

LETS Talk

July 2000

Attention all members: annual renewal fees are now due for all LETS members without a pale blue membership card. Please send \$10 to the office as soon as possible, together with our new renewal form, which is attached.

Regional LETS Currency Meetings

On May 14th, members from Byron/Mullum/Tweed (B/M/T) LETS, NimLETS (Nimbin) and RivLETS met to combine efforts to produce a regional LETS currency note. We met at the new Mullumbimby community centre, and spent the day looking at the strengths and weaknesses of our LETS systems, the strengths created by currency in the Ithaca *Hours* system in New York State, and the benefits that we can expect from our own notes.

A detailed set of minutes is available at the RivLETS office, kindly provided by Gayle Russell of B/M/T. We are also producing a detailed analysis of the issues surrounding currency notes. This way every point of view can be assessed, objections resolved and an obstacle-free 'best LETS practice' procedure created. This will take some time (sigh) but in the longer run will be worthy as a reference base.

The expected timescale for the production is now a printrun at the end of August or early September, to allow for B/M/T LETS' AGM, and to fine tune designs and the protocols for issuing the notes. I do apologise for the drawn out nature of this project. We never expected it to be easy, but there was some hope of timing the release of the notes to the onset of the GST (yes it's a disease). I'm sure there will be enough to do to as it is and that the GST confusion and resentment will continue for some time.

In this newsletter I want to discuss the three or four issues causing the most trouble including hour-equivalence, parity with the Fed\$, tax, LETS as a complementary currency, and hoarding. There is a directory at the end of this article with the thirty + topics of debate and practicality *SO FAR*. Please ring in your concerns or support to the RivLETS answering machine (it takes a long message). Otherwise call the office on Tuesdays or Wednesdays if you have something to add to the

list!

Hour-equivalence. This dilemma arises out of the fact that we want to ethically value everyone's precious planet time equally, in a world of entrenched disparity and vigorous debate about worth of any individual's talents (NB *talent* was a unit of biblical currency).

Ithaca's currency is in denominations: *hours*, *half-hours* and *quarter-hours*. This was intended to both encourage people to value each other equally and to de-focus from Fed\$.

In Paul Glover's own words: "Most accepted our suggestion of \$10 per Hour (the average of wages and salaries in our county), but a few said \$5, \$6, or \$8. Since the \$10 rate was soon widely accepted, we then declared it so for all. Most adjusted, but a couple resisted briefly. It would have been easier simply to introduce the Hour as a \$10 note"

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Some people have seen LETS in the past as marginal, clunky, quaint, or even dysfunctional. Most criticism has come from early members who found that LETS didn't work for them as expected. It was with precisely this in mind that a hard currency for LETS is proposed to make that bridge to the

existing FED\$, to allow familiarity and so improve the image of LETS.

We are also investigating other LETS systems that have been successful with a currency, Calderdale LETS in the UK being one.

The best solution to the *Hours* dilemma is to very clearly draw the parallel of hours to dollars on the note itself.

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One way is to use a main denomination, say 20 (\$ omitted, but *Locals, Nims, Ecos* etc included) and along the entire bottom banner of the note, have the words:

'20 LET\$ is accepted as one hour's work'

This relieves us of the need to confuse the issue with *Hours* (and rewrite our software and chequebooks) at the same time as buffering our fledgling currency against any possible inflation of the FED\$, this being the main functional rather than philosophical objection Paul Glover has to a \$ denomination.

The outcome of a more recent regional currency meeting is that to satisfy both STRONG views that we should have a time based vs. dollar-linked denomination, it looks likely that we will have BOTH, one on each side of the note and we will LET them explain themselves.

I do not expect that this is the end of the debate.....

Taxation. With the GST confusing the issue and antipathetic organisations like the current reactionary management committee of The Channon Market actively adding their disinformation, it's not surprising no one knows what's going on.

In short: unless you're operating in LETS as a business with a reasonable expectation of income, you need not worry about tax in any form: GST, declaring to ATO, or financial year. If you are a business and choose to use LETS to lighten your financial load, all you need to do is balance your LETS account to within about \$L300 at the end of the financial year. *This can be best done by balancing earnings and spending in a given year*, or making tithes and gifts to community groups like the Big Scrub Environment Centre, Gene-Ethics Network Northern Rivers, Permaculture International, and even **the managers account!** if you have any unexpected excesses.

