Organisational Learning and the NGO:

A preliminary case study of the Refugee Action Collective Queensland-Brisbane

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**For Environmental Advocacy assessment provisions
and for RAC Qld**

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1.0   Introduction

> *The majority of NGOs are engaged in campaigns for fundamental change at all levels in society, employing all manners of participatory, advocacy and motivational tools to achieve these ends. While NGOs take on this responsibility to promote a world order rooted in personal and collective growth, development and participation, the experience of this by those who work within NGOs can often be very different.*
>
> *(O'Malley & O'Donoghue,* http://www.bond.org.uk/lte/lngo.htm)

Since the Woomera Detention Centre protest action of 2002, the mass convergence tactic has become an important tool of the refugee advocacy movement in drawing attention to the plight of refugees suffering under Australia's mandatory detention policy. Initially intended as a "Festival of Freedom" to expose concerned people to the physical reality of remote detention, over the past three years these convergences have had to adapt to the changing tactics adopted by the state in its defense of the mandatory detention policy.

From Woomera 2002 to Baxter 2005, members of the Refugee Action Collective's Queensland-Brisbane division, hereafter referred to as RACQB, have remained involved in the organising, conduct and analysis of these events. This paper seeks to understand the processes adopted by RACQB to manage organisation of and participation in these events by their members and to place these processes within an Organisational Learning framework so as to determine the effectiveness, from an organisational perspective, of RACQB involvement.

Generally, the role of NGOs like RACQB is to engage in campaign building toward creating conditions for fundamental change. The management of these organisations is usually, if not in action at least in theory, to build upon a platform of inclusionary practices that are designed to empower participants and those affected by the particular issue. However, the application of these tools to the management of NGOs themselves is often overlooked in preference for undertaking much-needed action. As such, the development of this paper arises in response to the apparent difficulty many NGOs have in maintaining effectiveness over time and, more specifically, in realising their goals concerning the creation of effective, open, evolutionary organisations that are able to stand as examples of preferred models for shared activity.

This paper is concerned with mass convergence as a protest tool employed for refugee advocacy, and, in particular, RACQB's role in the organising, conduct and subsequent analysis of these events. In constructing this paper I am primarily interested in providing constructive analysis of how organisations such as RACQB can more efficiently utilise already stretched resources to provide a more substantial long term basis for advocacy work.

The outcomes of this preliminary analysis can be found in Section 7.0 *Recommendations* and Section 8.0 *Conclusions.*

2.0 Thanks to…

Thanks to the following people who have provided assistance in developing this paper:

- Gillian Marshall – for providing information and advice and for attending meetings to discuss involvement with RACQB and with mass convergences;
- Bronwen Lloyd – for meeting with me to discuss her involvement with RACQB and with mass convergences;
- Greg Brown – for guidance on persons within RACQB able to help and for brief discussions regarding the topic;
- Michael Engstrom – for insight relating to his experience with mass convergence;
- RAC Queensland-Brisbane – for their website and information supplied for this paper;
- Derec – for his assistance with the developing the scope of the paper; and
- James Whelan – for providing some information sources and for his general support throughout the process.

Disclaimer:

This research paper has been developed to better understand the organisational capabilities of RAC Qld to undertake mass convergence actions. The use of an Organisational Learning approach is intended to provide tools for the organisation to build it's knowledge base and therefore become more efficient in action. However, due to insufficient time spent with RAC Qld members this paper does not define this organisational development process within a clear context of the overall effectiveness of mass convergence as a protest tactic in recent years.

For this reason, this paper remains in draft stage and may be further developed by the author in collaboration with those interested in assisting. Further, this information is available for use and extension upon by contacting the author, Steph Walton at beatdadrum@optusnet.com.au.

3.0   An overview of RACQB and refugee mass convergence

> *RAC works for the achievement of a humane refugee and asylum seeker policy in Australia.*

> RAC Queensland-Brisbane, http://www.rac-qld.org/content.asp?s_id=1)

RACQB is an open collective of volunteers who advocate justice for refugees and asylum seekers and reform of Australia's immigration policies. The collective is managed by a volunteer Convenor who coordinates core activity areas, including media, fundraising, volunteers, publications, merchandise and administration, and campaign management, such as convergences and forced deportations. Each of these areas is managed by a volunteer Coordinator. (RACQB, http://www.rac-qld.org/content.asp?s_id=1). Please refer to **Appendix B** for a schematic representation of RACQB's internal composition and external relationships.

