered by the research strengths of the Institute and developing strong client relationships with these bodies. Such relationships are based on a mutual understanding of research issues and research approaches and are supported by the capacity of the Institute to undertake innovative research of high quality.

In the past, competitive research grant bodies mainly funded selected projects drawn from publicly invited submissions. Recently, however, there has been an increasing tendency among these bodies to use a 'key research program' approach in which

tenders for defined research tasks are invited from a small number of organisations perceived by the funding body to have the relevant research capabilities. The strategy defined above will be particularly important in regard to obtaining and retaining clients within government departments and agencies and highlights the importance of maintaining the distinctive research style and research philosophy for which the Institute is recognised.

Collaboration

We have successfully developed strong client relationships with the Agriculture, Forests and Fisheries Australia (AFFA), the Bureau of Rural Sciences, the Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics, the Department of Transport and Regional Services (DoTARS), the Meat & Livestock Research Corporation, the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation, Australian Wool Innovations, the Cotton RDC, Health and Community Services Research and Development Grants, and the NSW Department of Land & Water Conservation, NSW Planning, NSW Agriculture, Local Government Department, NSW Environment Protection Agency, Murray-Darling Basin Commission, Australian Greenhouse Office, Land & Water Australia, Environment Australia and Family and Community Services, the Parliamentary Library (Federal), and several Divisions of the CSIRO to name but a few. The Director continues to develop and maintain these networks and contributes invited seminars (for example to AFFA, BRS, MDBC, L&WA, DoTARS, and the Parliamentary Library).

Contributions

Also as part of this strategy, the Director contributes extensively to government policies at all levels including briefings to ministers and senior staff. Over the past two years he has met with the NSW Premier, NSW Ministers for Local Government, Rural Affairs, Conservation and Land Management, State and Regional Development, and Planning. Plans are being made to meet with the NSW Education Minister in the near future. NSW Ministerial liaison occurs through the local Member, Mr Richard Torbay. Professor Brunckhorst has also met with Federal Ministers including Warren Truss (AFFA), Environment Ministers (Hill and Kemp), Deputy PM (John Anderson) and the current Education Minister, Brenden Nelson. Mr Nelson has since referred to the IRF in several national radio interviews as one of the great models of applied research and engagement in rural Australia. The Institute Director has also contributed to national forums and reviews on regional engagement by universities, science for evidence based policy development, agriculture and the Australian environment, DEST/ARC Research Priorities, the higher education review/discussion papers, CSIRO flagship programs, and NSW Premiers Department "whole-of-government" coordination.

Media profile

The increasing profile of the Institute and the University has also benefited from more than 300 "media hits" over the past two years, and other novel community and regional communications (e.g. "Tilbuster Commons" on White Pages cover). While approximately 60% of these are in local and regional media outlets (news, papers and radio interview), a considerable proportion reach other regions (e.g. *The Weekly Times* in southern NSW and Victoria) and, state and capital city newspapers. Several national and international (e.g. BBC) stories have also been published/broadcast (e.g. national ABC News, 7:30 Report, LandLine, *The Australian*, Radio National).

Funding maintenance An important element in pursuing this strategy is the maintenance of the capacity of the Institute to identify new concepts and methods of analysis and to acquire the skills and knowledge to apply those concepts and methods to issues in economic and community change and development in rural Australia. Without this capacity to acquire and utilise new knowledge the Institute would, in the long term, lose its competitive edge over rivals and endanger its basis for differentiation. Hence, the Institute has developed a mechanism to fund projects designed to acquire and develop new knowledge. This mechanism provides a platform for developing and applying innovative research methods and techniques to a point where they can be used in attracting funding from outside organisations.

Research maintenance The Institute's strategy for identifying and creating pockets of stability within the research funding environment also depends on the ability of the Institute to maintain and enhance the quality of its research. Consequently, the Institute has been developing and implementing a quality assurance program. The major elements of this program are:

- developing and maintaining close working relationships with our clientele;
- maintaining a stable core of professional research staff;
- careful recruitment of new staff;
- ensuring the development of close working relationships with academics on this campus and on other university campuses;
- in-house peer review of research projects at appropriate stages;
- external peer review of research output;
- contributing to the supervision of graduate and post-graduate student research projects;
- refusing to pursue opportunities to undertake research projects whose budgets or time lines would prohibit the achievement of an acceptable level of quality in research output; and
- developing a culture within the Institute which encourages the pursuit of excellence in all research activities.