There will be a further bulletin on tax in detail next issue.

The entire alignment of LETS is towards a **Complementary Currency**, to further the practise of bartering in goods and services not offered by the mainstream economy, or offered at exorbitant costs due to commercial overheads. This really puts LETS squarely in the hobby bracket, as defined by the ATO.

It furthers all LETS members to fully take this on board. We cannot replace the dominant economy. It is HUGE and impossibly insinuated in every aspect of our lives. The best we can do is choose as much as possible to do our consuming in the local community, a fundamental alignment of LETSsystems.

The issue of **hoarding** is the next most contentious issue confronting a LET\$ currency. Since Lets\$ do not generate interest there is no reason to hoard, or even accrue a large + balance **for financial gain**. It is reasonable to allow for a lull

in a traders LETS spending, or their life activity, and as a possible consequence, a temporary excess of LETS. (Why this should be taxed at yearend is beyond me. Sorry. It's not the ATO's money).

Presumably these would-be businesses or traders "expecting a reasonable profit..." so if their income is above the tax-free threshold and they haven't traded evenly with the community or made donations to balance their account, they should be "expecting a reasonable tax bill."

I see no reason why this should not be paid in LET\$ to the ATO's LETS Account (#666) and left to the community of origin to spend on their own projects (as suggested by Jill Jordan of Maleny LETS.)

The second tactic would be to introduce + balance limits in the same way we have negative balance limits (L\$500), a process called **demurrage**. This sounds absurd at first, only because of our conditioning, but has worked in some European currencies.

The principal antidote for this trouble in the Ithaca *Hours* system was to tightly control the issue of notes, so there was a scarcity of them and this would encourage trading.

I seriously doubt the efficacy of this. For a start, it follows the scarcity pattern of FED\$, getting us into that mindset again. This is treacherous ground.

As well, scarcity does nothing for the trader who still provides services but limits spending and keeps their cash at home. This has a direct parallel to the mainstream economy hoarders distrusting banks, except that without interest on LET\$ there is even less incentive to return the notes to get a credit balance.

The only risk with hoarding is obvious: Loss/Theft. There is also a groundswell of belief that if members choose to deal with an unfair tax system "creatively" by hoarding our homegrown notes then good luck to them and

we will just have to print more. So long as we recover the net printing costs this can only be a boon for us in reducing office work and probably represents the LETS equivalent of the massive "creative accounting" that is accepted as the norm at tax time.

Whatever the choices, any trader who is not well known who begins trading in large amounts of notes will stick out and risk scrutiny, as in our dual, complete system, large purchases are done by cheque.

A DIRECTORY OF LETS CASH ISSUES IS ON THE NEXT PAGE.

Please add to this list any new topic you can think of and ring in your comments to RivLETS office answering machine on 6622 2776 (it takes long messages).

More next newsletter.

Geoff Moxham

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Philosophizing Issues

- Hour equivalence
- Dollar parity
- Complete system (i.e. + cheque book)
- Interlets trading
- Complementary currency (to Feds)
- Member consult and feedback

...PERCEIVED TROUBLES

- The past image of LETS
- Taxation
- Legalities
- Hoarding
- Counterfeiting
- Advantage — Disadv. tradeoff

Adv.s

1. Familiarity (apparent inherent value)
2. User friendliness
3. Facilitates member trade
4. Reduces office work
5. Facilitates InterLETS trading
6. Facilitates % trading agreements
7. IS a nominally time based currency
8. IS an abundance based currency
9. IS a backed (by our presence) currency
10. It's Exciting
11. Offers a limited sunset clause to office drudgery
12. Facilitates small business cash register process
13. Kid friendly
14. Busker friendly
15. Unifies local LETS groups
16. Demonstrates what cash really should be doing

Practicality Issues

- Denominations (1, 2.5, 10, 20)
- Ratios (e.g. printing more of 1 & 2)
- ?Numbering? (if no cheque acs.)
- Issue limits(L300)
- Security
- Accountability
- Information clarity
- Reverse side text
- Graphics/Designs
- Production
- Prototypes
- Proofs
- Printrun
- Collating
- InterLETS Accounts
- Distribution
- Member Issue A/Cs
- Press release preferences
- ATO communication?????/account No.?