RACQB meetings have traditionally been held on a weekly basis but have recently been changed to be held fortnightly. These meetings are open to existing collective members and potential members interested in organising activity in support of the group's Purpose Statement:

> *To uphold the right of asylum in Australia and to inform and mobilise people to challenge current government policy and legislation which adds to the suffering of refugees and asylum seekers." (RACQB, http://www.rac-qld.org/content.asp?s_id=1)*

RACQB's activities range from organising and promoting speaking events and public seminars to film screenings, dispersal of information through stalls and events and participation in World Refugee Day activities. Volunteers are encouraged to become involved in campaign building or to undertake personal actions such as letter writing and promotions.

Members of RACQB network with a range of other refugee advocacy groups, including other RAC chapters located in other states of Australia. Networking and lobbying occurs between RACQB and all levels of government and with both mainstream and alternative media. RACQB is engaged in awareness raising activities with the general public and is an advocate for freedom for asylum seekers and, while they are in detention, for more humane detention policy and living conditions.

Members of the RACQB collective have been heavily involved in organising publicity and information dispersal in the interests of recruiting people for the three refugee advocacy convergences that have taken place since 2002. A different coordinator has managed RACQB's involvement for each convergence, basically working in a sub-collective format and reporting back to other members through regular meetings.

Information has been shared through the RACQB website and since 2003 through the *Baxter Watch* and *Brisbane to Woomera* websites and discussion groups and has allowed coordinators to organise essential logistics such as transport and food. The RACQB coordinator also communicates with organisers in other regions of the country regarding more macro organisational requirements such as expected numbers, potential camping locations, toilet and water facilities and arrival times.

Prior to both of the Baxter convergences, members of RACQB have been involved in the organisation and conduct of pre-convergence training events, aimed at providing an understanding of what to expect for inexperienced activists and opportunities for all to develop specific skills in Non Violent Direct Action (NVDA) techniques and tactics. These training exercises also allowed some discussion of decision-making processes and coordination.

RACQB have also been involved in organising post-convergence debriefing sessions for the past two events with around 40 people attending the Baxter 2005 debrief this year.

4.0   Why an Organisational Learning approach?

In our 'post-modern' society there is a growing debate that sees knowledge and learning as the new power bases of the information age - they are what build and sustain competitive advantage and survival in the global arena. In this light knowledge and learning become tools for widening the gap between the haves and the have-nots. Maintaining the power and effectiveness of NGOs and the empowerment of their target groups will depend on their capacity to learn and to change in the light of what they learn

(O'Malley & O'Donoghue, http://www.bond.org.uk/lte/lngo.htm)

Organisational learning is an approach that attempts to harness collective learning as a means of adjusting organisational behaviour to best suit the particular goals and environment that exist. In this context it is important to note that collective learning cannot occur without individual learning, though the reverse is not true. It is this issue, where knowledge is accumulated and then leaves the organisation as people move on, which plagues the effectiveness of many volunteer-based NGOs. A key element of organisational learning is the design of systems that are able to capture the value of individual people and their perspectives while simultaneously collating and organising hard data.

Becoming an organisation with an inherent learning approach requires balancing reflection on work both in progress and completed with an understanding of the environment being operated within and the range of future options available and their implications. "Learning is about both gaining new knowledge from external sources and also learning from our own experience in order to develop best practice. " (British Overseas NGOs for Development, http://www.bond.org.uk/aboutus/index.html).

Incorporating learning into the everyday management of an NGO such as RACQB requires somewhat of a rethink of the value of time. Activists with limited time can benefit greatly from having easy access to the perspective of those who have undertaken similar tasks or had ideas that could not be developed at the time but were recorded for when resources might be available.

The extent of potential efficiency gains in the future depend on time investments in the present. Dedicating time for reflection and discussion, recording and cataloguing creates future capacity for the organisation by providing tools for managing transience. Reliance on volunteer labour requires a form of organisational management that can cope with often unforeseen changes to the group's management foundation. Adopting a learning approach, where experiences, ideas, techniques and processes are documented, discussed and

developed can provide mechanisms to create such a management structure and knowledge basis.

