Radical change to rural landscape predicted

by Lindy Brophy

The rural landscape of Western Australia will undergo a radical change if projections by the new Co-operative Research Centre on Dryland Salinity are correct.

Rolling green hectares will no longer necessarily be a characteristic of the wheat fields, where at least a third of agricultural land will be devoted to perennial shrubs and trees.

It’s what the CRC’s Director, Professor Phil Cocks describes as a “sea change in agriculture”.

Decades of growing traditional annual crops like wheat, which don’t use up the available water, have created rising water tables which bring salt with them.

Dryland salinity is one of the biggest environmental problems facing Australia and it will take a huge research effort to find an answer to it.

The new CRC, based at UWA, is a collaboration of nine partners, including CSIRO, Agriculture WA, CALM, and eastern states universities and authorities.

Although it’s yet to be launched, the centre has the equivalent of 70 full-time staff across Australia, with another 55 to be appointed.

Professor Cocks has been criss-crossing the country for the past fortnight, preparing program details for its June 15 deadline for Commonwealth funding. The centre’s first round of funding is in place for seven years: $22 million from the Commonwealth and another $14 million from industry and partners.

Does the problem sometimes seem overwhelming?

“Yes, sometimes, I feel a bit overwhelmed,” he said.

“But, although it’s bad, it’s certainly not hopeless. And even though it will take a long time to fix the problem there has to be progress in the short term.

“Some people think that we should have found solutions by now, but, in fact, there has been a lot of research done into the causes of dryland salinity but not much into the answer to it,” he said.

Professor Cocks said there were widely differing points of view on salinity but, within the CRC, the group is concentrating on the use of plants as a solution.

Put simply, “it can’t be fixed unless we develop crops that use more water.”

More on page 4
**A 14°C ‘Hot’ Open Day**

Yes, it was probably the wettest Open Day on record... wind blew down early signs... squalls of rain prevented the Great Court opening and Aboriginal welcome... most of us had wet feet by lunchtime... hot drinks were valued as if we were on a polar expedition... and yes, the numbers attending were down on last time, with some areas and displays having a very slow morning. All that will be considered in the Open Day review and report.

But, that was not the pervading mood of the ‘Day’. Despite the temperature recorded in the Agriculture tent only rising to 14.1°C, Open Day 2001 was in its way a ‘hot’ event!

Given the state of the weather – “at least the hail has not yet arrived”, as someone said to me cheerfully in the Social Sciences courtyard – we had a good response and major events all had good support, whether it was the science lectures, law court moots, UN simulations, Winthrop Hall Concert, not to mention interactive displays, multimedia presentations, information stalls, demonstrations and advisory counters.

Refreshments included the successful ‘Philosophy Cafe’. Richard Walley and Jill Milroy provided memorable Aboriginal cultural perspectives. Departments, faculties and centres warmly welcomed visitors with personal attention. Several families told me what a wonderful staff worked at UWA.

I agreed. It was the spirit of the day which came through. A positive and proud presentation of our University, passion for research and concern for students.

The Prospective Students’ Centre was, in fact, busier with enquiries than the last Open Day, and several colleagues reported more specific and interested questions than expected. As we are the most school-leaver focused Australian University (80 per cent of our first-year load) and see UWA excellence based in excellent students, all these responses were very welcome. The benefits of Open Day will be felt long after 2001 in our enrolments. Indeed, Open Days should be seen within the much larger community outreach and public role of our University.

Our formal programs and our research are all critical aspects of that community – as was intended by the UWA Founders nearly a century ago when they created the University to be a professional and intellectual powerhouse for the State.

Since then the role of universities has widened as society has become more complex and public needs in the community have grown. It is no longer sufficient for universities to conduct their missions separately from their environments, with their campuses enclaves of protected privilege. Being independent institutions, with our parliamentary Acts, does not mean isolation. Rather, it provides the special basis from which universities can serve society, not only with the skills and knowledge which underpins our modern economies, but also the kind of knowledge which is crucial in shaping our public cultures – the very nature of society and the values, which determine the civil order.