Disadv.s

Money-blindness/cash-confusion/greed
Not "Kosher LETS"
There are current objectors (few and varying strength)
Risk of loss is higher than cheque
Accountability of trade is less
Office loses 5% on transactions- how to recoup this?
Decreases the apparent nature of a repayable debt (??)
Loss of notes by tourists, collectors, etc.

Lets Talk

systems. From now on please make sure members from neighbouring systems make out a cheque, rather entering their details on an acknowledgment form. This will simplify these transactions.

Increase in fees. The LETS working group has voted to increase fees in Locals to L15. These are automatically debited annually. The main reason for the increase is to keep our LETS office costs - charged to the manager's account, in balance with LETS expenditure.

Renewals. Please send \$10 unless you have received a pale blue membership card for 2000-2001. To remind members about renewal costs throughout the year, these are:

July - Oct.....\$10

Nov - Jan.....\$8

Feb - April.....\$6

May & June.....\$10

The new working group has decided to start sending a renewal reminder letter in late September.

TAX issues. We recently obtained via Illawarra LETS a copy of a '92 ATO ruling concerning businesses and tax. It verifies that for tax purposes, the net LETS profit needs to be declared as if it were a \$ profit or loss. One point we were unaware of up until now is that the first 300 *Locals* received as business income every year are tax-exempt.

We have heard separately that businesses are apparently eligible to claim a net LETS loss in *cash*. Businesses may be interested in following up on this and obtaining a ruling from the ATO. LETS will also be looking further into this.

The GST. Because we have had one or two enquires about the GST implications of LETS transactions, here is a short clarification based on an ATO ruling. For non-businesses GST is unlikely to apply, and among businesses, only those with an ABN are required to charge GST on LETS transactions. Everything is the same as for cash trading.

Unlisted Services. If a skill or service is not listed in the directory, it may be on our database, or may be available through a neighbouring system. We have Byron/Mullum/Tweed LETS directories on sale for \$2.50 including postage, and anyone can visit the office on Tuesdays and Wednesdays to view the directories of other InterLETS systems.

New meeting times and process. The working group has decided to meet on the first Tuesday of every month till further notice at the Neighbourhood Centre, 13 Mackenzie St., Lismore at 4pm. Interested members are encouraged to come and help the constant renewal of the system, and become empowered to help the community.

Please come along with your inspired ideas so that they can be put into action.

Meeting dates for the rest of the year are:

4/7/00 1/8/00 5/9/00 3/10/00 7/11/00 5/12/00

**Martin Oliver - Interim co-ordinator,
Geoff Moxham**

RivLETS co-ordinator's report

Martin Oliver has taken over as an interim co-ordinator for LETS, with a possibility of a more long-term involvement.

Office news. Last month LETS acquired a second computer, which allows desktop publishing programs to be loaded onto it. Therefore the urgent need for help in producing newsletters and directories, mentioned in the last newsletter, has passed.

The new LETS working group decided on changing over to an A4-sized newsletter, which is more readable, and provides more space for discussion and news. So please send in your contributions. We are continuing our environmental policy of using 100% post-consumer waste recycled copier paper and sustainably -grown coloured paper.

The LETS note. At two regional LETS brainstorming meetings in Mullumbimby, local LETSsystems agreed to print a regional LETS currency note. Other possibilities included the *time dollar* which is being used successfully in the city of Ithaca in New York State, but there was a feeling that this would not combine so well with existing LETSsystems. A consensus was in favour of combining both the \$ and *time dollar* on the same note. (For more info see the previous report 'Regional LETS Currency Meetings').

InterLETS We have made one or two changes to the way InterLETS transactions are processed with neighbouring

Recycled paper

100% 'post-consumer' recycled paper is the best choice as it is made from recycled waste paper rather than manufacturers' offcuts. Canon 100 is most widely available, it comes in plain white packaging with a label at each end, and is sold at the Lismore GPO, the Big Scrub Env. Centre, and Shaws. The Canon coloured paper we use comes from sustainable plantations in Europe, and is also available from Shaws.

Connecting The Northern Rivers

A new group called *Australia Connects* has recently been active in the region, evolving from the work of Robert Theobald. Robert visited the region twice, '98 and '99 before dying suddenly late last year from cancer of which he'd been suffering a long time.

Robert saw himself as a catalyst for change, and spurned any notion of being a guru. For this reason he refused to offer concrete advice, but instead identified key problems and pointed people in the direction of creative solutions. He was not a remarkable speaker, but what distinguished him was the courage to stand up at the age of 70 and say the world needed changing - indeed had to be changed if we are to survive.

