

**Minutes of the Australian Health Economists' Society
Annual General Meeting
5.30pm, 30 September 2004
Park Hyatt Hotel, Melbourne**

(Subject to ratification at 2005 AGM)

The President of the Society, Dr Jim Butler, declared the meeting open at 5.30pm.

Present: Jim Butler, Brian Harrison, Lisa Gold, Jenny Watts, Luke Connelly, Mike Shields, Alison Currie, Tony Harris, Cathy Mihalopoulos, Brett Rogers, Philip Clarke, Rhema Vaithianathan, Richard Milne, Lili Bulfone, Jeff Richardson, Rosalie Viney, Jane Hall, Ruth Williams, Bruce Hollingsworth

[NB No register was taken of those present, names may be added at ratification at AGM 2005]

Apologies: none received.

Minutes of the Previous Meeting

It was moved by Brian Harrison and seconded by Jane Hall that the minutes of the previous meeting be accepted. The motion was carried.

President's Report

The President reported on the continued sound position of the society since the previous meeting.

This was the first year of the split membership arrangements from iHEA. As at 24th September 2004, there were 68 financial members of the society and more membership applications are in process. The e-mail mailing list in use since the separation of iHEA and AHES memberships contains 135 names. All non-financial members on the mailing list will soon receive a final membership reminder, after which non-members will be removed from the list. Brian Harrison reminded all members that AHES members receive a discount on iHEA membership.

The society remains in a very sound financial position. With a solid bank balance, the issue arises as to whether AHES should look to fund any activities such as Society-strengthening activities (e.g. funding a journal or proceedings publication).

2004 saw a bumper crop of papers submitted to, and presented at, the annual conference. 52 abstracts were submitted and 38 papers presented. Members are availing themselves of the Society's new credit card facilities for payment of membership dues and conference registration.

Proceedings from the 2002 conference were published this year on CD-ROM, and proceedings from the 2003 conference are nearly ready for publication.

The new AHES website is under construction, and the move to the new website should be complete within the next month or two. Jim Butler expressed his thanks to Lisa Gold for her efforts on this front – motherhood notwithstanding. Jim Butler expressed his thanks again to CHERE for hosting the website until now.

The newsletter has been re-instated, with two issues produced so far and one further issue to come in 2004. Members are encouraged to contribute to the newsletter, especially material that would not appear in the iHEA News, i.e. more Australia-focused material.

AHES was approached to put forward a list of names for PBAC. Nine members expressed an interest in having their names forwarded and six names were forwarded: Kirsten Howard, Don Lewis, Duncan Mortimer, Chris Selby Smith, Alan Shiell, Rosalie Viney.

The President expressed thanks again to:

- The conference sponsors – three pharmaceutical companies (Janssen-Cilag, Lilly, Pfizer Australia) and the University of Melbourne, that contributed sponsorship funds which allowed Martin Knapp, Tom Rice, Richard Scheffler and Eddy van Doorslaer to appear as keynote speakers at this year's Conference.
- Queensland Centre for Mental Health Research staff (Harvey Whiteford, Darrel Doessel and Sue Caleo) for organising the pharmaceutical company sponsorship, and Mike Shields for organising the University of Melbourne sponsorship.
- CHERE for hosting Eddy van Doorslaer as a visiting professor in Australia, thus enabling his keynote presentation at the AHES conference.
- The AHES Executive, for another good year.
- Denis Davis, the Society's public officer, for his services.
- The committee: Leonie Segal, Brett Rogers and Darrel Doessel.
- Finally, to Brian Harrison after several years as AHES treasurer, who has seen the Society through a difficult period and into a healthy financial position.

The votes of thanks were supported by acclamation.

Treasurer's Report

Brian Harrison reported that AHES is in a strong financial position and tabled the 2003/04 financial report. At the end of the last financial year the bank balance stood at around \$42,000; this has now increased to around \$62,000, although there are a number of significant outstanding expenses that will reduce this balance.

There have been issues to deal with regarding the split from iHEA. The Society has also dealt with an ATO query regarding income tax. The Society is exempt from income tax and ATO have accepted our notification of this. Credit card facilities have been fantastic and now cover 99% of our transactions. AMEX are now the preferred credit card facility as for us they actually have the lowest commission.

As the AGM is held after the end of the 2003-04 financial year Brian Harrison moved that the AGM approve the extension of the financial year to 30 September for reporting purposes, seconded by Brett Rogers. The motion was carried.