This is why I am so very proud of the role which UWA plays in our society. We are truly a campus in the community. Not only do our galleries, museums, festival and press all offer crucial cultural service to WA, but we support a great range of projects which take knowledge – often radical and challenging knowledge – directly to our society. I think of the lectures and seminars supported by the Institute of Advanced Studies, the ‘named’ lectures in many faculties, the special ‘hot spot’ lectures, the contribution of Science and Law Weeks, the Summer and Winter programs of Extension, the support of distinguished visitors who, together with our regular staff, speak out in the media on major scientific, social and cultural issues. And so on. That is also UWA at its best: our role as ‘public educators’, playing a critical role as the nation develops as an open democracy in a time of great global change. In the widest sense, social justice is dependent on ideas generated in the very kind of research and debate which characterises the great university.

‘Community’ is also being redefined with globalisation and there are increasing opportunities – through our graduates, our alliances and research links – to play a role outside WA in the wider region of our international horizons: Indeed, to contribute to great international issues of development and peace through education and social programs.

These are surely difficult times for universities. But they are also crucial times for service through community outreach. The wet and cold of Open Day is one small dimension of UWA connecting with society and the students of the future.

None of this could happen without the creativity, sheer hard work and obvious dedication of so many of our staff and students. Please accept my warmest thanks for all you did for Open Day 2001. And, for all the other outreach programs of UWA which go beyond the call of duty. So we build a great University for our community and for the future.

**Professor Deryck Schreuder**
**Vice-Chancellor and President**
**vc@acs.uwa.edu.au**
Steven Jones tells people not to wonder about Utopia.

“You are living in it. Life is not going to get any better than this,” says the world-famous evolutionary biologist.

His public lecture, Is Human Evolution Over? was part of the Institute of Advanced Studies’ program, Advances in Human Evolutionary Ecology, and one of the Faculty of Science’s celebrations for National Science Week.

The short answer is: Yes.

“Some people say that we are going into some great decline, that the quality of humans will decline, whatever that means, because we no longer depend on survival of the fittest.

“But that’s untrue, because evolution depends on change and that change just isn’t happening,” said Dr Jones, professor of genetics at University College London and the television face of science in the UK.

“Changes in evolution occur when something happens that prevents a species reproducing. In Britain today, babies who survive past six months of age have a 99 per cent chance of reaching the age of 20, an age at which they can reproduce.”

Human diseases that have a late onset, after people have had children, are not affected by evolution because they don’t affect the reproduction rate.

But Dr Jones says this lull in evolution may not necessarily last. “Who knows? Evolutionary biology is not a predictive science like physics.”

He began – and continues – his evolutionary studies with slugs and snails and says he and Associate Professor Mike Johnson from Zoology are the top six snail geneticists in the world.

“I know more about snails than anybody else in the world. When I began my work nearly 40 years ago, DNA was fairly new. But the beauty of snails is that they display their genes with the different patterns on their shells.

“Now of course, we use DNA for genetic research but it’s fairly dull. It’s much more interesting to look at their stripes.”

Dr Jones admitted apologetically that he had killed about 4.5 million snails in the course of his research.

“... this lull in evolution may not necessarily last. Who knows? Evolutionary biology is not a predictive science like physics ...”

“But now I’m much ‘greener’ than I used to be. When I’ve finished with them, I put them back. But I must say the number I’ve killed wouldn’t have had the slightest affect on people’s gardens. The snails will always win, it’s as simple as that. The only way the gardener can win is to plant something the snails don’t want to eat.”

His work on the ecological genetics of snails has helped him and the rest of the scientific world to come to grips with the central problem of evolutionary biology – to understand diversity.

The role of sex is of course important in the field, but Dr Jones is bemused by his title of sex expert.

“It only happened in WA and I think there were quite a few disappointed people who came to my seminar, What Sex Really Means, expecting something quite different!” he said.

Dr Jones completed his Australian tour, as a guest of Australian Science Festival, in Perth.
Radical change to landscape

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And those crops must be profitable for farmers.

