

# Report on the AMSA 6<sup>th</sup> National Conference

## Newcastle, New South Wales

17 – 20 October 2015

Prepared by Ray Hall – Chairman MENZSHED NZ

I was fortunate to be able to attend the 6<sup>th</sup> national conference of the Australian Men's Shed Association (AMSA) with funding provided by a grant from the Lottery Minister's Discretionary Fund.

The conference was attended by sheddies from all states of Australia and a small delegation from Ireland and New Zealand. Attending from New Zealand were;

- Neil Bruce from the Hamilton Community Shed,
- Frank Overend from the Kaiapoi MenzShed and
- Ray Hall representing the New Brighton Menzshed and MENZSHED NZ.



*Early morning breakfast at Fort Scratchley, Newcastle*

One of the strengths of men's sheds is how they bring together people of different backgrounds, experiences and skills and get them talking. This was true of the conference participants. No matter what their background and work experience, all were friendly and eager to find out where one is from, the shed size, number of members, activities and issues faced.

## Welcome reception – 17 October

A welcome reception was held in the Newcastle Museum. A long narrow brick lined part of the old railway workshops, it was not the ideal venue for the reception. The combination of a men's shed band playing and poor acoustics made it difficult to hold a conversation unless one moved away into other parts of the museum and the waitresses distributing the food struggled to get down to those at the far end of the building.

## Shed visits – 18 October

The day started with an early morning breakfast at Fort Scratchley where a lucky few got to fire the guns and wake up Newcastle. After that we were whisked away for a visit to some sheds.

From the many conversations during the conference, one learns that sheds in Australia can be large in size, can have a membership in the 100's and run multiple activity centres with their own management. However they are not all like that and the 2 sheds that I visited were of a medium size by NZ standards.

The [Raymond Terrace Men's Shed](#) occupied a former fire station. As



well as traditional men's shed activities, the shed also hosts music, cooking, computing and fishing groups. Although the shed is in a great location, they are looking to move to a new site and building a larger shed.

The [Salamander Men's Shed](#) occupies space within the Salamander Bay Recycling, a community not for profit organisation. The shed is expected to service repair requests from the recycling depot as part of their occupancy agreement. In return the shed has access to the store of materials being recycled. A well equipped spacious shed with room to expand.

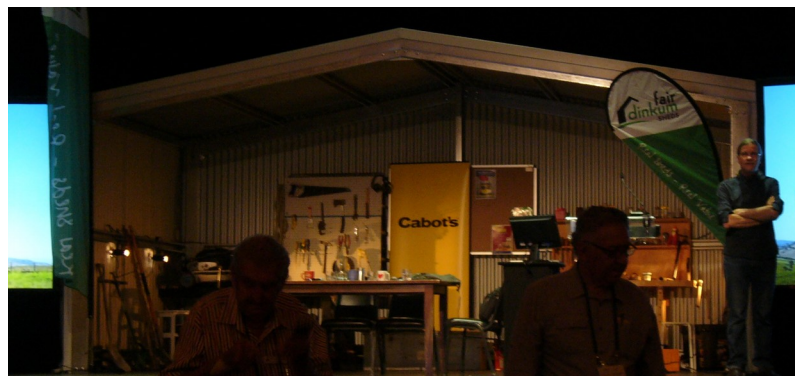
Both of the above sheds are members of the [Men's Sheds - Hunter Cluster Inc.](#), a grouping of 20 sheds around Newcastle:

“Each Member Shed maintains the common vision of sharing information, assisting new communities to develop sheds, sharing of tools and materials, and sharing friendship and companionship with others, thereby taking men’s health issues and awareness to a higher level.”

New Zealand has had the [Canterbury men's shed hub](#) operating since 2009. The Wairarapa sheds have close ties and other groups of sheds have initiated meetings in their areas. MENZSHED NZ is keen to see hubs or clusters expand to cover the country.

### Conference 19 – 20 October

The conference theme was Innovation and [programme delivery](#) was structured in 3 concurrent streams with topics on; Innovations in shed sustainability, Policy and procedures, Innovative health measures and supporting case studies. In addition there were plenary sessions featuring an array of speakers. The schedule limited options to switch between the various presentations so one could not pick the most relevant / interesting topics to attend.



*The FairDinkum shed stage setting at the Civic theatre*

I was only able to attend a quarter of the presentations as a shed leaders session was scheduled for the Tuesday morning. I hope to be able to see the remainder when they are released onto the website as has been done for previous conferences.

<http://www.mensshed.org/home/.aspx>

Health is a major focus for AMSA and health outcomes are used to help secure government funding. The conference schedule reflected that emphasis on health. A recent statement by Prime Minister, Tony Abbott stated “Men’s Sheds are an important part of many Australian communities. They keep men active, contributing to their mental health and physical wellbeing”.

AMSA Executive Office David Helmers was also quoted as saying that the money received from Federal Government was money well spent and “Each shed probably saves around eight lives a year so 7,500 lives a year being saved through shed programs, \$4.5m is extremely good value for money.”

There is an expectation from AMSA that sheds will also commit to that health focus through participation in health related activities throughout the year. A commitment not wholeheartedly supported by some sheds.

In NZ currently sheds do not receive direct government support. That there is not a strong health push from MENZSHED NZ is understandable given it is a voluntary organisation and there is no health related funding imperative. However, there may in future be some opportunities for MENZSHED NZ to promote men's health initiatives to the NZ sheds.

## **Some comments from sessions I attended**

### **Is your shed a house of straw? Barbara Look [Victorian Men's Shed Association](#)**

As sheds develop, they need to ensure that the governance keeps pace with the development. Have a:

- rolling action plan,
- strategic plan and
- a rule book, all elements of good governance and
- don't forget to document the shed history.