Election of Office-Bearers

Nominations for candidates for election as officer-bearers of the Society were called for in the second issue of the newsletter in August 2004. By the due date of 23rd September 2004, one

nomination had been received by the Secretary for each of the following positions. According to the rules of the Society, the following are declared elected:

- President: Jim Butler
- Vice-President: Michael Shields
- Secretary: Lisa Gold
- Treasurer: Brett Rogers
- Public Officer: Denis Davis
- General Committee: Brian Harrison

This left two vacant posts on the General Committee. Nominations were called for these positions at the AGM. Three nominations were received for the two vacant Committee positions. An election was conducted (the number of votes received by each nominee are shown in parentheses):

Rhema Vaithianathan. Nominated by Mike Shields, seconded by Lisa Gold (15 votes).

Jenny Watts. Nominated by Cathy Mihalopoulos, seconded by Lili Bulfone (13 votes).

Richard Milne. Nominated by Brian Harrison, seconded by Mike Shields (11 votes). Rhema Vaithianathan and Jenny Watts were declared elected.

Conference Proceedings for 2004 and beyond

Despite the large number of papers presented at the 2003 conference, only nine authors (of 36) opted to have their papers included in the proceedings publication. This response continues a slow decline in the number of authors seeking inclusion in AHES conference proceedings. Proceedings have clearly moved a long way from their original intention of providing a complete record of the conference. This may reflect the larger number of outlets available now in which to publish health economics articles. Therefore there is a serious question of the viability of continuing AHES conference proceedings in their current format.

One option available now is to archive conference papers on the website, reflecting that technical options have caught up with our requirements. Overtures have been made to the editors of the journal *Applied Health Economics and Health Policy* as to the possibility of committing to publish 4-5 papers from the AHES conference each year. The editors may be open to publishing some papers, but the number they had in mind was 2-3. A new electronic open-access (BioMed Central) journal, *Australian and New Zealand Health Policy (ANZHP)*, also publishes abstracts. Another option would be for the Society itself to establish a journal, that would then become a benefit of membership but that would require spending some of the cumulated reserves of AHES.

Jim Butler asked the AGM whether we wanted to continue to try to have some kind of publication associated with the AHES conference.

Jeff Richardson argued that we could arrange for conference abstracts to be published in a journal of choice. Brian Harrison added that we could use AHES resources to pay for one issue of a journal of choice. Rosalie Viney suggested that we could enter into a financial arrangement with the *Australian Economic Review* again for a similar set-up to the 25th Anniversary Conference publications, plus we should look at *Economic Papers* as an alternative. Mike Shields informed the AGM that the *Australian Economic Review* was not keen on an annual entry in the main journal, but were potentially interested in a 'policy forum' publication. Jane Hall noted that the new ANZHP journal charges for posting a publication. Jane Hall also argued that we need to think first why we want to have a

publication of conference proceedings, when it was better to encourage people to get publications into the existing journals. Philip Clarke argued that journal special issues were seen as low quality and we don't want to be caught in the worst of worlds – rather we should consider getting rid of conference publications. Rhema Vaithianathan supported the earlier suggestion that we should seek to get conference abstracts published, as this allows non-members access to material presented at the conference, and could be a compromise between the different positions voiced so far.

Luke Connelly proposed that we action Rhema's suggestion, that the Executive be authorized to look into abstracts 2004 (and thereafter) being published with a journal. Seconded by Jane Hall. The motion was carried.

Luke Connelly suggested that it can become a condition of submission of abstracts, that authors agree to publication of abstracts. However, there would need to be a right of withdrawal for the 2004 conference abstracts. The Executive has the discretion to do what it believes is in the best interests of the society, and to report back to the next AGM.

Conference 2005

An offer for hosting the AHES Conference 2005 has been received from the University of Auckland. Brian Harrison pointed out that hosting the conference in New Zealand would make it difficult for public servants to attend as it would be classed an overseas conference and they may have to self-fund. Rosalie Viney countered that it would be a really positive move to hold the conference in New Zealand. Jeff Richardson asked for a straw poll of who would attend.

Jane Hall moved that the location of the 2005 Conference be Auckland, seconded by Luke Connelly. The motion was carried.

Date suggestions:

- The conference should not be held in July due to the iHEA 5th World Congress in Barcelona.
- The New Zealand equivalent dates of the AVCC common week should be chosen. As these were unknown at the time, the dates are to be confirmed by the 2005 conference organizer (Rhema Vaithianathan).

Format of Conference Sessions

The current format is 20 minutes for the speaker, 10 minutes each for the discussant and general questions. The issue of whether this format should be continued in future years was discussed. Lisa Gold and Mike Shields outlined concerns from their role as 2004 conference organizers over the late delivery of full conference papers by authors as this left little preparation time for discussants. Although this concern has arisen in previous years, this year the late delivery of papers from authors risked losing discussants.