Adjunct Associate Professor Mike Ewing, one of the program leaders, said that farmers would always respond to something that was more profitable in the long term.

"Unless the solutions we work out are profitable, they won't be implemented on the scale which is necessary for them to be effective," said Professor Ewing.

Some options the centre will be researching are the use of biomass for electricity, the production of oils and the possible production of fuels, to partly take the place of the traditional annual crops that are causing the problem.

"Once the soil quality is returned, there won't be the run-off problem, so the water quality in the river systems will also be improved," Professor Cocks said.

He has already done extensive research on phase farming, rotating cereal crops with perennial pastures, such as lucerne, which uses up every drop of available water and returns the soil to its correct balance.

Combinations of phase farming and permanent perennial planting could be the agricultural pattern of the future.

The centre will concentrate its work in the two main areas affected by dryland salinity: south-western Australia and the Murray-Darling basin.

"Our salinity problem is worse than that in the Murray-Darling, but, over there, the problem extends over a bigger area and that river system is so important," Professor Cocks said.

In WA, 1.8 million hectares of agricultural land have been lost, with another six million hectares at risk. In the Murray-Darling basin, although less advanced, dry land salinity threaten about 10 million hectares, mostly in New South Wales.

"Radical changes in farming systems are needed and the key to new farming systems will be the use of perennials that, in their water use, mimic the native vegetation," he said.

Other UWA staff working in the centre are Professor Zed Rengels and Associate Professor Keith Smettem from Soil Science, Professor Hans Lambers from Plant Sciences and Associate Professor David Pannell from Agricultural and Resource Economics.
The world is your oyster could be rephrased more practically for university graduates: the world is your job market.

For many graduates, especially those with arts degrees, limiting the search for work to Perth and even Australia, is not enough these days.

Acting Head of the Department of Asian Studies, Dr Patrick Jory, says there is an enormous demand in Asia for graduates from quality Australian universities like UWA.

“And graduates who are willing to experience a different way of life, one that can sometimes be difficult or trying, and certainly challenging, are rare,” Dr Jory said.

He is one of the people behind the Faculty of Arts’ Careers Night next month (Tuesday June 12), To Asia and Beyond, an evening designed to inform and encourage students to look at work and study in the Asian region. Sonia Thomas-Lindsay, the faculty’s marketing manager, has been working with Dr Jory and Dr Philippa Christmass to put together a program that is destined to pack the lecture theatre.

Ideally these students would study the Asian region and learn an Asian language as the first step towards working there but Dr Jory says the most important (non-academic) qualifications are sensitivity and an open attitude to cultural differences.

“These, combined with an Arts degree, which teaches students to think, analyse and communicate, would open all sorts of doors in Asia. The perception that an Arts degree doesn’t lead to a career is simply not true,” he said.

But it’s not just Arts graduates who are sought after in Asia. Engineers, economists and lawyers can also build great careers in the region.

Many of Dr Jory’s students and those of his colleagues in Asian Studies are completing combined degrees, coupling studies in engineering, commerce, economics or law with studies in Asian languages and culture.

“The perception that an Arts degree doesn’t lead to a career is simply not true” says Dr Patrick Jory

Colin Yoong, a guest speaker at To Asia And Beyond, is a financial analyst at the Water Corporation. He originally studied commerce, then worked for two years as an accountant, before returning to UWA to do an Arts degree, including Asian studies.

As part of the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) scheme, he studied and worked in Japan for three years.

As an employer now, he looks for new young employees who have added travel and life experience to their university degrees.

Another graduate, Monica Skidzun, who completed a Master of Japanese Studies, and now works at the Japanese Consulate, will talk about the JET scheme.

The evening’s keynote speaker will be the Governor of Western Australia, Lt General John Sanderson. He led the United Nations transitional authority in Cambodia and has a lot to say about cultural sensitivity and languages.

The Faculty of Arts is keen for all students to learn about the opportunities that await them in Asia and the organisers of the evening hope that academics will encourage their students to attend.

