

Regional Editors Get Together.

AAP hosted the first Conference of Editors of Regional Daily Newspapers at the Hilton Hotel in Sydney on May 4. The Conference, which will be expanded next year to include Editors of metropolitan newspapers, attracted 66 delegates, 22 of them from AAP.

Virtually all the editors who attended have since written to AAP to applaud the success of the Conference and to reiterate the views they expressed on May 4 — that, overall, the AAP service was excellent.

Not that there wasn't constructive criticism of perceived deficiencies in AAP. Points raised by the editors were well taken and AAP has already acted on many of them.

AAP Editor in Chief Barry Wheeler addressing the conference.



AAP-Value?

To Reg MacDonald, Managing Editor of the Bendigo Advertiser, fell the task of examining, in critical detail, the AAP service. The title of his speech was "Value for money — a newspaperman's view of AAP."

His views:

- Regional dailies need more and better coverage on emerging social and lifestyle trends and issues:
- AAP should provide an expanded file of background and analytical reports on current main issues at home and abroad and on those that give every appearance of developing into issues:

- AAP was not doing justice to regional subscribers with its coverage out of Tokyo, Singapore, Hong Kong, Peking, the Middle East, New York and Washington D.C.:
- AAP lets too many good court stories get away and too many arrive too late for regional papers to use on inside pages:
- AAP has poor news sources outside the capital cities, especially in Western Australia and North Queensland:
- There was a need for more background stories and specialist pieces on agricultural trends and developments:
- AAP sometimes overwhelmed subscribers with too many stories on a running report then did not send an overall wrap-up encompassing major points from earlier stories:
- But in spite of the problems, Mr MacDonald stressed that the AAP service to regional newspapers offered tremendous value for money.



Reg MacDonald, Managing Editor of the Bendigo Advertiser (right) in conversation with Harry Gordon, Editor in Chief of the Herald and Weekly Times.

The Good News.

AAP Chief Executive Lee Casey, in a speech to the Regional Dailies Association annual conference in Canberra on May 24, responded to the points raised by Mr MacDonald.

- Provided the economic climate does not deteriorate AAP is considering appointing correspondents in Tokyo (late 1985), Washington D.C. (early 1986) and another Pacific correspondent, possibly in Fiji (late 1985).
- AAP is planning to revamp the Canberra bureau to improve rural and agricultural coverage.
- AAP is planning to establish part-time correspondents in major non-metropolitan centres.
- AAP is looking at ways to increase the number of lifestyle and leisure stories, including the purchase of some specialised services from overseas.

Legal Threat.

Brian Hogben, Group General Manager of News Limited and Senior Vice President of the Media Law Association of Australasia, addressing the Sydney Conference, denounced Federal Government moves to adopt a uniform defamation law, saying it would bind the media to a fearful silence.

Under its provisions courts would retain the right to award punitive damages and be given new powers to order publication of retractions, corrections and apologies; and reporting of parliamentary debates would be hampered by a newspaper's obligation to offer a right of reply to anyone defamed by a politician under parliamentary privilege.

All journalists should make clear to readers that such restrictions would interfere with their right to read fair and accurate reports. They should become better informed about the proposed law, appreciate the law's dangers and not be content with assurances by politicians.

"If so-called law reform continues on its present course," Mr Hogben said, "we will finish up not a yellow press but a beige press — pasteurised, sanitised and homogenised."

We Know AAP.

National Party Leader Ian Sinclair addressed delegates at lunch and Prime Minister Bob Hawke and Mrs Hawke entertained delegates to cocktails after the Conference.

Mr Hawke, in an impromptu speech on the verandah at Kirribilli House, showed a keen appreciation of AAP's role as the national news agency and its technical expertise in 'bringing the nation together.' The P.M. made one very telling observation: That regional newspapers reached more than two million Australians who live outside the major urban centres, a fact often overlooked by their larger metropolitan brethren.

Mr Sinclair expressed the view that regional journalists took greater care to ensure accuracy because close-knit rural communities picked up mistakes and misspellings more than metropolitan readers. Metropolitan journalists concentrated more on personality politics, he said, whereas reporters in rural areas wanted to know what a politician was going to do to improve the lot of country folk.

Mr Sinclair also showed a keen interest in AAP and demonstrated a broad knowledge of the agency. This may have flattered AAP staff but it was hardly surprising — his



Brian Hogben, Group General Manager (Editorial) News Ltd., officially opening the conference.



David Chipp, Editor in Chief of the Press Association (standing) discusses an issue with National Party Leader, Ian Sinclair.

Press Secretary Geoff Mort is a former senior AAP journalist!

Other major speakers at the Conference included David Chipp, Editor-in-Chief of the Press Association, and Ian MacDowall, Reuters Editor for Asia, Australia and New Zealand.

Delegate Count.