Bruce Britton in his reader *Learning for Change: Principles and practices of learning organisations* (2002) describes learning organisations as being able to:

- "Recognise the need for change;
- Provide continuous learning opportunities to its members;
- Explicitly use learning to reach its goals;
- Encourage inquiry and dialogue, making it safe for people to share openly and take risks;
- Embrace creative tension as a source of energy and renewal; and
- Be continuously aware of and interact with its environment."

(http://www.bond.org.uk/pubs/lte/learningforchange.pdf)

Knowledge management is the process by which knowledge required by an organisation is found, analysed, shared, stored, retrieved and used and represents a key element in creating a learning organisation (Britton, http://www.intrac.org/pages/PraxisPaper3.html). Where **Organisational Learning** approaches focus on the intrinsic *value* of all forms of knowledge and the characteristics of the people involved in the production or sharing of this, Knowledge Management is concerned primarily with systems to *manage* data including data storage and accessibility issues.

Organisational Learning systems empower people to make quicker, more informed decisions based on analysis of past occurrences and a sharing and documenting of perspectives. These systems create an accessible and comprehensive knowledge management system that is coupled with a reflection in practice approach to ensure that information resources are constantly revised and built upon. An accessible knowledge bank also empowers members of volunteer-managed organisations to freely access and contribute to this information and can help in orienting and empowering new members and developing awareness of organisational history and structure.

The Planning Cycle (see Figure 1) provides a simple model of the Organisational Learning approach and is useful in reminding organisations that there is value in adopting a cyclic approach to knowledge development. This model is can be used as a basic guide to any organisational activity and builds capacity by prescribing reflection on action and the recording of outcomes so that future action can benefit from past experiences. As the model shows, reflection becomes learning is then incorporated into future planning (Coopey and Burgoyne, http://www.mngt.waikato.ac.nz/research/ejrot/cmsconference/2005/proceedings/strategy/Coopey.pdf**).**
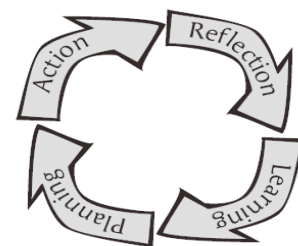

Figure 1: The Planning Cycle *(Source: Coopey and Burgoyne, 2005)*

According to Hyvarinen and Wall (http://www.gdrc.org/ngo/global-ngos.html) an important feature of learning organisations is that they are organised so that learning occurs at five levels. This can be applied to RACQB in the following manner:

1. **Individual learning –** learning that participants experience through involvement in campaign and organisational development.

2. **Team or work group learning** *(sharing lessons between individuals working together in permanent work groups or temporary teams)* **–** participation in sub-collective or

    main collective meetings and project work yields discussion regarding practices and outcomes that is recorded and used to augment future planning and action.

3. **Cross functional learning** *(sharing lessons between departments or sections e.g. between fundraising and operational staff)* **–** meetings occur between coordinators of different areas. This allows the opportunity to streamline organisational processes and the development of knowledge management systems.

4. **Operational organisational learning** *(focusing on improving practice, increasing effectiveness and efficiency)* **–** strategic meetings occur whose objective it is to assess organisational practices toward improving effectiveness and efficiency in event planning and management, volunteer coordination, publicity and networking, capacity development of participants and organisational learning and knowledge management.

5. **Strategic organisational learning** *(learning to deal with significant changes in the environment which affect the overall strategy of the organisation)* **–** scenario planning occurs within the organisation so that it is equipped to deal with a number of potential environment and organisational changes that may occur.

Designing management systems that can satisfy these learning streams requires in depth understanding of the organisation's goals, resources and timeframes toward designing a system best able to cope with change and transience.

In terms of mass convergence, and more specifically RACQB's role in the organising, conduct and analysis of these events, an organisational learning approach can provide real opportunities to build effectiveness and participation. In summary, learning systems designed to maximise participants' opportunities for reflection and discussion, and for these outcomes to be incorporated into knowledge management systems, can provide value for organisations that suffer transient membership and a heavy workload shared by few.