Reducing the financial sensitivity of the organisation to variations in revenue

Reducing variability This second component of the Institute's corporate strategy relates to and complements the first. While the first component can create some stability in revenue flow, changes in the research agendas and priorities of funding bodies and government departments and agencies and the emergence of new competitors will, inevitably, lead to some variability in the revenue received by the Institute from its major clients. Currently emerging new competitors include semi-corporatised government agency research groups (having staff salaries covered) now competing in the same funding pool as the Institute.

This component of the corporate strategy is designed to assist the Institute in accommodating such variability and involves three

elements. The first of these involves maintaining a portfolio of diversification projects. This portfolio consists of research projects undertaken at the Institute but in fields which are not a focus of the Institute's major research effort. These projects are selected on the basis that they draw on the skills and knowledge of Institute staff and represent areas in which the Institute could rapidly expand its activity. These projects provide a mechanism for spreading risk in terms of revenue, creating flexibility in deploying staff resources, and may provide a platform for developing new areas of expertise should the need arise.

Buffers

The second element consists of creating and maintaining a fiscal reserve and an "order backlog". The former provides a buffer which can be employed to meet unanticipated increases in overheads and running costs. The latter consists of a buffer of research projects for which funds have been obtained but which have yet to be commenced. This buffer provides a mechanism for smoothing the flow of employment through time. However, the increasing preference of funding bodies for tightly defined project schedules is reducing the scope for employing this mechanism. As a consequence, the Institute is moving to establish research projects of two or more years duration and to negotiate staggered project commencement times as means of stabilising work and revenue flows.

Staff adjustments

The third element in this strategy is the adjustment of staff levels in line with variations in revenue and workflow. The implementation of this element requires the willingness on the part of at least some staff to work on a part-time basis and to increase or decrease the number of hours they work in line with changes in workflow. In the past the former Rural Development Centre has employed staff who are able and willing to vary the number of hours they work. This practice has been continued in the Institute.

Fiscal reserve

Regarding the second strategy *reducing the financial sensitivity of the organisation to variations in revenue*, the Institute will attempt to maintain a fiscal reserve from a proportion of its RQ earnings and to seek projects spanning two or more years. Other RQ earnings go into infrastructure maintenance, computer replacement etc. In addition, diversification of projects will be actively sought on an opportunistic basis and some flexibility in the hours worked by staff will be maintained.

Joint publications

Finally, in order to enhance the Institute's academic standing, a strategy of promoting joint journal publications with staff of other departments in the University is being pursued. Publications have been/are being prepared in collaboration with staff in the Departments of Sociology, Economics, Marketing and Management, Ecosystem Management and Natural Resources, Geography and Planning, Law, History, and Agricultural and Resource Economics. Evidence of this activity is summarised in the recent publications list.

Building and supporting other partnerships and collaboration

Collaboration

The Institute has built its reputation for superior research on rural issues through its multi-disciplinary approach to research issues. The Institute has recognised the importance that interacting and collaborating with other staff of the University can play in provoking new ideas, and in developing novel approaches to research issues.

The Institute has adopted a policy of promoting collaborative research with staff in other departments and centres at the University, and contributing teaching, lectures and seminars in all Faculties. This policy involves facilitating interaction between the staff of the Institute and the staff of other Departments and centres in order to create opportunities for collaborative activity, and taking advantage of any opportunities as they arise. For example, the Institute has collaborated with staff from across all Faculties including the Schools/Departments of Marketing and Management, Agricultural Economics, Economics, Accounting and Financial Management, Law, Sociology, Psychology, History, Geography and Planning, Archaeology, Education, Health Studies, History, Philosophy and Politics, Theatre Studies, Animal Science, Agronomy, Rural Sciences, Ecosystem Management, Natural Resources and Engineering, Earth Sciences, Physics, Chemistry, and the Centre for Local Government. The Director and staff also assisted the early stages of setting up of the Heritage Futures Research Centre (attached to the Faculty of Arts), the Centre for Medium and Small Business Enterprises (Faculty of Economics, Business and Law) and the Centre for Environmental Dispute Resolution (attached to the IRF; managed by Julian Prior, Ecosystem Management).