Delegates to the Conference represented AAP, Reuters, Press Association (of Britain), Australian United Press, NZPA, the Regional Dailies of Australia, News Ltd., Bendigo Advertiser, Sunshine Coast Daily, Illawarra Mercury, Ballarat Courier, Geelong Advertiser, Warrnambool Standard, Toowoomba Chronicle, Shepparton News, Mackay Mercury, Tamworth Northern Daily Leader, Cairns Post, Newcastle Herald, Canberra Times, Burnie Advocate, Rockhampton Morning Bulletin, Townsville Bulletin, Albury Border Morning Mail, Orange Central Western Daily, Hobart Mercury, Murwillumbah Daily News, Gold Coast Bulletin, Gladstone Observer, Ipswich Times, Warwick Daily News, Bundaberg News Mail, Bathurst Western Advocate, Grafton Daily Examiner, Maryborough-Hervey Bay Chronicle, Wagga Advertiser and the Goulburn Post.

The Not So Merry Month of May.

AAP's man in Port Moresby, Chris Pash, kept up a steady stream of bylined or AAP-credited stories throughout May – beginning with the Pope's visit to Papua New Guinea, Irianese refugees crossing the border and then the row over the ABC Four Corners interview with an Irianese guerilla leader.

Across the border Leigh Mackay weighed in with Indonesia's view of the ABC row, the mysterious death of Irianese academic Arnold Ap and a widely-played piece on Irian Jaya's development. Light relief came with his account of Bali's plan to overhaul its "seedy" image as a playground for Australian hippies.

At home, the immigration debate deteriorated into a verbal brawl, replete with charges and counter-charges of racism. Canberra shouldered much of the coverage burden, with support from Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Brisbane.

Debra Bull, on assignment from Sydney to Canberra, scored broadly (including a Melbourne Herald front page lead) with her interview with Hazel Hawke and what life is like for a P.M.'s wife. Mrs Hawke and Jill Wran (wife of

N.S.W. Premier Neville), the subject of an earlier Debbie profile, have both since contacted AAP to say how faithful the stories were to the interviews they gave.

Other Credits:

HOBART: Andrew Darby scored widely with the high tech hunt for Tassie Tigers, what motivates Australia II skipper John Bertrand; the ALP National Executive meeting in Burnie; the pioneering spirit is alive and well on Tasmania's west coast; and an account of a low-flying supply trip to remote Macquarie Island.

CANBERRA: The bureau provided the bulk of domestic cover on the ABC/Papua New Guinea furore and the fallout from Professor Blainey's remarks about immigration plus the Hawke Government's alleged anti-British bias. Bruce Jones' in-depth piece on racism – "As Australian as meat pies and tomato sauce" – won considerable play.

The ANZAAS conference team of Jane Eyre, Mike Lawson, Tim Dobbyn, Debra Bull and Chris Kremmer, won a daily swag of AAP credits, unfortunately few of them bylined. Mike was luckier with his economic stories on the car industry, coal price cuts and the prices/incomes accord, winning handsome

bylined play in several newspapers.

Other bylines sighted for a grab bag of stories were Peter Logue, Cheryl Sanders, Craig Skehan and Patrick Lyons.

DARWIN: Crocodiles, Christmas Island and probably the best piece of graffiti, for a story lead, of the month: That was the lot of Brian Johnstone, AAP's man at the TOP END. Bylines sighted were for a story on moves to get croc skins back on retail markets and plans to incorporate Christmas Island with the Northern Territory for voting purposes. The graffiti lead? "Will I live to B-52?" scrawled on a placard protest about U.S. bombers using a Darwin base.

LONDON: London-based staff bylines popped up everywhere. Howard Northey, who had kept us fully informed of the disastrous Australian cricket tour of the West Indies, mercifully "ended" the punishment early in the month. Ian Dick sallied forth with Foreign Minister Bill Hayden, producing a slew of datelines – London, Paris, The Hague, Budapest, Moscow – before taking ill midway through the trip. Mark Lever, a recent arrival from Brisbane, won play with his assessment of Britain's defence, Ron Watson boggled the mind with a piece on Mick Jagger once contemplating being Jagger M.P., and Fiona Gillies scored well with two pieces – the new Tarzan trying to save African rainforests and how the British cope with April sunshine.

BRISBANE: Most popular byline this month was Glenn Davis, who scored well with the story on the Australian flag. Other bylines sighted regularly were Wayne Heming (sport) and Gareth Kelly (racing). Introduction of the new dollar coin gave Brisbane one well-played story: Discovery of what was suspected to be (but later disproved) a counterfeit coin.

ADELAIDE: Tim Dornin won bylined play in several newspapers with his account of why RAAF Mirages keep falling from the sky and Richard Pullin scored bylines all over the place with his cover of the Roxby Downs protests. Unbylined pieces on Roxby by Kate Hannon won play, as did Ian Williams' trip to the glowing wilds of Maralinga, the former British nuclear test site.



