

Norway reflections

By Adrienne Francis, Darwin, Australia

ABC Northern Territory Country Hour

My first experience of the International Federation of Agricultural Journalists (IFAJ) was as a volunteer to organisers of the 2000 World Congress in Canberra. As a young agricultural science student at the time, I was bowled over by the warmth and camaraderie of those attending from every corner of the world. From that point on a career in agricultural journalism began to look very attractive.

Six years passed, and Alltech and the IFAJ gave me the opportunity to join this year's conference in Norway. However, this time I didn't have to wait tables or arrange name tags! It



took me by great surprise to be given such an incredible opportunity to travel abroad and take part in such a major event, marking 50 years of IFAJ. However, it was not going to be all smooth sailing.

Above: Pictured from left Orla McAleer from Alltech's communications team, Europe and Asia, IFAJ president David Markey, scholarship winners Adrienne Francis, and Gavin Grobbelaar and Billy Frey, Alltech communications, North America and Latin America.

An unfortunate accident, or was it?

A week or so before departure I had an unfortunate accident playing netball, which is a popular ladies team ball sport similar to basketball. A collision with another girl put me in hospital with a fractured bone in my right foot. Even worse, it required a half-leg plaster cast! What a nightmare, I thought, and how disappointing. Would I even be able to board the plane, and how on earth was I going to get around across the globe with crutches and a microphone?

In fact, having a disability proved to be a great advantage. I had every pain relieving pill and anti-inflammatory medication you could find. But the airlines went to great lengths to ferry me around in a wheelchair or golf buggy, at every opportunity. And whilst an upgrade to business or first class eluded me, they re-arranged passengers to ensure I could stretch the plastered leg across spare adjoining seats.

It really was wonderful to return to the northern hemisphere. I had lived and worked in the UK straight after university for several years as an agronomist and trainee agricultural journalist with *Farmers Weekly Magazine*. Australians abroad always travel widely, but I had always regretted not making it to beautiful Norway.

I was absolutely captivated by the sweeping rural landscape and proud agricultural traditions. This was to be a stark contrast to the past four years spent in tropical and remote northern Australia. Here our industries receive little and dwindling support from government and the broader community at large. In the Northern Territory our rural industries are still really finding their feet. And there isn't a long cultural tradition that places our rural industries in people's hearts, the way it does in Norway and the EU.

Inspired to be a storyteller

Storytelling is what inspires me about journalism, and there were some great one's to record in Norway. I probably went a little overboard and returned home with a wonderful audio stockpile of many hours.



I recorded in long format with lots of local ambient sound to craft the stories into special packages. Stories ranged from moose hunting, the blackberry industry, mare's milk and EU reform to the forest timber industry. These stories are likely to be broadcast to a national Australian audience over the Christmas and New Year summer holidays.

As well as returning home with miles of material, more importantly I feel a stronger sense of purpose in this my chosen field. I realised that ABC Rural Radio is unique compared to other nations, where specialist broadcasters have ceased or been moved sideways into environmental reporting. Last year the flagship program (that I present in the Northern Territory), the *Country Hour*, celebrated 60 years on air, making it the longest-running radio program in the nation. We also have a team of more than 70 specialist reporters based in most corners of our huge brown island. It's both the size of our team and the longevity of the program that makes me even more proud to be a part of it. Have a look for yourself at: <http://www.abc.net.au/rural/>

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