The Institute has invested considerable time in assisting or facilitating collaboration across faculties. While more can always be done, balancing investment of time and resources can be a limiting factor for IRF staff. Nevertheless, there are several highlights worthy of mention here. Firstly, IRF has facilitated a soon-to-be-announced Australian Wool Innovation project for Animal Science worth in excess of \$2M (IRF will have a minor role). Secondly, an ARC Discovery project, worth \$200,000 but including a wide range of staff collaboration from all Faculties, started this year. A second such project is under consideration in the current ARC round. An ARC SPIRT Post-Doctoral Fellowship in collaboration with geography (Roger Epps) was also successful. Collaboration with Sciences on shared GIS software (saving The Sciences and UNE some \$140,000). Collaborative GIS support and teaching is also developing. The IRF has also collaborated in providing GIS mapping expertise to an Archeology project (Peter Graves). Two large projects facilitated with, and to be run by, Agronomy (Weeds) and Natural Resources (Biodiversity and Wool) are also about to start. There have also been collaborations with Health, Education, Economics, Marketing, History, Politics and Philosophy. Finally a book to be published by Federation Press represents an additional output of David Brunckhorst's Commons project (L&WA), through collaboration with the Law School, Natural Resources and joint student project supervision. Facilitating increased collaboration and funding opportunities across Schools and Faculties remains,

however, a challenge due to a range of structural issues, staff time and funding and corporate institutional culture – these are challenges for the wider University to consider.

Contributions

All staff contribute to teaching in a variety of subjects in several degree programs as well as seminars. The Director has taught in nine different subjects across several Schools over the past year. Several undergraduate honours projects and an increasing number of postgraduate research projects are being supervised by staff, however the majority of staff time is unfunded for undergraduate and postgraduate teaching activities and their time requires careful monitoring and management.

The Director has also contributed to Boards of Study in Urban and Regional Planning, Rural Science, and Natural Resources, and to development of professional postgraduate degrees in Law (proposed M.Ag. Law and M. Env. Law). He has also contributed to a recent review of Humanities research. The Director and staff of the Institute have taught in a wide range of subjects in all Faculties of the past two years and contributed to seminars and workshops.

The Institute contributes to the Rural Social Science Network, a loose association of UNE academics, research students, and other staff. It includes anyone who is interested in understanding the economic, social, cultural, and environmental wellbeing of rural and regional Australia, the processes that create those conditions, and their management by governments, communities and individuals. It seeks to develop that understanding through regular activities. Interaction between the Network's members facilitates inter-disciplinary understanding, a greater depth of knowledge about rural and regional issues, and joint research and publishing projects. The IRF often hosts Network seminars. Through the relationships developed within the Network, academics can readily assemble project teams in a wide range of rural research areas.

Community and Regional Engagement

The Institute undertakes and contributes a tremendous amount in regional engagement activities. Projects are usually developed with key stakeholders, local businesses and regional development groups, community representatives, farmers, State and local government agencies. Many projects are developed over time spent building shared objectives, trust and networks within particular locales or industry/business groups. The Rural Industry Clusters, Farmer Retirement and Tilbuster Commons are examples. Several projects exemplify a seamless engagement in understanding and building knowledge and 'action-learning' with communities. For example, the "opening the farm Gateway" project which gathers knowledge on IT needs of farmers and rural services, while providing hands on assistance. The Tilbuster Commons project, the Guyra small business study and, the Tamworth and Inverell Regional Businesses projects also incorporate 'action learning' research. Research engagement for learning by Institutional organisations has occurred with the Murray Darling Basin commission and Healthy Rivers (NSW) Commission. Such regional engagement activities are important, but take are difficult to fund because they require a considerable investment of staff time. The Director has contributed to several forums and submissions on this issue and has met with Federal and State Ministers to seek funding for community and

regional engagement activities.