5.0 RACQB's management of mass convergence activity: 2002 to 2005

As with most small-scale, unfunded NGOs, RACQB experiences some difficulties with managing information and coordinating activity. This is not to say that the organisation is ineffective in responding to the needs of asylum seekers in detention in Australia, more that the process of managing information and change while conducting activity and raising awareness is difficult to coordinate where volunteer labour and donated funds are the prime resources. Activists exposed to what is obviously the need for urgent assistance to alleviate the severe conditions under which asylum seekers suffer naturally prioritise direct action as a means of immediately addressing the situation. The lack of organisational management is exacerbated by the small number of people willing to participate in volunteer activity (relative to the Brisbane population) and the level of transience experienced within most community activism of this form.

Under these conditions, it is not surprising that local NGOs, such as RACQB, are stuck in a "transient, day-to-day, success-to-success, failure-to-failure" paradigm (Interview with RACQB members, 14 July, 2005). To organisations in this position the resources required to move to a structure that can effectively manage the reality of its membership, information, funding and workload can seem out of reach.

The following section provides a brief outline of key areas where adopting an Organisational Learning and Knowledge Management approach may provide further capacity to RACQB to provide advocacy support for asylum seekers.

- **Training**

Training is an integral aspect of organisational and individual development. In relation to mass convergence, RACQB is involved in training for NVDA, meeting and communication management and the management of affinity groups. The training process could be made more effective through the development of:

- NVDA knowledge banks regarding tactics and techniques, contacts for other organisations undertaking research or activity in this area and the production of training materials to build individual capacity.
- Networking with organisations who conduct research or activity around techniques or tactics associated with mass convergence, including meeting management (facilitation and recording) and personal involvement (affinity groups and spokescouncil models).
- An RACQB model for meeting and communication management and debriefing that can be shared with participants and developed nationally with other relevant groups and individuals.

- **Orientation of new RACQB members**

Developing knowledge management systems that are accessible and able to manage a wide variety of information types and sources may provide opportunities for new members to become familiar with organisational history, approaches, successes and failures so that more progressive and effective member involvement can occur. This may devolve real or perceived power issues within the organisation and especially for new members who may be alienated by the seemingly cliquey nature of some social change groups.

- **Building momentum and membership for RACQB**

Developing a more extensive focus on learning can enable RACQB to determine more clearly how individuals are able to contribute to the organisation. This occurs through developing systems that provide reflection on activity, thereby giving opportunity to activists to discuss and have recorded their skills and ideas while simultaneously allowing RACQB to share opportunities for involvement and future action. Creating a cycle, where action initiates reflection and lesson-learning, and where this is combined with the outcomes of this process in the form of an accessible expression of options for participation and campaign building, gives RACQB and potential members opportunities to collaborate and refine the advocacy process.

This process can also develop opportunities for ongoing collaboration beyond the activity of mass convergence, where these events are managed as a publicised point of initial contact for new activists. While this may presently be part of the focus on mass convergence for RACQB, its success has been limited by its organisational capacity to manage human

resources outside of the specific activity of convergence. "Organisationally, we wanted to strengthen and invigorate the campaign and ultimately get those people interested in doing direct action involved in the ongoing RAC QLD refugee campaign. Unfortunately in the longer term, this wasn't achieved" (Gillian Marshall response to questionnaire, See Appendix A).

- **Meeting conduct**

An important part of developing a learning organisation is creating opportunities for reflection and for this to be recorded and included in the process of determining goals, strategies and tactics. Regular meetings are an excellent opportunity for this to occur. RACQB has recently changed the regularity of their main collective meetings, from weekly to fortnightly, to trial longer, less frequent meetings as a means of creating the opportunity for discussion and reflection. A vital aspect of this change must be the opportunity to record these discussions and incorporate the information into future decision making, activity and information-reliant processes. This should also be incorporated into convergence meetings to ensure their management becomes an evolutionary process gaining in capacity and effectiveness with each occurrence. Organising for convergence events would need to begin earlier than it did for the 2005 Baxter protest so that meetings can be spaced and allow opportunity for reflection rather than being limited by a short time frame.

- **Networking**

Developing learning systems requires human resources. Wasting this precious resource on creating systems from scratch is not an effective management technique in terms of developing the effectiveness of the asylum seeker advocacy movement or in achieving associated goals. Networking with other social change organisations can provide important information and reflection on processes, techniques, successes and failures that can be incorporated into RACQB's learning process. Though much of this sharing occurs within social change NGOs, most of it is informal and little appears to be recorded in a manner that will be accessible to future generations or to other similarly inclined groups or individuals.