The Faculty’s Careers Night last year was booked out early so students (and interested parents and teachers) should register as soon as possible with Dr Philippa Christmass on 9380 3316 or by email at pipc@arts.uwa.edu.au

To Asia and Beyond starts at 7.15pm in the Social Sciences Lecture Theatre on Tuesday June 12.
Anniversary at the Octagon

Perth’s Black Swan Theatre celebrates its 10th Anniversary by returning to its very first venue, UWA’s Octagon Theatre, for its current production of the Australian drama classic *Away*.

The Octagon brings back good memories for Black Swan’s Director, Andrew Ross, and at least one member of the cast of *Away*, Perth-actor Murray Dowsett, both of whom were there for the company’s first performance – Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*.

The company likes the theatre’s intimacy, particularly for *Away*, which is strongly focused on domestic and emotional relationships in a time of epic change.

“The Octagon is amazing,” says Director Andrew Ross. “It is a very beautifully designed theatre. It has 650 seats and yet it is extremely intimate, whereas the Playhouse has 420 seats and is really not intimate at all.”

He recalls the company’s first production at the Octagon with a wincing chuckle. “It was pretty terrifying. We were flying by the seat of our pants.”

Albany-born actor Murray Dowsett has softer memories. “It was a beautiful mix of people and skills, people who’d never done Shakespeare before with people who’d gone through the Academy and were used to that kind of thing. So it was all pitch in with ideas, everybody helping each other.”

The Shakespearian connections between *Twelfth Night* and *Away* are subtle but enough to remind the company that they haven’t done another Shakespeare since that first production.

The modern play opens with the final speech from *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and closes with the final scene from *King Lear* – a dramatic technique Andrew Ross describes as “bookending.”

“It’s what the playwright has borrowed from Shakespeare’s ideas and his structure that is really so clever; the fact that he has bookended it with Shakespeare is really a way of getting you to look beyond the domestic detail to the universal themes of the play. It helps to change the audience focus a little bit, and it certainly inspires us to do it differently.”

*Away* is one of the most performed Australian plays and considered one of the greatest of the post-*Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* period.

Set in the summer of 1968-69 it revolves around three families forced together by a storm as they are about to embark separately on their ritualistic summer holidays.

It is about relationships between two generations, the young ones and their families, at a time of great upheaval, as parents are forced to relinquish their sons to Vietnam and as Australia emerges from isolation into an extended world.

*Away* opens on Thursday May 24.

Inspired fragments of Suburbia

There will be a sense of deja vu linking baby-boomers in the audience at the Black Swan’s new Octagon production with its unusual set design – an eclectic representation of 1960s Perth architecture.

There’s a streak of lawn, a patch of sand, a bland blob of lino, a strip of asphalt, and a combination of rainbow-coloured slatted timber planks with a hole in the middle.

What it looks like is a miniaturisation of 1960s suburbia – represented by a house with a lino floor, separated from the asphalt street by a strip of lawn; there’s a cheerful patio table
There are some words that always seem to carry a sneer and suburbia is one of them. But it is where the great majority of us spend most of our time. And Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery curator Robert Cook thought it was about time to face up to that reality.

“We had a drawing show planned and I decided to ask the artists to focus on something that was relevant to everybody: the place we live, the suburbs,” he said.

“A lot of commentary on suburbia has been negative, describing it as the place for boring dull families, while exciting artists live a bohemian lifestyle in the inner city. But it just isn’t so marked these days, with lots of artists living in the northern suburbs.

Mortgage + lawnmower = art

“The other view of suburbia is the kitsch icon, which I think is equally patronising.

“So I encouraged the artists to think about what the suburbs mean to them, not to take the hard intellectual line.”

It evokes domestic solidarity and a familiar past, and a distinctly sandgroper preoccupation with sun, sand and the suburbs.

Director Andrew Ross (pictured left, with actor Murray Dowsett) says the set was inspired by a book on Perth, Sense of Place, by UWA author George Seddon, honorary research fellow in the Centre for Studies in Australian Literature.