The Institute Director has also contributed to national forums and reviews on regional engagement by universities, science for evidence based policy development, agriculture and the Australian environment, DEST/ARC Research Priorities, the higher education review / discussion papers, CSIRO flagship programs, and NSW Premiers Dept 'whole-of-government' coordination. Over the past 2 years the Director has met with the NSW Premier, NSW Ministers for Local Government, Rural Affairs, Conservation and Land Management, State and Regional Development, Planning. Plans are being made to meet with the NSW Education Minister in the near future. These meetings aim to explain the results of IRF research and interpret these results in the context of government policies and programs. NSW Ministerial liaison occurs through the local Member, Mr Richard Torbay. Professor Brunckhorst has also met with Federal Ministers including Warren Truss (AFFA), Environment Ministers (Hill and Kemp), Deputy PM (John Anderson) and the Education Minister, Brenden Nelson. Mr Nelson has since referred to the IRF in several national radio interviews as an excellent model of applied research and engagement in rural Australia.

Regional engagement also takes the form of a variety of 'standard' and novel communications. More than 300 "media hits" over the past 2 years and other novel community and regional communications (eg, "Tilbuster Commons" on white pages cover; ABC *Landline* and *7:30 Report*) have been undertaken by Institute staff and collaborators. Approximately 60% of these are in local and regional media outlets (news, papers and radio interview), a considerable proportion reach other regions (eg The Weekly Times in Sth NSW and Victoria) and, State and capital city newspapers. Several national and international (eg, BBC) stories have also been published/broadcast. Issues of the aging population of rural communities and farmer retirement have been the subject of another study that included video production with local communities.

International

A number of collaborations and interaction have occurred internationally. These have included staff with UN Environment Program, UN Sustainable Development Program, UN Social and Economic Development Program, UNESCO Management of Social Transformations Program, UNESCO Ecological Sciences Program, UNESCO World Biosphere Reserves Program ('Man and the Biosphere'); and with Universities such as St Andrews, Plymouth, London and Cambridge in the UK; Beijer Institute (Sweden); Universities of Ontario, Calgary, British Columbia, Guelph and McGill in Canada; Otago, Auckland and UNITEC in New Zealand; and several Universities in the USA including Harvard, Duke, Indiana, Idaho, Chicago, Oregon State, California, Florida, Maine and Ohio. The Institute is also collaborating with researchers in 17 countries as part of the Global Environmental Survey.

The Institute ran the second international Symposium, *Landscape Futures II*, in December 2001, which, despite air travel disruptions of September 11, attracted participants from around Australia and

the world. This time the conference focused on social and institutional issues and arrangements for future sustainable landscapes and their inhabitants. The IRF is about to publish the refereed conference proceedings on CD (the *Landscape Futures* publication series has its own ISSN no.).

Institute for Rural Futures Senior Staff

The Institute for Rural Futures currently has 15 professional staff, who bring a wide range of disciplinary backgrounds and experience to the work of the Institute. Project Officers and technical staff assist project directors on several projects at one time. Senior staff also supervise several Masters and PhD level students. The senior staff are:

David Brunckhorst, BSc, PhD, Dipl Comp, Dipl Mgt, *Professor in Rural Futures, Director*

Brendan Doyle, BAgEc (Hons), *Assistant Director*

Ian Reeve, BSc, MNatRes, GradDipStats, DipNatRes, PhD, MEIA, *Principal Project Director*

Richard Stayner, BCom, MAgEc, DipFinMgt, *Principal Project Director*

Elaine Barclay, BA(Hons), BsocSc, (PhD in progress) *Project Director*

Roslyn Foskey, BA, GradCertContEd, *Project Director*

Graham Marshall, BScAgr, MEc, PhD, *Post- Doctoral Research Fellow*

Judith McNeill, BA(Hons), DipEd, MEc, PhD, *Post-Doctoral Research Fellow*