During his hectic visits to Australia he was able to link up with a wide cross-section of people, including politicians, government bureaucrats, academics and the business world. And surprisingly the private message he received from most of them was that things needed changing.

He was able to touch the deep stratum of discontent within the dogmas of major party politics that has emerged in One Nation and other far-right political movements around the world. However, the deep reluctance of these movements to address environmental and social justice issues speaks volumes.

Through widespread media coverage and phone-ins he was able to link up with many people who, isolated within their communities and subjected to brainwashing via the corporate-owned media, were effectively saying 'I thought I was the only one who had these ideas.'

His visits were launching pads for 'Discussion and Action' groups which emerged under the banner *Reworking Tomorrow*. A group was launched in Lismore in late '98 but was unable to maintain both a grassroots vision and long term energy. However, it was responsible for launching the magazine *Reworking Tomorrow Now* which is being produced by John Knapen at The Big Scrub Environment Centre, and is essential reading for anyone interested in social change. Back issues can be viewed on-line at www.lis.net.au/~rtn

Australia Connects is now carrying the torch for Robert's ideas, essentially the interlinked goals of community-building, social change and environmental sustainability.

Robert felt that Australia is the country ready for change, and the Northern Rivers the place where it is most likely to happen. *Australia Connects* has forged further ahead in this region and anywhere else, running numerous events including regional visioning days, and having a fortnightly column in the *Northern Rivers Echo*.

Another distinguished speaker who has been in the region for the last few months is Helena Norberg-Hodge from the International Society for Ecology and Culture. She has been raising awareness about the threats of globalisation for a number of years, helping to found the International Forum on Globalisation and editing *The Ecologist* magazine.

As a regular visitor to Ladakh, a remote corner of India in the Himalayas, for about 20 years, she was able to witness from the beginning how a very tightly-woven culture with strong family bonds was starting to be pulled apart by the global economy in the form of Barbie dolls and Nike trainers. What was a highly co-operative, joyful society was being turning into one of unhappy materialistic individualists.

Her book *Ancient Futures* which covers her experiences in more detail is worth reading and will change forever your perception of the nature of Western culture and 'civilisation'.

Helena has been running a campaign in the UK called *From Global to Local* which raises awareness about how food is being transported ever longer distances from farm to table as a result of globalisation. This is no accident, as it involves increased profits for the fossil fuel industry, multinationals and other middle-men, the losers being farmers and consumers.

Australia Connects is currently making the food issue its main focus, promoting the local and organic alternative. The Rainbow Region Organic Market (held at the showground in North Lismore, (running from 7-10 am every Tuesday) is at the cutting edge of the localisation of the food supply, and is well worth supporting.

LETS is also a good framework to connect up local certified organic producers with consumers. If you have an organic certification and are able to offer any produce at a percentage of LETS, please let us know. We may produce a separate section for organic produce in the next directory.

While most of the regional energy for *Australia Connects* has come from Byron Shire, the rest of the region is geographically close enough to link into the initiatives of the coast.

Robert Theobald originated the idea of a 'Passion Cafe', where a cafe table is reserved for an hour or two for a group of like-minded people to get involved in an issue they feel passionate about. A fortnightly Passion Cafe is being held at Caddies, Carrington St, Lismore, looking at strategies for local economic renewal. For further information call Kerrie on 6624 5177.

For more details about *Australia Connects* and the regular

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events being held, call Rho on 6687 2480 or Cass on 6680 8944. Events are also listed on the regional *Australia Connects* website at www.nrg.com.au/~connect. Groups working for change are welcome to add their site to the growing Local Groups page.

As a final word, much of the corporate-owned media is feeding us the message that globalisation is inevitable or has already happened, sub-text being that it is too late to try to 'turn the tide of progress'.

As Francis P. Hutchinson points out in his book *Educating Beyond Violent Futures* (Routledge '96), the easiest way to bring about an unpopular and non-inevitable future scenario is by presenting it as a foregone conclusion. Through a self-fulfilling prophecy principle people will tend to defer to it and this co-operation is absolutely necessary for its fruition.

Globalisation is only inevitable if people believe that it is!