Barbara is a member of the Victorian Men's Shed Association. At the state level some associations are run by volunteers, similar to MENZSHED NZ.

### **Men's health and wellbeing: Distress and why health matters. Owen Cato <http://regionalmenshealth.org.au/>**

An overview of a regional men's health initiative, the presentation made some good points as to what can be done to help men in distress and a couple of videos to help get the message across.

- Men facing retirement – loss of identity was the biggest issue [Die, sweet roadrunner, die](#)
- Provide “A safe place for men of all ages”
- Primary care is ordinary people looking after their mates “R U OK Mate”
- “Before it gets all too much, talk to a mate”

Setting up a men's shed in a retirement centre shed. Ted Donnelly [AMSA](#)

The process is no different to setting up an ordinary shed, however they may not end up like a conventional men's shed. They may be just “coffee and chat” sheds.

Socialise first, find out what is wanted, then set up the shed. Do not try to replicate a community shed unless it is going to be open to the community.

### **Getting it right: The AMSA insurance scheme and how it helps sheds and shedders. Sean McDermott Everest risk group**

The AMSA shed insurance scheme is \$25 per annum per shed member. There is no cap but if the scheme is taken up by an AMSA shed, the \$200 membership fee per shed is waived. Covers contents and buildings to \$100,000. Extra premium payable if greater cover required.

This approach to shed insurance was considered during the formation of MENZSHED NZ but rejected in favour of a lump sum shed insurance, premiums for which are based on cover not number of members.

### **All power to you. Graeme Curnow [AMSA](#)**

A mainly [video](#) presentation discussing how being a member of a shed enhances their wellbeing and their lives. Well worth watching. Jointly produced by the [Queensland Men's Shed Association](#) and [Arthritis Queensland](#).

### **Men's shed and dementia: A manual. Stuart Torrance [Alzheimers Australia](#)**

An interactive presentation included the presentation of a manual about the issue of dementia in a shed environment. [The manual is available online](#). See also [“Every bloke needs a shed”](#). The programme aims to



encourage and support men living in the community with early stage dementia to access, participate and enjoy the mateship, camaraderie and activities available in their local Men's Shed.

### **Innovation and the future. [Jeffrey Julian, University of Newcastle](#) and [Craig Rispin, The future trends group](#).**

An interesting journey challenging men's sheds to evolve and innovate to be relevant in the future. See video ["Did you know that in 2028"](#) and check out [Craig Rispin's website](#).

### **Shed leaders meeting. John Peacock, Associations forum Pty. Ltd.**

I attended the first part of this meeting but concluded that the discussion was not so relevant to ourselves in NZ and switched to the presentation stream. One issue that was raised by a delegate was the idea of having one constitution across all AMSA members sheds but that was opposed by other delegates..

### **Conference exhibition**

Parallel to the conference was an exhibition featuring some of the major sponsors such as Cabot's and FairDinkum sheds, equipment suppliers CarbaTec, Chevington Tools, Arbortech, Gregory tools and an assortment of health and government agencies.

The Australian "Work for the Dole" programme had a stall at the exhibition. We had a discussion about the programme and how sheds were involved. They pointed out that it was voluntary, there were checks in place to ensure the scheme was not abused but agreed that it was possible that sheds could feel they were being put under pressure to participate in the programme.

There have been similar approaches made to sheds in NZ to participate in programmes or other activities. It is okay to say no.



*Chevington tools metal bending and riveting demonstration*

### **AMSA and Australian sheds**

There is a hierarchy of sheds in Australia. AMSA, has now over 930 sheds representing an estimated 175,000 individuals and employs 4 full time employees. The Men's Shed concept was an Australian initiative from very humble beginnings; the idea has now spread internationally with a number of sheds being operated by health authorities in Ireland, England and New Zealand with other interested groups in North American and Japan.

At the state level in Australia, there are voluntary organisations that comply with AMSA by laws and appoint a director to the AMSA board.

It was interesting to see that at a local level there are clusters of sheds (see [Hunter Valley Cluster](#)). In NZ, a men's shed hub has been operating in Canterbury since 2008 and more recently the sheds in the Wairarapa are working together with a common membership. This is a natural evolution and one that MENZSHED NZ will encourage more widely in NZ.

Not all Australian sheds are members of AMSA. There are a number of reasons for that, but a key effect is that they are omitted from the AMSA "Find a shed" facility. Although understandable, both Ireland and NZ national organisations take a different approach and include all sheds irrespective of their membership status.

There was a lot of discussion about building larger sheds, increasing the range of activities, management committees etc. But for me, one comment provided a reality check, "Build men not sheds".

### **Other links from the conference**

[The Shed Online](#), [Beyond Blue](#), [Spanner in the works? When was your last service booklet](#)

and from the exhibitors; [Arbortech woodworking tools](#), [SawStop tablesaw](#), [Chevington tools](#), [Cabots](#), [FairDinkum](#)

### **Actions arising from the conference**

1. Shed clusters or hubs in NZ  
MENZSHED NZ will encourage more widely the establishment of clusters or hubs of sheds in NZ to promote greater communication and sharing of knowledge, skills and activities.
2. International contacts  
The contacts established at the conference with the Irish and Australian associations will be continued with a proposal to establish a social platform where information can be posted and shared.
3. MENZSHED NZ Conference 15 – 17 April 2016  
Ensure that the NZ conference reflects the aspects of the AMSA conference that worked well.
4. Contact the primary health agencies associated with men's health to see if MENZSHED NZ can increase the reach of campaigns through promotion to NZ men's sheds. Note the tools already available in Australia specifically developed for men's sheds.