Networking also offers opportunities to work with other groups to develop knowledge management systems and resources that create options for collaboration and movement growth. Incorporating methods of information sharing into plans for activity offers opportunities for strategic movement development. An example of this may be the conduct of an asylum seeker conference before or after a mass convergence, creating opportunities for activists to develop clear agendas, share and develop tactics and techniques and to reflect on past outcomes. This also provides activists with practical support while undertaking work that can be significantly emotionally draining. "Linking in with local community groups, unions and activists from around the country gives you hope and inspiration to keep going and that there are a lot of other like-minded people out there, more than you may think" (Gillian Marshall response to questionnaire, See Appendix A).

There also exists opportunities to collaborate with research organisations to develop a more comprehensive and managed library of information relating to both asylum seeker advocacy and to the conduct of mass convergence in support of this. Strategic research projects may provide insight into the organising, conduct and analysis of refugee advocacy mass convergences that may be out of the reach of unfunded NGOs such as RACQB.

- **Managing transience**

Managing transience is of key importance to organisations such as RACQB. Volunteer transience is affected by systems that rely on personal rather than organisational memory and where the lack of systemised process and information management creates a sense of a clique or "inner circle" that can only be penetrated by the passing of time. This creates a "shortage of the number of people who continue their involvement and participation in RAC and/or the refugee campaign on an ongoing basis when they get back from the convergence" (Gillian Marshall response to questionnaire, See Appendix A). While this form of organisational management may be appropriate for small, community development focused organisations, the focus for RACQB, as a national campaigning body for refugee rights, a broader, more inclusive structure is more appropriate. Incorporating learning processes such as reflective action and knowledge management into the organisation can assist in ameliorating activist burnout and allow learning from positive and negative outcomes.

- **Debriefing**

With the extent of social and environmental change work "needing" to be undertaken, it is not in the best interests of any NGO to expect potential activists to become engaged with their organisation where personal dynamics and the extent of people's personal time contributions largely control the flow of information. Information systems that reflect the involvement and perspectives of the people who are and have been involved and the range of activities that have been undertaken, have greater capacity to attract and sustain new members who may have no personal connection with existing activists in the organisation. As such, undertaking a debriefing process that provides real insight into the knowledge produced by the activity and the associated values of participants provides a platform for development of future strategies and tactics. It also provides an important starting point for new activists who need context to become meaningfully involved with an organisation.

While debriefing may be a standard practice of most social change organisations, it is its execution and the collection and storage of information and values from this process that is important in developing a learning approach. RACQB has been involved in debriefing processes after each of the mass convergences; however this has mostly focused on the emotional requirements of individuals rather than deconstructing the organisational process and outcomes associated with the events. Further, there is little evidence that there are effective systems in place to utilise information from these debriefing sessions to inform future activities and some confusion about where it would be stored and how accessible it might be. "There was some lesson learning that was integrated into this process, but it was largely dealing with the emotional experience and then where to take this energy or experience further" (Gillian Marshall response to questionnaire, See Appendix A).

From my discussions with RACQB members, it seems that there is an ad-hoc approach to convergence management handover which happens according to the available energy of coordinators. Systemising this handover process and incorporating it into the debriefing that occurs after each event can provide ongoing capacity to the organisation by allowing lesson learning and process adjustment to be integrated into the planning process.

6.0   The vision: developing mass convergence as an effective tool for change

It's January 2006. Organising for the Baxter 2006 mass convergence at the Baxter Immigration Detention Facility has been happening since around July the year before. The networks are strong and it is clear how the organisation of the event is being managed between the different advocacy groups involved who are based

around the country. A grant has been sourced from an independent group of philanthropic investors and this has provided the means for computer systems and office spaces in key cities for the three months prior to the convergence and funds for expenses such as phone, internet and transport.

The workload is divided amongst a range of sub-collectives and coordinated by a management collective meeting that occurs fortnightly. There has been a paid project worker managing the convergence planning since December last year, thanks to the funding, and so there is a level of consistency that has not been available before. This person represents the Convergence Collective at the main RACQB meeting (others are free to attend also) so that the remainder of the organisation is clear about the planning of the convergence and has the opportunity to participate.

