



Newsletter

November 2008

Farm Writers' Association of NSW Inc
GPO Box 1108 Sydney NSW 2001
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Reporting back on the first 12 months, Agriculture Minister Tony Burke

Tony Burke, Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, will be the guest speaker at our November 28 seminar; almost one year to the day since he was sworn in as a Minister of the Crown.

Mr Burke has many issues on his plate of interest to Farm Writers: the Government's response to the inquiry into the social impact of drought; the Cutler Review's musings on Rural R&D; the Government's response to Roger Beale's review of Australia's quarantine and biosecurity arrangements; where agriculture fits in the Government's climate change policy and how the new wheat export arrangements will pan out are just a few.

This month Minister Burke will travel to Rome to address a special session of the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization, where global food security will be one of the key issues discussed. In light of the global financial crisis and global food crisis, it is a key time at which to hear the Minister's views on food security, Australia's emissions trading scheme and capacity-building. Join us at the Menzies Hotel, Friday 28th November to hear how Tony Burke sees the next 12 months in this challenging portfolio.

November seminar

The Menzies Hotel
14 Carrington St

Friday 28 November 12pm

\$60 per head or voucher for members.

\$70 per head for all non-members

RSVP BEFORE 5:00pm

Monday 24th November 2008

online: www.nswfarmwriters.org

Please note, if bookings are not cancelled by the deadline, the person making the booking will be invoiced.

Farm Writers' Christmas Spectacular!

The NSW Farm Writers' 2008 Christmas Party is set to be a spectacular event, with 2 course meal, drinks, prizes and perhaps even a visit from Santa. Starting 12 noon at the Strangers Room at NSW Parliament House put a note in your diary for Thursday 11th December. Prizes up for grabs this year are:

The Rudolf Prize: Dinner for two at Tetsuya's, including a \$110 wine tab; value \$500 Sponsored by the NSW Farmers Association

The Prancer Prize: Learn to fly a helicopter; value \$300 Sponsored by Syngenta

The Vixen Prize: The Observatory Hotel Day Spa Voucher (The Rocks); value \$200 Sponsored by Renard

Corporate Members of the month:

NSW Farmers Association

Syngenta

Renard

At only \$60 per head for members, \$70 per head for all non-members; book your seat today

online: www.nswfarmwriters.org or
email: bookings@nswfarmwriters.org

Rural Australia the market of choice

John Porter, Chief Executive of AUSTAR addressed the October luncheon to discuss AUSTAR as a regional company and future media and telecommunications across Australia and specifically in regional areas. AUSTAR has over 700,000 subscribers and has increased the number of channels offered from 8 in 1995 to a staggering 120 in 2008. Interestingly and somewhat surprisingly AUSTAR offers its rural and remote subscribers the same set-up cost and subscription fee it offers its city based customers, the premise being that rural and remote customers should not pay for their remoteness.

AUSTAR is also expanding its services, offering mobile phone communications and wireless internet to their predominantly regional and rural customers. With an understanding of the changing customer media consumption habits, especially of the younger generations, hundreds of millions of dollars have been reinvested into spectrum licenses in the understanding that their customers value multiple media forms and have a preference in purchasing bundled products.

The important issues facing regional media are the National Broadband Network and the digital switchover. "Broadband history is a good example of how global circumstances and government policy can have a huge impact on service delivery in regional Australia," said Mr Porter.

Mr Porter was of the belief that the OPEL network would have delivered significant improvements to media access in regional Australia and now that this initiative has been cancelled it is imperative that the National Broadband Network (NBN) deliver a better and more far reaching service. This however is met with some concerns by Mr Porter, the greatest being the potential of reduced competition, "AUSTAR has always been a strong advocate for policies which encourage competition, as we believe these will ultimately drive investments in telecommunications infrastructure benefiting all regional Australians."

Mr Porter voiced a sentiment which is echoed across the country; that access to and reliability of internet and broadband services in regional and remote Australia is inadequate in comparison to metropolitan service. "Recent data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics highlight the state of internet and broadband uptake in regional, rural and remote Australia. The findings show that regional and remote areas are at least 40 per cent less likely to have broadband access relative to major cities.

"Everyone agrees that broadband is an enabling technology which will have a significant and profound influence on Australian society. True high speed broadband is not just about content services or being able to surf the internet more quickly; it is critical for business, for health services, for both public and private sectors, and policies developed should encourage the provision of affordable broadband access to all regional Australians."

John Porter is clearly passionate about his company and his market "Regional Australia is an exciting market for AUSTAR, it is our market of choice. But there is no doubt that there are challenges being a service provider to regional areas, and where the government gets involved we have to make sure that this involvement helps the process rather than harms it, that it encourages innovation rather than reinforces a non-competitive status quo."



Photo courtesy of Mick Keogh

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