
LETS Community NEWS © 2006

LETS Conference 2006 New Plymouth – Special Edition

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(photo: D. Robbie)

New Zealand LETS Conference 2006

Camp Vertical Horizons 7 to 9 April 2006 Everett Park

Thirty members of 12 LETS groups attended the 13th Conference of New Zealand LETS systems. The emphasis of this Conference was on creating sustainable communities by developing financial and environmentally sustainable trading systems.

Friday evening saw presentations by LETS/ Green Dollar systems of planning and resourcing steps taken in the past 12 months. New types of community interaction are being developed to meet changing needs. In particular, liaison with community groups dealing with climate change, Peak Oil and complementary monetary systems.

The Conference was open to the public on Saturday and 40 Conference attendees and members of the public were present. Invited speakers were Eileen Gill, Hon. Harry Duynhoven, Stanley Sands and Grifen Hope. A range of issues was talked about, like how to do funding applications, peak oil and how a positive future could look like.

Deidre Kent, author of Healthy Money, Healthy Planet, and member of Living Economies, presented a well received outline of how money is issued into circulation as Interest bearing Debit by the Banks and the disastrous effect this is having on human populations and money distribution world wide.

Stuart Bramhall outlined how the Green Party is working to develop strong rail and public transport systems, supporting low energy farming and developing

renewable energy resources.

Saturday morning was Market Day and 18 Stall holders displayed their skills and goods for the public and the Conference members to exchange.

Bryan Duxfield

A full conference report is available from Bryan. Request it by mail from bdux@xtra.co.nz.

LETS Connect AGM

On Sunday morning 9 April the yearly AGM of LETS Connect was held. Of twelve members, ten were present and one voted by proxy. The committee for 2006-07 received following mandates from the membership:

- Role of LETS Connect: The new constitution as proposed by the outgoing committee was adopted. That means that the role of LETS Connect has changed from being an inter-trading mechanism only to being an 'Association of New Zealand LETS'. The new constitution gives LETS Connect the option to be active in several fields.
- National Exchange: The committee has the mandate to set up a sub-committee who will set up a national

In this issue:

New Zealand LETS Conference 2006.....	1
LETS Connect AGM.....	1
Taranaki News.....	2
“HANDS”-on Autumn Market.....	2
Something to think about.....	3
New Zealand LETS and the Community Exchange System (CES) – Part 1.....	3
Inter-trading Balances.....	4

exchange, covering all areas in NZ that do not have a local group operating already.

- Inter-Trading Convention: The new committee will work out an Inter-Trading convention to clarify the rights and responsibilities of all the exchanges that participate in trading with each other.
- New Charity Commission: The committee will investigate the possibility of registering as an umbrella organisation and save individual exchanges any bureaucratic troubles.

Following people have been elected to the new committee:

- Bryan Duxfield, Taranaki, chair
- Christoph Hensch, Christchurch, treasurer
- Ron Sharp, Motueka, secretary
- Neville Miller, Blenheim
- Dave Robbie, Invercargil
- Hayden McGrail, Masterton
- Jan Machin, Wellington

As per recommendation of the outgoing treasurer, the yearly sub will stay at \$40.

Christoph Hensch

Taranaki News

The conference is over and I think went well considering the few folk that organized and ran it. We could have done with more members participating, but everyone seems to be busy doing their own thing like earning a living. Thanks to all of you from other systems that gave a hand. A very full report has been done by Bryan and is available to everyone. Just let me know if you want a copy.

Taranaki LETS is rebranding and hopes to go ahead in leaps and bounds. We still need heaps more members with new motivation, skills and ideas. Our next market is 6th May. Also doing a mayday display for promotion.

Promotion is the only way forward, I believe and we need to be doing heaps to get the skills within our system to really make it work for everyone. At the moment we have members who can not spend their credits. This makes these members unhappy with the system!! But if this is always going to be the problem, how are we going to attract new motivated members who may end up in the same situation???