“The first idea for the set was to do a sort of topographical cut-out, but the problem of trying to imitate nature on the stage is it can end up looking slightly silly and fey. We did a trip from the centre of the city to the coast and looked at the different layers of decades and the architecture, and when we hit Floreat Park we were interested in the architecture of that period and the way different materials and surfaces were juxtaposed. There’s a section of varnished wood, a section of bricks, a section of layered stones, and things like that.

“It’s like pieces of 60s architecture interspersed with chunks of nature, all sliding inland from the sand dunes.”

Interpretations will vary, but what the set aims to do is link past and present through suggestion.

“There are a lot of domestic scenes but very little domestic paraphernalia on stage. It’s very stark and very economical, but at the same time, what you see are fragments of recognisable reality,” Mr Ross said.
UWA’s vibrations felt worldwide

A UWA team’s methods of teaching a specific field of mechanical engineering on the web has been feted by peer groups in the US and the UK.

Professor Brian Stone (pictured) and Dr Nathan Scott (with two others) presented Teaching One degree-of-freedom vibration on the WWW to the American Society for Engineering Education (ASEE) annual conference in St Louis last year. They have just been notified that it won the Computers in Education John Curtis Award, which will be presented next month.

The award is for the best oral and written paper presented at the Computers in Education session of the international conference. It will be published in the ASEE Computers in Education journal.

At the same time, their web site for teaching vibration has been selected by the Edinburgh Engineering Virtual Library (EEVL) as a “choice site”.

EEVL is widely acknowledged to be the first port of call for anybody looking for engineering information via the Internet and receives thousands of hits a day. Each site is evaluated by subject librarians and only the best sites are chosen and linked. The site is: http://www.mech.uwa.edu.au/bjs/Vibration/OneDOF/

When it comes to marketing, who better to market than yourself?

Students in Fang Liu’s promotional strategy course (right) in the Department of Information Management and Marketing have hugely enjoyed creating promotional brochures for their faculty.

The best ones have been published and are being used by the Faculty of Economics and Commerce, Education and Law (ECEL). Brochures designed specifically for Open Day were handed out to visitors on the big day and the winning general brochure is being used for prospective students’ inquiries.

Students received certificates and gift vouchers for the best nine brochures, including awards for best content, best slogan and most creative input.

“This was a good opportunity for me to assess the students’ understanding of what we’ve been talking about, and a great opportunity for them to put what they’ve learnt into practice,” Ms Liu said.

She has 39 groups of four or five students in her course and they all took to the challenge with great enthusiasm.

“The faculty provided information for them but many of them still went ahead and did some of their own research as well. They discovered that what prospective students expect from UWA are good resources, the prestige of being a student/graduate here, and the legendary fun undergraduates have on the campus.”

Ms Liu said students’ creativity was enhanced by opportunities created for them and other lecturers in the department had also arranged competitions and prizes.

Have fun at UWA: We do!

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Like threatened lizards shedding their tails, western rock lobsters apparently get away quicker by shedding a few appendages.

When predators are closing in, or the weather outside the lobster pots is too extreme, they just drop off a few legs.

This evolutionary streamlining may simplify things for a while in the marine world but it costs the western rock lobster industry millions of dollars a year. Export markets want whole live lobsters or whole cooked lobsters. Legless ones don’t quite make the grade.

That’s a good enough reason for the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation to spend $500,000 on research to find some way of preventing the leg shedding – at least during commercial capture and handling.

It was also the cue for UWA zoologist and research fellow Dr Glen Davidson to pack up his research books and join Geraldton Fishermen’s Co-operative research officer Wayne Hosking on a lobster crawl. Last month they were both on board a commercial lobster boat off Port Denison pulling in lobster pots, on one of several such expeditions they’ve made already this year.

They’re doing it for the industry of course, and ultimately to get more lobsters into more cooking pots, but if they can come up with a strategy that works, it may also be to the lobsters’ advantage – paradoxically, giving them a longer lease on life.

The lobsters shed their legs in various circumstances, primarily when threatened, but also apparently when it’s time to grow a new shell. They leave behind their old shells, and quite often one or more of their 10 legs, and grow new ones. And every time they shed a leg, it shortens their life span.

