

THE AUSTRALIAN ACOUSTICAL SOCIETY IN THE 21st C WHERE TO NOW? TIME TO RECONSIDER?

The Australian Acoustical Society recently celebrated its 25th anniversary and it has evolved considerably since its creation. From a small membership in three states on the eastern side of the country, it has grown to the stage where its membership now exceeds 400, spread through five divisions right across Australia. During that time, acoustics too has changed in Australia: new technologies, more consultancies, legislation, wider public awareness of noise and its hazards, acceptance of the role of acoustics in architecture and a more prominent image for the Australian Acoustical Society. It is a cliché, but true none the less, to say that the Australia of today is not the place it was twenty five years ago, indeed the world is an entirely different place, so perhaps it is appropriate that we ask the question "is the Australian Acoustical Society still operating in a manner most appropriate to its Membership and to its role in modern Australia?"

An excuse for an appraisal

While I'm not one to be particularly impressed by a roll-over of the date from 1999 to 2000, it strikes me that the approaching end of the millenium at least provides us with an excuse to re-evaluate our Society and to ask (i) is it still doing what our membership wants and (ii) what is its most appropriate role as the only body in Australia addressing the scientific and technological aspects of acoustics as well as the interests of the community in acoustical issues? Each year Federal Council, the elected body charged with running the affairs of the Society, holds two Annual Council Meetings in association with the Annual Conference, in whichever state is hosting the Conference that year. This year I am proposing that Council set aside a significant part of at least one of its Meetings in Melbourne to address the future role of the Acoustical Society: to ask where are we going, what are we trying to achieve, are we going about it the right way, are we satisfying our members' needs? I hope it won't be just a talk-fest. I hope it will lead to some genuinely useful re-appraisal of the Society. Perhaps we'll discover that things are exactly right just as they are, in which case we can all congratulate ourselves and continue on, or perhaps we'll discover that there are some things which need to be changed. Whatever the outcome, I'm convinced it would be remiss of us not to reassess ourselves sometime in the very near future.

Now comes the sales pitch. Council has been elected by you, the members. In case you're unfamiliar with the procedure, Councillors are elected by the Divisional Committees, who are in turn elected by the Divisional membership at each Division's Annual General Meeting. Apart from some legal requirements, Councillors are supposed to represent your interests at Council and to take decisions that are in the interests of all states, all members, and of acoustics too. Council is not the only body which can

change the Society, but it is the most powerful in this respect and is certainly the most appropriate forum in which changes should be considered. But Councillors do not by themselves know what is right for the Society. They can't know what is appropriate for us unless they have adequate input from the membership. I had hoped we might survey your views in a formal manner, in a questionnaire to be circulated within this issue of *Acoustics Australia*. Unfortunately, personal circumstances forced me to stop work temporarily on this project and it is now too late to make such a survey, but there is still plenty of time for a more informal approach.

Gathering the ideas

In the next two months I'd like to hear from you. I'd like to know what you see as the role of the Australian Acoustical Society. Ask yourself why you originally joined the Society? Why do you still pay your annual subscriptions? What is the appropriate role of the Society? Should it be doing more? Less? Is it oriented too much towards technical acoustics? Too much towards legislation? Standards? Should it take more of a lead in public debates on noise or lobbying governments? Should it be playing more of an educational role for its members? For the general public?

Of course, we have to be realistic here. We are all unpaid officers and members of the Society and can't take on huge burdens without the appropriate resources to carry them through. Any new initiatives must be realistic, but unless we know what it is that we should be doing, then it is certain that we won't be doing it.

I hope we can have several opportunities for this review. First I'd like immediate feedback from you, both directly to me and to your Divisional Committees. I'd like your Committees also to consider the future of the Society in much the way I have outlined. Then the Divisional Councillors can bring your ideas to Council in November. Written submissions are preferred because they can be given more reflective consideration, but I also hope that we can find an opportunity at the Melbourne Conference, perhaps at a symposium scheduled out of normal conference timetables, at which some of the more interesting proposals can be discussed directly. It is then my intention that Council should consider all the proposals and, assuming some interesting ideas are developed, prepare some discussion documents to go back to you. The timetable from then will depend entirely upon the nature of those proposals.

If this opportunity (excuse) for a review is missed, it might be a long time before we attempt it again.

*Graeme Yates
President*