Martin Oliver

"The challenge is to set imagination and creativity loose, to think outside the box, to see the opportunities that lie beyond the problems. We can only resolve today's questions by opening up new approaches and seeing new connections.

Fortunately a broad and general move away from obsessive problem-solving and toward as earch for new opportunities is already underway."

Robert Theobald

RAINBOW REGION ORGANIC PRODUCE MARKET

Held every Tuesday from 7-10am at the
Showground, North Lismore

Retail and wholesale

Support local growers, and buy organic produce
for supermarket prices.

*One of the stallholders, Hogan Gleeson (# 580),
accepts a negotiable % of LETS for his produce.
Ask the other stallholders if they want to join too!*

Lets Talk

Improving the Functioning of LETS

- 1) To improve the functioning of LETS, **please** ensure that you notify the office of any change in phone number, address or skills.

Likewise if you move out of the area or go away for a few months or more. This saves the need for time-wasting phone calls.

If you come across another member this applies to, again **please** tell us.

- 2) Kathryn Macmillan has recently taken over the role of advertising manager, and her main role will be to liaise with newsletter advertisers. Please consider putting one in the next newsletter which is coming out in September. She can be reached in the office on Wednesdays between 1-4pm, and at home on 6622 5202.
- 3) The LETS working group has decided to set a minimum LETS trading % figure for non-businesses; this is 50% LETS (excluding petrol costs). For retail businesses, we recognise the need to start by offering a small % of LETS.
- 4) From now on a free 1/8 page newsletter advert is available to all joining members.
- 5) We are introducing a renewal form, which will be attached to the renewal letter, and which will be attached to future May and July newsletters.

We are open to further suggestions.

INTRODUCING THE LETS OFFICE STAFF

MARTIN OLIVER (Co-ordinator)
Wed 9.30-1pm

I have ~~has~~ been involved with the running of LETS for 3 1/2 years, and took over the role of co-ordinator in January. I am heavily involved in the fight against genetically engineered food (which fortunately is being won) and am interested in many areas connected with social change and sustainability.

GEOFF MOXHAM (LETS cash & newsletter editor)
Alternate Tuesdays, 9.30-4pm

Geoff is a founding member of LETS, since the inaugural meeting, and is a member of an intentional community in Terania Creek for more than 15 years. He has been working as editor for RivLETS for 6 months and has a passion for improving the workability of LETS systems generally, by innovations like the currency notes, and solutions that other LETS systems have found useful.

KATH MACMILLAN (Advertising manager)
Wed 1-4pm

Singer, parent, organiser of spaces and events. A recently reactivated LETS member. I am passionate about honouring the magic in life. Tread softly, seek subtlety. Fields of interest are Aesthetics, Metaphysics, Performance.

JENNI OLIVER (Office helper)
Wed 2-4pm

I've been helping out in the LETS office for a couple of years now. A few of my other interests are; the genetic engineering issue and human rights (especially reconciliation and East Timor). I also like writing and astrology, and hope to explore the art of healing when the time is right.

CAROL TOMI (Office helper)
Alternate Tuesdays, 1-4pm

Carol joined LETS in 1990, initially working as a natural therapist. She has more recently branched into organic growing at Tumble Creek.

CAROL FICKLING (InterLETS)
Alternate Tuesdays, 9.30-1pm

Carol came to the region 11 years ago from North Queensland, and settled on a small farm near Kyogle. She joined LETS right away. She has a B.A. in Fine Arts and is a qualified librarian. She and her husband have 2 daughters and 8 grandchildren.

The Passing of a Great Scribe

Long-term LETS member Jon Axtens who died suddenly on 27th May will be greatly missed by other members. He was well-known for sending a constant stream of letters to politicians on many subjects including globalisation, and he was involved in a number of interesting projects, including an interest-free home loan society running in Lismore in the 1950's, which was linked to the co-operative Starr-Bowkidd movement.

He was a reliable and dedicated provider of transport, for a period transporting the LETS stall to the Channon Market, and later making 4 daily trips to and from Nimbin to enable Martin and Jenni to run a stall there. Thank you Jon.

LETS would like to extend its sympathies to Val Axtens and his children.

lets Talk

CLASSIFIEDS

GENERAL SKILLS, SERVICES & LABOUR

LI PET SITTING. Going away? If your pet needs feeding and lots of cuddles, call Marianne on 6621 4817. 20-30L/day neg.