“We don’t really know why it happens, but it happens during post-harvest handling, and it’s probably linked to some form of stress. The fishermen say it’s particularly bad on hot, dry, windy days,” Dr Davidson said.

“But it also occurs naturally. The only way lobsters can grow is to get rid of the old shell, and they do this from once to several times a year. Maybe this leg-shedding process has also evolved to help them get rid of the old shells; the legs may get trapped, and the leg-shedding process may be a mechanism to help them set themselves free. The legs do grow back over one or two moults, but there are costs. Lobsters grow at a slower rate if they lose their legs, and they’re more likely to die sooner,” he said.

The cost to the export lobster industry is huge, in terms of reduced value for damaged or smaller lobsters, and in lost volume – the shed legs amount to somewhere between 40 and 80 tonnes of export product per season, worth between $25 and $32 per kilo.

Dr Davidson says about 18 million undersized animals are caught and returned to the ocean each year, and many are damaged during capture. The damaged lobsters are more likely to die and the survivors to suffer reduced growth or reproductive success, at further cost to the industry.

In a collaborative research project involving the UWA Department of Zoology, the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation, the Geraldton Fishermen’s Co-operative and other industry partners, Dr Davidson and Wayne Hosking are investigating a technique for immobilising the lobsters prior to handling by immersing them in very cold water, effectively stunning them, to find out if it will reduce the leg-shedding.

Though currently illegal, the technique has been a source of debate within the industry since it was first mooted in 1997. According to Dr Davidson, initial trials suggest stunned lobsters which are returned to ambient water temperatures recover very rapidly.

“The treatment doesn’t actually chill the lobsters, it simply appears to stun them. It also dramatically reduces tail-flipping, which allows them to be handled easily and safely,” Dr Davidson said.
One of the best things about working at UWA is the grounds that make this campus one of the most beautiful in Australia. The staff survey of a few years ago confirmed this and now there is a new group on campus dedicated to ensuring the maintenance and development of the grounds and their preservation as a major feature of the University.

Friends of the UWA Grounds will be officially launched on Thursday June 7 in the Eileen Joyce studio, a unique venue that blends both indoor and outdoor environments and chosen specifically for its characteristics and its proximity to the newly landscaped Somerville auditorium.

The Friends hope to enhance the profile of the grounds by offering a forum for professional and social interchange between everybody who has an interest in them. They plan to provide information about the grounds through publications and lectures and to assist with raising funds for specific projects.

Former Chancellor Justice Geoffrey Kennedy chairs the Friends of the UWA Grounds and other foundation members include Lady Jean Brodie-Hall, a former landscape architect for UWA, Professor George Seddon, Dorothy Ransom, David Hewson, Sara Wordsworth, Barbara Hale, Dr Shirley Watt, Dr Julie Plummer from Plant Sciences and Christopher Vernon from the School of Architecture and Fine Arts.

Representatives from the National Trust, the Heritage Council, CALM, Kings Park Board and others connected with plant and bird life have been invited to join.

If you would like either to attend the launch or become a Friend of the UWA Grounds, contact Shobha Cameron at the Office of Facilities Management on 9380 3556 or by email: scameron@admin.uwa.edu.au

The Friends are keen for people from both within and outside the University to join them in developing and preserving the grounds for future generations.
Two brothers have shared the UWA Graduates' Association Sports Award for 2001.

David and Neil Dennis (pictured) are rowers and the $2000 prize money is split between them.

“We’re really happy to have won but the prize will be gone pretty quickly. Rowing is not highly funded or sponsored and we have to find 25 per cent of our expenses when we travel interstate, and 100 per cent when we go overseas,” said Neil (18) who is in his second year of mechanical engineering.

David (20) is doing honours in chemistry and finishing off a mechanical engineering degree.

Both boys do well academically despite training 12 times a week: six mornings on the water, then afternoon sessions in the gym, on an ergo machine or lifting weights, going for a run or another row on the river.