Jane Hall suggested that there be a cut-off date for the receipt of full conference papers prior to the conference. As the discussant does add value to the presentation authors should be encouraged to submit full papers by this date. Authors that missed the deadline could have their papers removed from the conference entirely or moved to a special session where authors had shorter presentation slots and discussants were not assigned.

Rosalie Viney stressed that any cut-off points adopted must be credible threats and that it should be left to the discretion of each conference organizer to set cut-off dates and policy.

Lisa Gold supported Jane's suggestion of shorter non-discussant sessions for authors submitting late. Ruth Williams argued that any policy should allow all submitted papers to be presented.

Jeff Richardson supported Jane's suggestion although queried the impact of discussants on the quality of papers. Tony Harris reminded organizers to make clear to authors that the full conference paper does not have to be of publishable quality.

Rosalie Viney asked the room to empower the Executive to work out a policy for accepting conference papers on the basis of having a credible draft paper by a set date, arguing that having a credible threat will make the system work. The issue in supporting Jane's suggestion is that we first need to commit to the format of conference sessions being author and discussant presentations.

There was no support in the room for the option of not having conference papers submitted in advance of the conference.

Due to time constraints, Jane Hall moved that the AGM be postponed until lunchtime the next day, seconded by Bruce Hollingsworth. The motion was carried.

Lisa Gold summarized the discussion so far over a possible two-tier structure for conference papers submitted late. Mike Shields suggested another disincentive would be to hold the shorter presentations session during the first morning slot following the conference dinner, although Jim Butler argued that organizers should not be too heavy-handed in dealing with authors who fail to meet submission deadlines.

Luke Connelly wondered if the issue really needed addressing now, because organizers have always managed to get discussants for late papers in the past. Brian Harrison suggested that it be left up to assigned discussants as to whether or not they presented a discussion on papers submitted late. Jeff Richardson and Rosalie Viney argued that it should be left up to the conference organizers to decide between the different options discussed here.

Lisa Gold moved that it be at the discretion of conference organizers to treat papers not delivered by a certain date in a different way, including relegation to a shorter time slot, withdrawal of discussant and/or withdrawal of paper, seconded by Jeff Richardson. The motion was carried.

Scholarships for Overseas Delegates

Mike Shields added this item to the AGM agenda. Five or six abstracts were submitted for this year's conference from young and overseas researchers who required scholarships to attend the conference. The establishment of scholarships, say 2 scholarships each of \$1500 and perhaps limited to Australian applicants, would promote the Society in the Asia-Pacific region.

Jane Hall requested that the Society also promote the conference more to PhD students, including perhaps a PhD session. Jeff Richardson supported this concept, adding that the session could be in the form of a contest.

Brian Harrison argued that any scholarships would be better directed at building capacity in Australia and wondered whether the Society may prefer to spend resources on purchasing AV equipment that could be used at future conferences. Bruce Hollingsworth disagreed with the purchase of equipment, but suggested that resources could be used to reduce conference fees for all members. Luke Connelly supported the original proposal of scholarships.

Mike Shields moved that the Society offer up to two scholarships of A\$1500 for presenters from the Australasia area, with scholarships to be decided by the Executive by competition, seconded by Jeff Richardson. The motion was carried.

Process for Nominations for PBAC

Jim Butler added this item to the AGM agenda. Due to the time constraints involved, this year the Executive determined a systematic process for eliciting nominations for PBAC and now requested members' views on whether this process should be changed. The systematic process for 2004 was to firstly ascertain whether nominees were members of the Society, and secondly to ensure they had the requested expertise in terms of economics qualifications and health economics experience.

Brian Harrison asked whether the Executive could work on the criteria for nomination. Lisa Gold suggested that this could be a job for the General Committee members in 2005.

Luke Connelly wondered whether the Society could not actually nominate people but rather simply circulate the letter requesting nominations and allow individuals to respond. Gavin Mooney [via email] also requested that the Society should consider not nominating people for PBAC. Jane Hall argued that since an aim of the Society is to promote the discipline of health economics then the Society should participate in nominations for PBAC.

Brian Harrison moved that the general members work up criteria for the process of nominations for PBAC. These criteria should be presented at the next AGM, with any decisions needed in the meantime left to the Executive. Seconded by Lisa Gold. The motion was carried.

Any Other Business

Sadly, Bernie O'Brien passed away earlier this year. Philip Clarke noted that a trust fund had been established at McMaster for scholarships in Canada.

Philip Clarke moved that it would be appropriate for the Society to donate A\$500 to this fund and that the Executive be empowered to finalize arrangements, seconded by Luke Connelly. The motion was carried.

Luke Connelly suggested that conference fees be combined with membership, so that in future it would not be possible to attend the conference as a non-member.

The President declared the meeting closed at 2pm.