Date: Thu, 18 Jan 90 14:26 +0830
From: Chris.Rusbridge@salt.edu.au
Subject: Text of fax going to John Mullarvey re Regional management
Sender: Chris Rusbridge <CCCAR@salt.edu.au>
To: gih900@CSC.ANU.EDU.AU, rxe900@CSC.ANU.EDU.AU, ccrees@UQVAX.UQ.EDU.AU

Regional Management in the AARNet

As I won't be able to be present at the meeting on 24 January, 1990 at Canberra when the decisions on AARNet management structure recommendations are finalised, I thought I should spend some time putting forward the arguments for more regional management as I understand them.

I summarise the arguments in 4 groups as follows:

a) expectations and credibility

b) commitment and sense of ownership of participants

c) resources and timeliness, and

d) flexibility and responsiveness to local conditions.

To summarise the arguments even more briefly, I and others believe that it will not be impossible to build a network with the currently planned centralist approach. But the result will be less effective, less useful, less used, and will generate more ill-will than the regional model. The comparisons are the success of the US Internet, and the thinly disguised contempt in which the UK's JNT is held by many users.

At the end I have a proposal for a move towards more regional management in 1991, starting with immediate devolution of regional management in Queensland for a trial period.

1) Expectations and credibility

Right from the start of the current AARNet models, at the 1988 Networkshop in Sydney, the regional model was seen as the only practical solution. Time and again in progress reports, Geoff re-stated and re-inforced this idea, which was accepted by the Steering Committee and by the AV-CC. I have quotes later from the progress report which Geoff published as recently as September, 1989, re-stating this commitment (see attachment A).

It therefore came as a major shock to most people when Geoff and Robin had to stand up at the Adelaide Networkshop, and propose the current model. I saw absolutely no sign of support for the idea at the Networkshop. (see attachments B to E). I sympathise with Geoff and Robin in having to propose something with which they may well not have been happy; the result, however, came across to most people there as rigidity and inflexibility. This seriously damaged their credibility at a quite crucial time. The qualities of rigidity and inflexibility are the classic fears that people have of centralised bureaucracies, and it is a serious problem that these qualities were manifest at the moment of announcement.

It is going to be difficult for the centralised model to recover from this disastrous start. Geoff's credibility, in particular, is absolutely crucial to the success of the network, particularly in the centralised model.

2) Commitment and sense of ownership of participants

Graham Rees argues well for the sense of commitment that a sense of ownership brings (see attachment B). The centralist model brings a feeling of alienation, and the expectation that "they" will solve all the problems. The regional model brings the realisation that we have to solve them. This was very apparent at the Networkshop; Hans Ericsson tried hard to persuade us that "they" could not do everything, but it was clear that most people saw problems without regional management to give focus to the co-operative effort that is required.

The result of these expectations are that either the central resource needs to be built up to meet them, or they are not met, and quality and use do not grow as expected.