LI Vanessa Morris, # 1091. Bachelor of Naturopathy. Offers Holistic healing with Diet, Nutrition, Herbal Remedies (1:1), Massage and Lifestyle Management. Fees: \$25/hr with \$20/hr concession. First three consults @ 100% LETS\$, thereafter 50%. The Inner Sanctum (above Noah's Arc) 6622 7478.

LI Whether it's a paper bag, a desk or a room that resists your organising efforts, call me for your fresh ideas and together we will succeed. Kathy Clutterbuser 6622 5202.

TRANSPORTATION (SALES/HIRE)

XX Transport goods to and from Sydney every 6-8 weeks (van & trailer). Call Bill on 0417 499125.

WANTED

DU Couch - comfortable, with soft arms. Heavy cut mower, or parts thereof. Call Graham Jordan on 6689 5300.

KY Video camera (8mm). Good condition and all accessories. Will pay 50% LETS. Call Carol on 6633 9188.

LI Technical advice sought for 386 & 486 with faults. Kath 6622 5202.

LI Unwanted Raddi Solaris must go. Experienced kinesiologist wanted to help. Practitioners of other modalities confident of results please call also. Kathryn 6622 5202

InterLETS with Nimbin

After the last regional currency meeting NimLETS have agreed to InterLETS trading with RivLETS, and inter-trading between the two systems is now possible.

NEWSLETTER ADVERTISING RATES

Classifieds.....	1L per line
1/8 page.....	12L
1/4 page.....	20L
1/2 page.....	35L
Full page.....	60L

**THE NEXT DEADLINE IS
WED. 23RD AUGUST**

Letters to the Editor

The Channon Market - where did it go ?

The volunteers at the LETS office, Channon locals, and almost everyone on the street we talk to, is wondering where the old, quaint, "Make it, bake it and grow it" market went.

In previous newsletters we have pointed out the active disinformation the "new" (sic) market committee was publishing about the risks of employers using LETS...used as an excuse to scuttle it.

The most recent news about this ongoing community vandalism we have heard is that the committee (all stallholders) feel that **Reusabowl** is just too much of an interference with trade, confusing the poor consumers with recycling decisions...how awful!

The HUGE question is where's the public comment on all this?

No one has said as much as 'boo'.

Are we all a bit shy now we are swallowing the US tripe of adversarial litigation?

Or are we all a bit exhausted by the endless righteous right-wing backswill?

Perhaps no one knows what's happening.....well that's about to stop.

Please send us you observations which will be printed in this column, anonymously if you like. LETS stop the destruction of 20 years of hard community slogging, SOON.

Geoff Moxham.

Let's Talk

John Brumpton, Kyogle

6633 3254

John offers brushcutting, if anyone has a lantana nightmare.

Chimie Moxham, The Channon 6688 6166

Chimie can work as a kitchen assistant or carpenter's labourer, and offers brush-hooking and clearing.

Ralph & Jean Lewis, Goon'bah 6625 2970

Ralph offers sheep-shearing, lawnmowing and odd jobs.

Jean teaches embroidery, and offers greetings cards and works of folk decorative art.

Frank Hampton, Goonellabah 6625 2469

Frank offers permaculture advice, and sells organic produce and wheatgrass.

Patrick Curley & Kev Muldowney, East

Lismore

6622 4851

Patrick offers a number of natural therapies including acupuncture, remedial massage, oriental herbal medicine and Qi Gong. He also offers massage training classes.

Katie also offers massage.

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

Belinda Kerslake, Rosebank 6688 2272

Belinda offers Holistic massage, Indian head massage and can put together resumes and application letters.

John Ljubicic, Lismore 6622 0413

John offers basic sustainable energy consultations, specialising in solar.

Jude Wright & Kev Stubbings, Tabulam
6666 1427

Jude offers organic avocados and eggs, and makes home-made jam. She offers home-made woollen slippers and can do domestic cleaning.

Kev offers lawnmowing and car audio installations.

DISCLAIMER

The views expressed in LETS Talk do not always represent those of the LETS working group.

OBITUARIES

Jon Axtens, JP

Stirrer
1932 - 2000

A lifelong campaigner for causes wide, wonderful and sometimes merely weird, Jon Axtens has died where he was born, in the northern NSW community of Lismore. He was 68.

Jon Mackay Axtens, a name familiar to regular readers of many newspapers' letters pages, was born into a long-established Lismore family, although his arrival was a close-run thing — he almost died at birth.

