

IAIA 2012 Rose Human Acceptance Speech

May 29, 2012, at the Annual General Meeting

Peter Croal

Bom dia, everyone. Thank you, Stephen, for these kind words. Do you think you could share them with my parents-in-law? Sons-in-law need all the help they can get.

I extend my deepest thanks to the Awards Committee, IAIA president and IAIA board for this wonderful honour. I am truly humbled and proud to be recognised this way by my IAIA peers. I also thank my family for their years of support, and for all the times I heard “Goodbye, Dad” as I headed out the door to another IAIA gathering. I also want to recognize the wonderful support the Government of Canada and the Canadian International Development Agency have provided me by supplying the resources and time to come to IAIA over the years and be involved in so many IAIA initiatives. And lastly, I also wish to thank you who have helped me so much over the years with my IAIA projects. I truly value your help and advice, and all your enriching friendships. I hope I have been as equally helpful with your work.

Frank Lloyd Wright once said: “We create a house, and then it creates us.” And so it is with IAIA. Since joining IAIA in 1994, I have been rewarded with so many amazing memories and knowledge which has helped me become the person I am today. IAIA can be a truly a life-changing institution. In 1999, at the IAIA conference in Christchurch, I met Peter Tarr of the Southern African Institute of Environmental Assessment. We struck up a conversation in a hotel lobby, which eventually focused around a bottle of scotch in the lobby. And, as it seems to be with scotch, it had a very high evaporation rate!! Over the years a wonderful friendship grew that resulted in me working with Peter in Namibia at the Southern African Institute for Environmental Assessment for 2 years. At that time, other IAIA members John Boyle and Arne Dalfelt, who were World Bank employees, were also huge players in making the position in Namibia come to be. My family and I benefited so much for this experience and we are forever grateful to IAIA to being the catalyst that started this life-changing opportunity.

IAIA is like an African waterhole where we all come to be refreshed and....do a little drinking. Speaking of waterholes, I have to tell you about a story that happened one night around a waterhole in Etosha National Park in Namibia. It was late at night and it was hot. My family and I were sitting quietly at the waterhole just wondering what might come to drink. There is a small wall between the waterhole and the spectators. This is a good thing because that wall keeps those beasts armed with claws, teeth and horns separated from us who are armed with iPods, earbuds and sandals!! Out of nowhere a young Australian student, who did seem to have consumed way too much Namibian beer, leaped over the wall and sort of staggered and ran towards the waterhole, saying “Come on mates, let’s go for a swim.” He got to the waterhole and plopped down in the mud right between a bull elephant and a rhino and her calf. They looked very bemused and did not know what to make of this. We on the other hand, on the right side of the wall felt we were in a National Geographic moment and were about to see this bloke mightily stomped into the Etosha version of vegemite. He soon realized the error of his ways and sprinted back over the wall, with the elephant and rhino still looking bemused. Perhaps this was an Australian version of Public Participation. I will leave it up to you to see where this fits in IAIA’s code of good practice.

Yes, you never know what will happen at IAIA. There was the time Bill Ross leaped 3 feet into the air and onto a desk to make a point about cumulative effects! Then there is Rob Verheem and his famous Rubber Band, which creates some interesting and new dance moves. And there was the time in IAIA 1999, in Christchurch, where our IAIA president Maria Partidario was made to disappear. The Maori had to do a welcoming ceremony, but it could not involve a woman! The Maori were perplexed so they developed a ceremony to make her “disappear.” Well now, we could still see her, but the Maori couldn’t! So be careful what you do at IAIA 2012: Maria might be watching you.

The world is so full of challenges and we know what they are. But take just a second and look around the room. Just notice the person sitting near you. All of us are trying to make the world a better place through impact assessment. What better vocation could there be? What better way to live our lives? And what better organization than IAIA and its members to support our collective work.

There will always be a need for impact assessment and IAIA, and I would say that this need is escalating. The demands for natural resources and energy are putting huge demands of IA. But some countries may be taking a different approach and seem to want to relax IA systems to allow the extractive sector projects to get approved faster. Regardless of the policies of various governments, regardless of the status of IA laws, what remains at the end of the day is our practice. What remains is our goal of influencing decision makers with IA tools to ensure the best possible decision is taken. What remains is our collective global leadership in IAIA to make our future more unsustainable. Our creativity and passion to make this happen is in the room and in our membership. An example of the leadership we are taking is at Rio+20. The IAIA Board and President have developed a statement on IA and have submitted it to the Rio+20 process. We are not alone in this effort. Over 20 institutions and countries and prepared statements for Rio+20 which include the need to have IA recognized in the final outcome statement. I recall a saying from the Hopi tribe of America: “We are the ones we have been waiting for.”

Thank you so much again for this once in a lifetime honour. I look forward to your continued friendship and working together of some fantastic impact assessment ideas and projects. I also thank Miguel and Carlos, and the warmth and hospitality of the Portuguese people for helping all of us feel so much at home in Portugal.

Abrigado y boa sorte.

Addendum, August 2012: I understand that during my Rose-Hulman acceptance speech at IAIA12, I upset some delegates by referring to the ceremony that was presented by the Maori during the conference. I fully apologise for this and take full responsibility for my statements. I would welcome discussing this issue with any IAIA delegate so that I can learn from this, personally apologise and prevent it from happening again.