People are keen to be involved with the organising of the convergence. Because information and promotions have been out in the community for so long more people are coming along to meetings and taking on key areas of organising. After last years convergence the details of participants, and anyone else who expressed interest, were recorded and followed up on for this year's convergence. The convergence organising collective is handling this additional involvement well, having undertaken a meaningful and documented debriefing session after last years convergence and incorporating these constructive ideas for change into the management structure.

New members are empowered by the open and creative style of meetings that take place, where coordination is the key focus and ideas are nurtured and recorded. Meetings don't seem bogged down in detail anymore with the micro-organising that is so necessary to campaign development happening in informal sub-collectives of people able to communicate via phone, email, bulletin boards and in person. The paid project worker is able to coordinate all of this communication and ensure that values and data are recorded to build upon the organisations knowledge bank.

Since the organisation has developed more effective information storage systems that are accessible and which contain detailed information about procedures, ideas, networks and resources, new members are able to quickly grasp what RACQB has accomplished and how the organisation is managed. These systems have also allowed organisers to build upon training systems for inexperienced activists so that training activities are about to begin and will continue until a couple of weeks prior to the convergence. Formal discussions regarding communication and management systems for the convergence, including meeting styles, affinity groups and logistical requirements, have been occurring regularly so that people are already forming groups and discussing tactics and resources. And because of the early planning and additional opportunities for group discussions there has been a lot more talk of specific tactics and the sourcing of resources to satisfy these plans.

This vision is formed from a brief discussion with two RACQB members. It is a very basic attempt at refocusing RACQB strategies and tactics based on the provision of key resources and the design and implementation of a learning approach and knowledge management processes. The intent of providing this example of potential change is to illustrate how strategic analysis of organisational methods can impact upon the output of the organisation in a positive way.

The following section provides some recommendations on key strategies that could be adopted by RACQB to provide a more sustainable management foundation for ongoing activities.

7.0   Recommendations

On the basis of the preliminary analysis this paper outlines, the following recommendations are made to the RACQB:

1. Develop a set of **templates** for people to contribute their reflections on events, actions, participation opportunities, communication and strategies and tactics for future action. Have prompting questions on the sheet to provide people with a starting point and space to provide freeform comment. These can be electronic as well and be located on the RACQB web site.

2. Add a **Knowledge Coordinator** role to the organisation and develop an outline of key duties and responsibilities including managing information systems, managing information gathering and storage and developing systems to capture values as well as data. This position may well not be permanent and may only exist to design and implement information management systems.

3. Develop clear protocols regarding **Knowledge Management**:
   a. Data storage
   b. Email communication and email storage
   c. Website data management
   d. Data access by members
   e. Knowledge production plan including links to research centres for undertaking collaborative and strategic research projects on issues relevant to asylum seeker advocacy.

4. Develop an organisational understanding and capacity to **capture people's reflections** on activity and a set of processes to ensure this information is effectively incorporated into future decision making.

5. Develop **combined approaches to activity and information gathering**. An example of this is the conduct of a refugee advocacy conference before or after a detention centre convergence to create opportunities for discussion, reflection, strategising and networking.

Further to this, there are several specific areas where a learning approach could improve RACQB's capacity to manage activity and growth. These include:

- Pre-convergence training;
- Post-convergence debrief and handover;
- Information storage and accessibility;
- Developing the Spokescouncil and Affinity Group models for coordination; and
- Meeting and discussion management and recording.

Developing these areas is a tangible form of activity that could be developed internally by new volunteers to the organisation.

8.0   Conclusion

RACQB is involved in the difficult and highly emotive area of social change work around refugee advocacy. Creating a balance between the need to act and the organisational needs that provide more capacity for this action is in the best interests of RACQB's members and the asylum seekers they advocate for.

The recommendations in the preceding chapter are the results of a third party analysis conducted by the author to provide further capacity to RACQB's activities. From this limited analysis, it is of utmost importance that the organisation increase its accessibility to potential members and create systemised means of managing mass convergences so that there is an evolution in their planning and conduct.