His father was a solicitor, which offered prestige if not wealth to the family, a background which made Axtens an economically prudent and morally upstanding individual who detested foul language or anything vulgar. He was a stickler for accurate grammar and spelling, despite the fact that his own sentences were convoluted and his arguments were often obscure.

The gawky kid matured into a handsome silver-haired gentleman who took pleasure in being different, wearing strange clothes and funny sunglasses which were in delightful contrast to his Victorian manners and morals.

He was educated at Lismore Public and Lismore High schools, the Armidale School and the university of hard knocks. In 1960 he married a Sunday school teacher, Valerie Nosworthy, and they had five children, one of whom, Andrew, died before him.

For 31 years he worked in a law office; with his pen at the ready he cut a familiar figure as he strode the footpaths of Lismore in his ubiquitous tweed cap with a fistful of photocopies.

An implacable enemy of injustice, he was a member of many community groups, including his church, the local RSL and the Fellowship of Australian Writers.

A generous listener, his passions were never limited to the local; a citizen of the world, he took that citizenship seriously. Just before his death he was working on a draft proposal for "Reworking Tomorrow and Australia Connects".

The draft gives something of Axtens's style:

Define Morality and Justice. Show us a surviving successful long-term mutual (self help) co-operative in Australia. Literally tens of thousands of charities and

groups which are less than pleased with the political, economic or legal status quo exist in Australia because individuals are notorious for only paying lip service to concepts of networking and sharing resources and for seeking to build their own empires or having an important role in their own projects.

It seems to me that the entrenched, so-called majority parties, with combined memberships of about two per cent of the population, can rest assured that their hidden agendas and ulterior motives will, go unchallenged because their opponents are splintered and lack any ability to mount a co-ordinated effort in the relatively near future. However, one should not lose sight of the fact that the price of freedom is eternal vigilance.

... Extensive use should, where possible, be made of Internet Web sites, emails, brochures, handbills, pamphlets, talkback radio, newspaper articles and whatever else comes to mind.

Axtens was a justice of the peace for more than 30 years and a telephone counsellor for 14 years. He spent three years working voluntarily with the



Lismore and District Financial Counselling Service.

A founding member of the Tuntable Falls Community, he did ground-breaking work on the legal structures of Australia's burgeoning multiple occupancy co-operatives. And his help in the formation stages of many communities earned him universal respect. One story has it that a Buddhist community offered him sainthood.

In the 1980s he enrolled to study philosophy. To his delight his lecturer informed him he was

a universal political iconoclast. This title suited him well and he used it consistently in self-description. Otherwise he never spoke of himself and was in so many ways a contrary and private individual.

An example of his offbeat sense of humour is perfectly portrayed by his four campaigns to enter parliament, for the NSW Legislative Assembly seat of Lismore, the House of Representatives seat of Richmond, the NSW Legislative Council and the Senate.

He had no illusions of actually winning, but delighted in stimulating debate, attacking what he saw as political parties' conformity and immorality and generally causing a stir.

Obsessive in his indignation towards injustice, his letter-writing distribution techniques might best be described as epistolary carpet-bombing, all in the cause of bringing accountability, transparency and democracy to Australian politics and society.

He is survived by his wife, Valerie, and sons, Bruce, Peter, Laurence and Christopher, and also his younger brother, Peter.

The Axtens family



Renewal Form

PO Box 402, Lismore, NSW 2480

Ph: (02) 6622 2776

Membership renewals are due by the end of June each year, for all members except those with a membership card valid for the coming financial year. Please send \$10 to the address above together with this form.

Please complete the whole form, even if you believe LETS already has your details.

Member number.....Name of a member on this account.....

Postal address.....

Phone number for directory entries.....a/h or b/h?.....

Signed.....Date.....

We usually list working hours numbers for businesses (other than market stalls) and a/h numbers for other members.

Skills and Services offered - list up to 5

*Only list those you **really** want to do. Please be concise and accurate; mentioning qualifications is helpful.*

Member 1
Name:

Member 2
Name:

Are there any improvements to LETS you would like to suggest? *(Please feel free to continue on the back of the form)*.....

Please tick here if you would like to distribute LETS brochures to your local store or in your local area. We will post them out to you. ☐

Are there any LETS services you have been unable to track down?.....