



## Guest Editorial

**President, SEAANZ Consulting Editor, SER Brian Gibson & Assisted by PhD Candidate Tanya Jurado**

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# GUEST EDITORIAL

## Celebrating the 25th Anniversary of SEAANZ

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I have been asked to provide a reflection on the evolution of this journal, *Small Enterprise Research* (SER) and its founder, the Small Enterprise Association of Australia and New Zealand (SEAANZ) which this year celebrates the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of its 1987 establishment. While my reflections may be of interest to some people, I feel the broader readership of the journal may be more interested in a wider base of reflections. I am therefore going to provide two elements in this editorial: a summation of my own interpretation of the nature of the content of the journal since its inception; and, a summation of the reflections of a group of former presidents presented at the ICSB Conference in Wellington in June 2012.

### **SMALL ENTERPRISE RESEARCH**

The journal of course is not as old as SEAANZ, having been only first published in 1992. The driving force behind the foundation of the journal was a group of academics within SEAANZ that included its first editor, Scott Holmes from Newcastle, the initial associate editors, Gary Tibbits from Wollongong and Claudio Romano from Monash, and subsequent early edition editors Richard McMahon from Flinders and Patrick Hutchinson from New England. Since its inception, the editors and associate editors have

included (often for extended and repeat periods) in addition to those mentioned above, myself, Claire Massey, John Watson, Delwyn Clark, Stuart Locke, Tim Mazzarol, Victoria Wise, Kate Lewis and Beth Walker.

Including volume 18 issue 2, there have been 263 items published in SER. Of these items some were special editorials (regular and guest) or book reviews. Excluding these special items leaves 222 research focused papers that have covered a diverse range of topics. Using a very crude classification (relying on my interpretation from article titles that forced each title into one and only one category) the main areas of study have been:

Accounting, finance and tax	43
Business performance (including failure and growth)	38
Education and policy focus	26
Individual and sub group (such as family and Indigenous) characteristics	37
Macroeconomic analysis	24
Marketing and franchising	18
Other management activities	36

While, as expected, many of the editorial team have been supporters of the journal through their own submissions, the journal has

also been a publication outlet for a large number of other authors. While it is not appropriate in this editorial to assess the individual quality of published papers, it is worth noting that included in the author list are many leading names in the Australasian small business and entrepreneurship research domain as well as the names of many who have made their publication debut in the journal. In addition there have been many authors based in other countries of the world.

Such diversity in content and authorship is of course consistent with the objectives of both SEAANZ and SER to advance the understanding of small enterprise, in all of its facets, by, amongst other means, furthering the development of scholarship, education research and practice. In the journal, we have built a considerable body of knowledge relevant to the Australasian and international SME and entrepreneurship research environment and we are delighted that the journal's contents are available to current researchers through the full digitisation of all past volumes by our publishing partner.

## SEAANZ

As I promised earlier I would like to share a wider base of reflections on the first 25 years of SEAANZ. At the ICSB 2012 World Conference held in Wellington in June, we gathered several former presidents for a workshop discussion of notable events in the history of SEAANZ. I would like to thank Tanya Jurado, a Massey University PhD student, for taking the notes that have enabled me to present these reflections.

The initial reflections came from the very first president of SEAANZ, Geoff Meredith (President 1987–89), who described how he coordinated the first ever meeting to setup the group that eventually became SEAANZ, back in the late 1980s. This group of around 50 (that included three others who were present in Wellington), meeting for a weekend at Sydney University, came up with the vision that contin-

ues today in the form of the four pillars, to not only be a group of academics, but to also seek out business advisors, small business owners and government. ICSB membership was a possibility but not a critical element in that discussion – the focus was very much on an Australasian association to achieve the aim of bringing together professionals in practice, education and training to promote the communication and dissemination of research, ideas and information.

Following Geoff, John Breen (President 1997–99) recalled his time as committee member in the early 1990s as a time when SEAANZ was extremely active reaching a membership of over 300. He focused on the political environment in which SEAANZ operates and singled out the fact that the first Minister for Small Business in Australia was appointed at this time. Since then 13 more have been appointed and more recently, the portfolio has been included in cabinet. The impact of these appointments on small business was dependent on the degree of personal involvement that the minister in question had for small business although there had been cases of ministers taking up the portfolio with no significant prior knowledge about the sector who then went on to actively represent the interests of small businesses. Since the early 1990s politicians mention small business all the time as part of day to day political rhetoric, but this has not always been reflected in the policy that was developed.

Colin Dunn (President 2002–04) who as well as being a former president served as treasurer, chose to focus on the continued importance of the four pillars from our inception and to emphasise the future potential of continuing to prioritise those pillars to reflect shifts in the membership base. He also reflected on the shifts in the surrounding environment that have seen the membership vary over time and a desire to see more young members get involved.

Following a similar direction, Michael Schaper (President 2004–06) commented on the importance of remembering how SEAANZ had come about, and acknowledging the work that went into its beginnings until now. He focused on the challenges SEAANZ has had throughout its history in operating as a voluntary member organisation, which he feels has been exacerbated by the limited interest in small business issues in general academia.

Claire Massey (President 2006–07) commented that she first attended a SEAANZ conference in 1994 and was struck by the dynamic environment she encountered where participants were committed to have an impact on small business. She also commented on the changing environment in which SEAANZ has survived. She specifically noted that technological advances, such as the internet, have taken away from one of SEAANZ's primary roles as a point of information from direct contacts as a lot of that information is now easily accessible on the Web. At the same time the digital environment presents many opportunities to reach other members in different ways.

As current President I took the opportunity to emphasise the dedication of members who step up to committee and other service levels despite the low status/reward (from others) that volunteers receive for long hours of work. I also announced, following the comments about attracting younger members, that the programme of the 2013 SEAANZ conference included topics that were intended to attract early career researchers. The intention is to try and pair them

up to more experienced researchers to encourage mentoring dynamics.

In general discussion, John Bailey (one of those who attended the founding meeting) echoed the comments of others about the changing political environment and SEAANZ's commitment to being an apolitical representative of what became the four pillars.

These reflections provide an insight into the past and future of SEAANZ. The aims and objectives of SEAANZ are still as relevant now as they were 25 years ago. A challenge at the moment is that many users of information generated by SEAANZ activities are not aware of the source of their information and are not encouraged to actively engage with the association. The current leaders of the association continue to take a proactive approach to generating interest in its activities. Updates to the web site and social media interactions as well as focused conferences and continual improvement to the journal are happening. We encourage those who benefit from those activities (such as journal users and conference attendees) to give back to the association through ongoing support and serving on boards and committees. Such a collaborative approach has the potential to see another 25 years of commitment to the aims of the association.

I commend to you all the benefits of being a member of an association that has a 25 year history and an unlimited future.

**Brian Gibson**  
*President, SEAANZ*  
*Consulting Editor, SER*

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