Anne Dixon, co-ordinator Taranaki LETS

“HANDS”-on Autumn Market

Our regular quarterly market was held in late March in the spacious orchard of a local backpackers that is run by H.A.N.D.S. members. As always, food stalls and live

music were organised in advance, to keep marketgoers happy. Our policy is that stallholders pay no quarterly fee.

This was our first "HANDS-on" market, where members had the opportunity to "give a go" to some of the many skills of our members—browsing the H.A.N.D.S. directory reveals limitless possibilities, for example, art, crafts, music, photography, dance, movement, qi gong, feng shui, aromatherapy, permaculture, pest control. Our HANDy messenger organised a schedule of three workshops, half an hour to an hour in length, throughout the market, free to HANDS members, with only one happening at any one time. Members who gave workshops were paid by the committee in HANDS (negotiated). The workshops were "Make a hypatufa pot," "Intro to reflexology," and "Vocal exploration."

In addition to informing our members through our newsletter and email updates, we advertised the market and workshops to the general public. Non-members who participated in a workshop bought HANDS Exchange Vouchers and paid workshop leaders in HANDS; that was in addition to the HANDS paid by the committee to workshop leaders. And the public did come! About half the participants in each workshop were non-members. Other members are keen to offer workshops at future markets.

In keeping with the HANDS-on theme, we also asked that as many members as possible offer consultations, sessions, etc, (such as health therapies, energy work, dream interpretation, haircuts) for HANDS at their own stalls. Gazebo space was available for members' use.

Also featured at this market was our second "charitable raffle." A member donated a valuable prize and members nominated other members to have some work done, paid for with the HANDS raised from sale of raffle tickets at 2H each. 90H were raised, a nominated member was randomly chosen, and the HANDy messenger will organise the work to be done.

Joanna Piekarski



Something to think about

The Conference earlier this month went off with a minimum of hitches and Taranaki Group are to be congratulated on their efforts.

One trend that concerned me was the proliferation of Speakers. I agree that Peak Oil is a big issue, however I question it's place at a LETS Conference and to be followed by two political speakers was in my opinion out of order. Harry Duynhoven appears to be a dedicated person and well versed in his subject, but this lead to a large number of questions being asked from the floor afterwards, some genuine and some apparently designed to trip him up, all of which he ably answered but resulted in the program running very late.

Given that there were two political speakers I feel that to obtain real balance all other political parties should have been given the opportunity to have their say, (clearly not practical in the time available) otherwise the impression left is that LETS Conferences are leaning towards favouring the Green Party.

The unwritten rule for any LETS system should be that Politics or Religion are not discussed. It must be remembered that we are promoting our systems to everyone from a wide range of backgrounds and all should be welcome regardless of their politics or creed, to appear to be favouring one or any political party is unwise. Also we are moving away from using the term "Green Dollars" because of the erroneous perception some people had that we are connected to the Green Party.

Organisers of future events should endeavour to obtain speakers who have a knowledge or understanding of events which are relevant to LETS groups and their members and will inform and educate where possible.

I think the talk on funding and the problems involved was excellent, although it did leave a negative note, perhaps it should have been followed with a talk on successful fund raising. This would have been much more useful than what did follow.

*Jim McCaughan
TATS Administrator*



*Conference: Stanley Sands talking about peak oil.
(Photo: C. Hensch)*



*Conference: Rich offerings at the market!
(Photo: C. Hensch)*

New Zealand LETS and the Community Exchange System (CES) – Part 1

This document by Tim Jenkin of CES and SANE was originally intended to be presented at the conference. It will now instead be published in several parts in the 'News'.

There are now 13 New Zealand LETS exchanges using the CES system, which hopefully represents a new era for LETS in New Zealand. For the first time any member of any exchange can trade directly and transparently with any member of other exchanges, not only in New Zealand but worldwide.

