

PLENARY SESSION (Chaired by David Hill)

Professor Hobson Bryan: Closing Address

Professor Bryan began by praising the quality of the people, food, wine and the music. He said the evenness of the presentations particularly impressed him. He drew out two themes

NZIA now longer had to be defensive about its capabilities. It was now a leader in impact assessment.

The legislation compared to 15 years ago is better and more supportive of IA. Within this context he felt that the debate between the technocrat and organic approaches was great.

He was impressed by the planners who gave presentations in the sessions and by the depth and amount of public consultation. He was intrigued to hear that some felt there may have been a problem of over-consultation as he felt that this was a nice problem to have.

He said that the IAIA Conference held in Christchurch in early 1998 had set a standard for IAIA Conferences.

Prof Bryan said he felt he had to highlight one burning issue – that of "Growth". It was taken as a "given" when it should perhaps be a question? Are another million people needed in Auckland? It may be more of a question of distribution of population within a low density country and of fluctuating immigration pressures. It would be useful for IA to put Growth on the agenda and look at the options and consequences of higher density and growth. As an example, he was mindful of Japan and its population being supported by a phantom carrying capacity (i.e. more than its own land area and resources).

Another issue was the semantic consequence of alternatives to growth-shrinkage or decline did not have quite the same appeal. There were no robust terms for non-growth.

Perhaps growth was endemic to capitalist systems but as he was now almost becoming a deep ecologist, it seemed more a simile of growth being equated with that of cancer. This was to take a negative viewpoint. However he was also aware that growth could be beneficial for economic vitality and diversity (witness the visible example of Viaduct Basin and economic impact of America's Cup in Auckland)

Within his hometown Tuscaloosa, Alabama (pop 75-100,000) he was aware of the impacts of the Interstate highway in terms of habituation to noise. But in the Grand Canyon, the buzz of noise might mean something bad about to happen. The ramifications of growth in unmodified areas could be pretty big, he felt.

He reflected on news of a traffic jam reported in Birmingham, Alabama, recently, where two women exchanged insults and then shots were exchanged. Was this the downside of density – more violence?

He said he had done more listening this time and was conscious that IA was a moving target. There appeared to be no explicit targets of what is good or bad. He asked rhetorically "what was

the standard we are all agreed on? Is it Peace, vitality etc?" If we were always adaptive, how did then we lose what we value? What are the impacts of running out of things? What about sustainability? It was possible that the quality of life may decline long before we run out of things.

He gave the example of trout fishing near Twizel on a quiet stretch of stream, watching and catching trout. Being the only one on the stretch of river he felt it was too crowded when two other fishers arrived – this compared to the crowded fishing situations in his own country.

He finished with the theme of integration. If it were possible it would come about, although he liked the idea of integrating environmental and social impacts. Perhaps environmental issues had a disproportionate influence at present.

He thanked the organisers of the Conference and said he looked forward to being at future IA Conferences.

Discussion

Dianne Buchan replied to Hobson Bryan's address by reflecting on the idea of growth as a central government policy scenario for planners. Auckland was held up as the dynamo of economic growth and the rest of the country was supposed to experience the trickle-down of that growth. In the area of traffic congestion, she said it was sometimes better to let it battle against itself so that people realised the consequences of further growth rather than always attempt to (technically) fix the problem.

She was interested to hear that North Shore City had changed its attitude to growth scenarios and was not pro-growth on the volumes projected. She asked rhetorically if one could have positive or negative growth?

In terms of discharges to water, she noted that there is a complexity of discharges from various sources and it is likely that up to 30% of discharges remain untreated at present. She said there was a difference between technical and political decision-making and that although one could add more techniques or analysis, there was never a perfect engineering solution. All this added up to a requirement for more monitoring of growth nodes – both quantitative and qualitative.

Nick Taylor reflected on IA's knowledge about rapid growth over the past thirty years through SIA practice and monitoring studies, such as Huntly. Thinking of the 3 circle model of sustainable development promoted by MFE and its relation to impact assessment techniques, he said perhaps the Charette was the social input to the process. He was aware that in the New Lynn case they may have been swept along by the visuals of the physical design, but these were not backed up by coherent social and economic policies. The process seemed to have been driven more by business and environmental concerns, with economic growth dependent on the New Lynn mall growth node.

David Hill, commenting on the New Lynn case study said that railway improvement by itself would not solve all the transportation issues in West Auckland. There was a danger of Councils trying to shoe-horn solutions into a situation they had no control over. He said he believed there

were limitations for participants in such "design by enquiry" processes (as in New Lynn growth study) as they were not privy to all negotiations re growth options. Such techniques may need to be viewed with caution depending on the facilitators' expertise and brief and the outcomes generated.

Nick Taylor responded that the Charette shouldn't just stand on its own but be regarded as part of a process. For example the Auckland property market changed over the past three years and now property values for developments such as Tuscany Towers were down. This could not have been anticipated three years ago.

Lastly, the plenary session discussed what feedback if any the NZAIA as an organisation should give to the Auckland contributors from the experience of working through the Auckland Regional Growth Strategy "case study" at the conference. It was noted that the work of the future of the Auckland Regional Growth Strategy's Social Infrastructure Group was not clear at this point and it would be a good time to encourage that group to continue its work as one thing. It was also reasonably clear that the Auckland Growth Strategy tended to focus on the physical supply and capacity side of growth. There needed to be more focus on consumer preferences and social needs - with the distribution, composition and needs of different population groups.