

Advance Party Conference

by Phil Stewart, *Deer Industry News* Editor

Eighty-three Advance Party (AP) members, facilitators, staff and industry representatives gathered at the Brentwood Hotel in Kilbirnie, Wellington on 25 May for the third annual Advance Party Conference, held this year back-to-back with the Deer Industry Conference.

THE CONFERENCE INCLUDED

55 farmers plus 15 facilitators, including 33 AP members attending their first conference, with a great turnout from Waipa and the new Tasman/Marlborough groups.

The format was similar to the highly successful formula used at the Methven conference last year, with participants moving around a series of four structured sessions involving six workshops in each. These were interspersed with presentations by individual APs on their projects.

“I was very pleased with the AP conference,” says DINZ P2P Manager, Innes Moffat. “We knew the split-day format in Methven last year had worked very well, so we were a bit unsure how a single day in Wellington would go (and not just because of the wind).

“In the end, we easily exceeded our target of 50 AP members. It was really valuable for the facilitators to attend because they get to listen to what farmers are talking about and what is affecting them day to day, so it’s a valuable learning experience for them too.

“Everybody had indicated what workshop topics they wanted to be involved in, and I think we got that mostly right.”

Moffat says the most popular topics were hill country development, weaner growth, weaner health and genetics. Groups also discussed nutrition requirements for lactating hinds, velvet stags and R2 hinds.

“We want to make sure these days continue to evolve and next year we will place more emphasis on sharing results and analysing the impact of some of the suggestions in some sessions, but we also want to respond to what AP members want to discuss.”

Fourteen Advance Parties made presentations on their activities, as follows.

Otago: Sean and Cassie Becker talked about extending irrigation and dealing with issues such as Johne’s disease, parasite control and good utilisation of resources in a dry area.

Southland Elk/Wapiti: Jim Cameron described the results of an on-farm trial to test the impact of leptospirosis vaccination on reproductive performance and liveweights (see page 16 for a full report).

North Canterbury: Annette Marr talked about the role of the



Flying high: DINZ Board member and proud Hawke’s Bay deer farmer, Ian Walker (left), presents the award for best presentation to Geoff Smith (Hawke’s Bay Fast Finishers) for his presentation on using a drone as a management tool.

Advance Party in farmers learning from each other and improving performance through the spread of new ideas.

Waipa: Hamish Clarke described a project on the farm he manages implementing a “spray and pray” programme on 6 hectares of poor hill country, done with the support and advice of his Advance party colleagues (see page 16–17 for a full report).

Hawke’s Bay Fast Finishers: Geoff Smith wowed the audience with aerial footage from the drone that he and wife Caroline use as a management tool on their sheep, beef and deer farm near Te Pohue. (Available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JEKCDRcqTr8>, or search on Hawkes Bay Fast Finishers Drones for Deer. See also page 31 of this issue.)

Hawkes Bay Originals: Karen Middelberg talked about the group’s plans to deal with drought and, in a moving tribute, described the “ideal AP member”, epitomised by the late and much missed John Spiers.

Central Regions: Pania Flint discussed a trial using fodder beet on Advance Party member Fraser Laird’s farm, where grazing in situ was compared with grazing lifted bulbs.

Tasman/Marlborough: Urthe Engel described two projects by members. Geoff and Nic Hayes came up with a plan to help foil stags that had been damaging fenceposts, while Tim and Julie Robilliard reconfigured lane and holding paddock design to make deer easier to move and manage.

Mackenzie: Hamish Mackenzie talked over a project designed to improve hind performance by more consistent weighing and monitoring, better feeding during lactation, as well as by introducing superior maternal genetics.

Southland Breeding and Finishing: Bruce Allan described what members were doing to get more fawns on the ground and better growth through improved feeding in winter, especially with fodder beet.

South Canterbury/North Otago: Tom Macfarlane worked with his Advance Party colleagues to analyse the benefits of breeding and finishing versus finishing only, finding that the numbers stacked up well for breeding and finishing.

Wairarapa: Quentin Connell said his group was still developing ideas but had learned a lot from its more established neighbours in Hawke's Bay, especially regarding winter feed crops. One of the group is the local Taratahi training farm, which has leased a block and is trying to get weaners to grow bigger, faster.

Canterbury: Lorna Humm told the conference about a project to minimise stress and maximise growth in weaners bought-in from breeding properties for finishing. They found that getting all animal health treatments (vaccination and drenching) done before the weaners were moved was a better option.

Gisborne: Andrew Cribb said this is a new group and at their first gathering they identified some of the main production constraints such as hill country fertility, fencing and the impact of wild deer. He said the group gave members the confidence to

tackle these issues, including fence design and dealing with the wild stags.

Some of these presentations are available online if you log into the P2P website at: <http://ap.org.nz/national-workshops/2017-national-advance-party-workshop>

The award for best presentation went to the Hawke's Bay Fast Finishers. ■

- *Deer Industry News* will bring more extensive coverage from the Advance Party conference in following issues.



One of the workshop sessions gets down to business.