As a protest tool, mass convergences are an effective means of creating media attention, networking activists and introducing people to the physical reality of detention. Their effectiveness can be improved by developing some of the Organisational Learning principles discussed in this paper and incorporating these into RACQB's management approach. This paper has made a preliminary analysis of how this might occur.

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10.0   Appendix A - Summary of interview with RACQB members

Present:

- Gillian Marshall;
- Bronwen Lloyd; and
- Steph Walton

Date: 14 June, 2005

Baxter 2005:

- Not enough familiar with the process of facilitating
- Affinities weren't pre-organised very much
- So much work to get people to Baxter that there wasn't much energy left to organise anything further like affinity groups.
- Specific role Affinity Groups (like legals or food) worked
- No One Is Illegal not there this year
- Lack of experienced people attending this year.
- Lots of new people.
    - Pre-Baxter activist training weekend just before the convergence where 10 people attended. This helped.
    - New people were unsure about tactics
    - Value of pre-event training not realized by the majority of those attending – many people said after that training would have been beneficial.
- Lots of photography students this year.
    - Non-participation was interesting
    - They focused on documenting
    - It was good they attended as it increased the numbers and the photos, but it would also be good to have that many people actively participating in building tactics
- There was a debrief on the Saturday after the convergence
    - 40 or so people attended
    - We felt it was successful
    - It was conducted in a circle format and was facilitated
    - We talked about how the week had been for us
    - We shared our thoughts and feelings

- o We talked about where to from here?
- o Workshopped ideas about how to get people involved
- o Workshopped what we did and what we could do better
- o The notes from this were typed up and emailed and stored for reference for next year.
- There was also a report-back night within RAC
- The idea is that the person who coordinated the convergence this year, Bronwen, will hand over to next years coordinator once organising for it begins.

Baxter 2003 to 2005:

- There was a list generated of things that could have been done better from 2003 and this was used in 2005.
- Gillian who coordinated 2003 was not around when organising for Baxter 2005 was initiated so was unable to handover to Bronwen.

Woomera 2002 to Baxter 2003:

- Hand over of organising info happened between 2002 and 2003 coordinators. Gillian who coordinated the 2003 convergence felt that this was very helpful.

Various issues:

- Monopoly of information is a key problem in RACQB
- Building mass convergences is about organising resources and people
- Refugee activism has a high burn out rate. This is partly caused by the lack of "success" we've had in recent years.
- Not many people come to meetings
    - o The meetings aren't very accessible
    - o Meetings aren't lively or stimulating
    - o We're trying less frequent meetings so that people have more time to reflect and act and so that we can have a longer meeting that allows more space for discussion
    - o People adopt set roles in meetings and it's not very flexible
    - o For people interested in mass convergence, who are usually into NVDA, these meetings are boring
- RAC uses a lot of different tactics to reflect the diversity of people involved
- Convergences are far apart. In between is organising time but this isn't really seen as fun and so people don't really become involved.
- Baxter 2005 began being organised in January 2005 in Brisbane.
    - o We need to organise earlier to build momentum earlier and attract people who are looking for "fun"
- In 2003 GM started working on promotions for the convergence in November 2002
- Greg (Convenor) believes that the mass convergences are a major tool for refugee advocacy and contributed to the closing of Woomera
- GM feels that the convergences are supported by RACQB as a tactic.
- There are issues within RACQB about the public face of advocacy, such as the convergences, taking away from the everyday campaign activity that goes on constantly.
- Networking with other groups and people to promote convergences is equally important to getting bums on seats.
- RACQB has a transient, day-to-day, success-to-success, failure-to-failure approach
    - o Compared to funded organisations with structure and clear long-term strategy, RACQB falls down:

- ▪ Transient people
- ▪ Lack of resources
- ▪ Shortage of people actively involved
- The notion of organisational learning as an approach needs to happen on a national level.

The Vision:

- More resources
- More people
- Advertising
- Project worker with ongoing funding
  - o The value from this lies with the additional record-keeping and materials generated by this person
  - o Forms an ongoing series of reference points
- Training
- Office space
- Shared filing systems
- Computer systems
- Building capacity of peoples perception of what actions/tactics they can employ once there – planning in advance
- National networking / debriefing opportunities and strategizing

Collecting names and details of people

11.0 Appendix B – RACQB Organisational structure and external relationships schematic