Rowing, they say, is to do with strength and length but it’s also a mental sport. If you stop thinking, you might as well stop rowing.

The brothers train in pairs and row in fours and pairs. They also race in eights. Being two years apart in age, Neil and David only started to row together last year. But they have different partners when they race in pairs.

Rowing in Perth means a lot more work than rowing in the eastern states because the rivers here are all salt. The boats have to be cleaned, washed down and polished after every session.

David, who was awarded his Blues this year, and Neil will be competing later this year in the East Asian Games in Osaka.

Rowing rewarded

Ancient culture meets new technology

The University’s Berndt Museum of Anthropology has acquired an important new partner.

France’s Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) is conducting a joint investigation with the Berndt Museum into new multimedia technologies and their application to anthropological and ethnological research.

The result, according to Berndt Museum Curator, Dr John Stanton, will be the development of high-tech multimedia tools which will make some of the longest established cultures in the world widely accessible to academics and the public alike.

This year the collaboration will focus on the development of a DVD-ROM to collate aspects of Aboriginal culture and history.

“The is an exciting development. It’s the first time that museums and anthropologists and historians are working together to develop such a comprehensive record of information,” Dr Stanton said.
The last word

A Senator reflects...
By Keith Abercromby

When I was elected by UWA graduates to be one of their representatives on Senate in 1992 there was no way that I could have foreseen the years of interesting associations, intellectual challenges and enjoyable experiences that lay ahead.

For the previous four to five years my position on the Council of Convocation, the UWA Graduates Association had re-introduced me to University activities and enhanced my enthusiasm for the institution that led to an Engineering degree.

First attendance at a Senate meeting was a bit daunting and I admit to being a little overawed. To be meeting on an equal standing with professors, company directors, judges, a Guild President, a Director of Education and the Vice-Chancellor was not conducive to idle or thoughtless contributions to debate. The reserved attitude or tension was relieved at the dinners following the Senate meetings where one found the relaxed atmosphere a place to discover enjoyable company and exchange ideas on an informal basis.

Senate operates very much on a devolved sub-committee system. The detailed work is done in and by committees and their activities are reported in summaries to Senate. Some committee actions require Senate endorsement or in some cases prior approval before implementation. Hence Senate endeavours to focus at a strategic level and in recent years has succeeded in reducing its involvement with matters better handled by the Administration.

My committee work has given me an awareness of the fantastic diversity of activities undertaken by the University.

Finance and Investment, later Strategic Resources Committee, gave an insight into how UWA managed its financial responsibilities within the applicable legislative boundaries. To hear financial advisors present argument for and against potential investments was an education.

The Audit and Review Committee’s responsibility is to advise Senate that University plans, systems and procedures, financial, academic or general, are in order or need attention. The Committee checks cover such diverse matters as faculty or departmental reviews, Student Grievance/Complaint Procedures and Waste Management which covers a range from paper and glass to chemicals and radioactive matter.

The Animal Ethics Committee work was the most demanding. Reading and attempting to understand the submissions by science and medical researchers for approval to carry out experiments on animals was an intellectual challenge. The responsibility and privilege of inspecting quarantined facilities not open to others was an experience not readily forgotten. To visit the animal care centres in transportable buildings at Fremantle Hospital, the top floor of a multistorey building at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital or Shenton Park Faculty of Agriculture was well worth the reams of reading.

The occasional request to be on a selection panel for professorial positions was a challenge. I recall asking why I was approached to consider the selection of a Professor for a subject about which I had no background. The answer was that the panel needed an outsider to consider general aspects of suitability rather than a narrow academic focus.

Campus Review 2000 was my last, but not least, Committee involvement. An essential part of this task was undertaking a conducted tour of the campus with emphasis on architectural, environmental and green space aspects with historical and future considerations. This was an informative and very pleasant duty.

Thank you to the University staff, general, academic and administrative, whom I have been associated with because of my Senate position. The future of UWA is in good hands.

Thank you to my Senate colleagues present and past for a wonderful experience.

* Mr Abercromby’s term of office expired recently.