This is a giant leap for LETS, as traditionally LETS exchanges have been self-contained trading communities. While there have been attempts to provide inter-trading through national bodies such as LETS Connect, these have been somewhat cumbersome and have required a separate, second-level LETS mechanism where the 'members' are the different subscribing exchanges.

Globally LETS has been in decline for the past five years. There are a number of reasons for this:

(1) No single group ever reached "critical mass" where it became sustainable and where growth continued exponentially or even linearly. Many groups saw rapid growth initially, but then plateaued out and declined. New members would join with enthusiasm but after a while lose interest for the reasons given below.

(2) LETS groups remain inconvenient vehicles for trading. Usually it is easier to pop in to the local supermarket than drive all over town to pick up ones requirements. While there have been attempts to set up LETS shops, it is difficult to keep these filled with interesting stock.

(3) LETS exchanges never grow beyond a certain size because they are managed by a single administrator who is responsible for recording membership information, e.g. account details, offers, wants and transaction data. Usually this is performed on a single, centralised computer. This means that the maximum size of an exchange is limited to what a single administrator can handle. Administrators often find the tasks burdensome and unfulfilling, resulting in a loss of enthusiasm.

(4) Most LETS groups rely on traditional forms of communication and do not embrace modern technologies. Offerings and wants directories are printed on paper and distributed by post. This, apart from making them out of date by the time members receive them, is a costly and time consuming exercise that requires a supply of the national currency for consumables and postage. The same with statements of account and other communications.

(5) LETS as a body is not ideologically motivated. Each group was set up for its own reasons though in most cases these were to have fun, build community, get to know their neighbours, save a bit of money by trading 'without money' and so on. LETS does not talk with a single voice and cannot be described as a movement heading in any particular direction.

(6) The value of most offerings is small. No one offers anything of real value because they can see there is no way of recouping that value.

(7) The range of offerings is limited. Most offerings are of a service nature, rather than goods. One can only have so many massages before it becomes boring!

(8) Most service offerings are of the "mind, body & spirit" category rather than really useful services such as electricians, plumbers, builders, mechanics, dentists, doctors etc.

(9) LETS groups do not operate in real time. Transactions are recorded on paper cheques and these are given to the administrator, who enters them into the system monthly or sometimes more frequently. Statements of account are posted to members monthly or quarterly. Thus the real state of play is never known. Similarly, offerings and wants are forwarded to the administrator and they get published periodically in paper directories. Thus many offerings and wants are out of date by the time that others get to know about them. There is no way of members letting others know of their immediate offers and wants.

(10) Life in the LETS lane is slow. Because LETS does not operate in real time there are only irregular reminders of what is happening in the LETS world. In our modern, fast-paced world LETS has taken a definite back seat and

always has the feeling of something unimportant and secondary.

(11) While there have been attempts to allow inter-group trading, the process is clumsy and operates as an 'add on' rather than being integrated with the system.

(12) LETS groups operate as clubs or associations. This results in exclusivity and reinforces the feeling of belonging to something closed and alternative. Each group has its own constitution and set of rules. The fact that there are so many different groups that present themselves in different ways attests to the assertion that each one is jealous of its independence and uniqueness.

(13) As clubs LETS groups have members who have to pay national money to belong to them, because the club has costs to service them. This reinforces the feeling that complementary currencies are secondary and dependent on 'real money' for their functioning.

(14) There is a tendency to think small, cute and cosy. Many writings about LETS suggest an optimum size for a group to be less than 200 people. After that it is said to become unwieldy and impersonal.

(15) There is a tendency to think inwardly, about creating a community spirit in the local area, not about how to spread LETS everywhere.

(.. to be continued next month: What is CES?)

Tim Jenkin, CES



Conference: Market stalls. (Photo D. Robbie)

Inter-trading Balances

As LETS Connect is not involved in enabling inter-trading anymore, we cannot publish the balances as previously. We are working on a solution to this issue to make this information available again in the future.