

29 May 2009

Dear SAIEES members

In September 2006 our previous Chair, Bill Harding, announced that the Board of the Southern African Institute for Environmental Assessment (SAIEA) had agreed to take on the management of our Institute as 'interim caretaker'. Bill pointed out that this move was designed to 'keep SAIEES alive' until we could figure out how to move it beyond mere existence to real growth and prominence.

Before I reflect on options for the future, I would like to clarify the difference between SAIEA and SAIEES and update you on the current situation.

SAIEA is a non-profit Trust, working to improve the application of sustainable development tools (such as Impact Assessment) throughout southern Africa. Through its work, it hopes to influence decision making processes that result in better policies, plans, programmes and projects in our region. It does this by providing consulting services to governments, developers, financiers, donors and other stakeholders. SAIEA is thus a non-membership, consulting NGO governed by a Board of Trustees. Its head office is in Windhoek with another office in Cape Town (see [www.saiea.com](http://www.saiea.com)).

By contrast, SAIEES is a membership organization that was established for the advancement of the science and practice of ecology and environmental science (encompassing both natural and non-natural sciences), to represent ecologists and environmental scientists, to promote their interests and to uphold the status of the profession of ecology and environmental science.

SAIEA's current activities as caretaker of SAIEES include screening and registering new applicants, upgrading the website (just completed), organizing occasional Board meetings, attending to requests for information and maintaining contact with the secretariat in Noordhoek (run by Jeanette Walker.). SAIEA provides these services free of charge.

Unfortunately, there are currently inadequate resources to enable a more pro-active approach, but there have been recent efforts to 'market' SAIEES in the region so that we can grow and broaden our membership (currently 283). However, some of our long-standing members have questioned the value of SAIEES, arguing that they receive no real benefits and minimal

return on their annual subscription fees. I have sympathy for this argument.

For South Africans there are perhaps alternatives to SAIEES, but for other SADC citizens, the Institute offers a unique 'home' that is valued. We are seeing a growing interest in SAIEES from ecologists and environmental scientists in neighbouring countries, which bodes well for our future. In many cases, these new applicants struggle to find 'sponsors' as they have not previously been part of the network. Also, they may not yet have the experience of their South African counterparts so many are required to resubmit their application a bit later. Progress is being made on this front, and we look forward to welcoming professionals from all over SADC to our Institute.

This brings me to the future: SAIEA is happy to continue being caretaker as a shortage of funds and a lack of volunteers limits our options. When Bill Harding canvassed members a few years ago, the response was essentially 'keep SAIEES alive', but there was no accompanying rush of offers to help us keep the show on the road. Maintaining the *status quo* is possible, as SAIEA is prepared to attend to SAIEES business on a part-time basis. Subscription fees enable Jeanette to maintain the administration, but there's nothing left to enable more activities. In the absence of a pot of gold, we need to re-iterate our call for volunteers. The following support would go a long way towards helping us achieve a critical mass of members, more activities and a higher profile:

- SAIEES brochure – a nicely illustrated, professionally laid-out hard copy brochure and application form that briefly summarises the Institute's mission, constitution etc. and encourages qualified people to apply.
- SAIEES ambassadors – people who would distribute the brochure far and wide
- Training course volunteers – people who would volunteer their expertise and time to run the occasional course under the banner of SAIEES, though the course may in fact be offered on the occasion of another event (e.g. an IAIA conference)
- Newsletter editor – a volunteer to coordinate the compilation of 2 or 3 newsletters every year, and many volunteers who would be prepared to write articles for the newsletters. As was the case in the past, the newsletters can be emailed to members and placed on the website.
- SAIEES representatives – members who are prepared to represent us at various meetings to which we are sometimes invited. Some of our members already do this for us (thanks!), but we need to spread the load a bit more evenly.

And lastly.....

**A volunteer to take on the running of SAIEES full time!**

Actually, this may not be asking the impossible. Surely there is a retired ecologist or environmental scientist who would love to spend a couple of days each month running our Institute? Please regard this as an official advertisement for a highly prestigious, very rewarding, unpaid job. CVs to [peter.tarr@saiea.com](mailto:peter.tarr@saiea.com) ASAP, not later than 15 July please!

Regards

Peter Tarr

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Windhoek