AAP Editor Peter Brown (right) with two of the conference speakers, Peter Newell, Editor of the Illawarra Mercury, Wollongong (left), and David Lonsdale, Editor in Chief of the Sunshine Coast Daily, Maroochydore.

MELBOURNE: Ian Pemberton's report on breakdown of coal talks in Japan scored well in the Courier Mail and Canberra Times and Ted Himmelreich's piece on the ACTU backing away from hard-line opposition to uranium mining scored a byline in the Newcastle Herald and West Australian, among others. Jim Dallmeyer did the rounds of Victoria's regional daily newspapers to show the AAP flag in May – and wrote features while he was about it. At least one, about a mythical shipwreck, won full page bylined play in several papers. Seaton Ashton scored widely with the curtain going up on Victoria's new arts centre.

SYDNEY: Both Olympic sagas – The Soviet boycott and Michelle Ford's battle to be included in the Australian team – won a swag of bylines for Sydney sports desk's Joyce Thompson, Trevor Robb, Warwick Stanley and Winsor Dobbin. Warwick and Sydney bureau night editor Tony White also shared a bylined exclusive in the Sydney Telegraph and elsewhere forecasting the ASU vote against Ford's inclusion. Other scorers were Diana Plater's cover of the Slattery Commission hearings and Keith Gosman's state parliament debate on a gay rights Bill. Sydney bureau won front page play (Brisbane Courier Mail and Newcastle Herald, among others) on the Mafia-style executions near Griffith and Andrew MacSwan's cover of the Melbourne-Sydney marathon scored widely. Finance Desk's Bruce Hextall and Annie Jamieson won byline play with their "Shellshock on the Stock Exchanges" and Ron Corben and Graham Lloyd bylines were sighted on a range of Finance stories.

PERTH: Mark Smith switched hats frequently to score bylined play with stories as diverse as new gold strikes in Kalgoorlie, the struggle over Cliffminex shares, attempts to remove the stigma of criminal conviction, homosexual law reform and the John Pat murder case.

Play of the Month.

Geelong Advertiser, Page 4, May 2: Three bylined AAP stories – Britons warm to a change of season (Fiona Gillies); New seats will benefit Labor (Bruce Jones); Shootings a spur to gun debate (Rosemary Triggs).

Staff Changes.

Don Woolford, a former AAP staffer, rejoined the company as bureau chief in Adelaide.

In Melbourne, Jim Dallmeyer was appointed News Editor and Ted Lambeth became Night Editor. Sydney racing desk staffer Mark Ryan transferred to Melbourne and Chris Kremmer moved from Sydney general reporting to Canberra.

Louise Williams has completed her cadetship and joined the graded list in Sydney and former NZPA journalist Martine Cusack has joined head office staff.

The Corporate Report.

Planning is well advanced on a new AAP Project – The Corporate Report – which will go into service at the beginning of September and be in full production in early October.

The Corporate Report will be delivered by a unique technology known as the Multi-point Distribution System (MDS) which, is something of a "world first" for AAP, utilises radiated microwave to deliver information and data to subscribers.

The service, to be officially launched in Sydney and Melbourne on October 8 and in other cities after the domestic satellite becomes operational late next year, will be beamed from transmitters in each major metropolitan area. In Sydney the transmitters are atop Centre-point Tower, in Melbourne they are on the Commonwealth Bank Building at 367 Collins Street.

The high speed microwave signal is captured on a range of reception dishes at subscriber premises, with the service being accessed via a terminal leased from AAP or on the customer's computer equipment.

The technology involved gives AAP greater long-term flexibility for a range of specialised services (The Corporate Report being the first) being developed to meet the needs of the business community. Radiated microwave is a faster and more economic means of transmitting data.

The first of the new services developed jointly by Product Development, Editorial, Technical and Marketing, is the Corporate Report, prepared from the domestic and international editorial files and intended as an aid in the corporate decision-making process. The service will forewarn and provide a concise summary of major stories 24 hours a day with special emphasis Monday to Friday business hours, enabling executives to keep in touch with general news as well as detailed financial information.

As such it will be an important resource for key decision makers – and organisations as a whole – providing fast, succinct coverage of news events that affect the company's operations.

A wide range of subjects can be accessed selectively, providing constantly updated information via a desk top terminal.

Information can be transferred to a printer if paper copy is required for filing.

The contents of the service will broadly include:

- General News, summarising major international and domestic news.
- Political News, information from the political sphere with emphasis on the happenings in politics rather than straight news reports.
- Industrial News, a report on industrial relations matters, including copy on strikes, industrial threats, a union move for award changes and ACTU or government pronouncements.
- Sports News, brief coverage of major sporting events.
- Weather, updated three times each day.
- Media Topics, a summary of the editorials in the metropolitan daily newspapers plus details of special supplements being planned by the major newspapers and magazines and the main discussion points for various talk-back radio shows in the capital cities.
- Financial Information, news and data covering a wide range of financial areas. This will include concise coverage of major financial stores from the AAP news files.