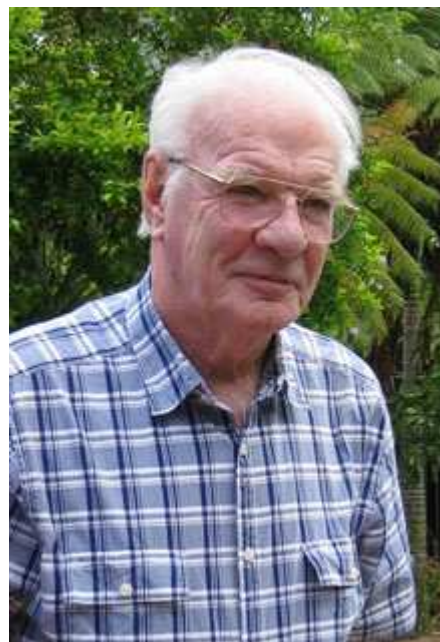


Vale Dr John McAlpine 1930 – 2010

By Fiona McFarlane

John McAlpine leaves behind a remarkable legacy that we in the science community and the people of Papua New Guinea (PNG) will continue to benefit from into the future.

John's legacy grew from his unique gift to lead multi-disciplinary teams and to foresee the benefits of integrating social information into land use planning and resource assessment.



John is well remembered for his mentoring of younger scientists assisting many to develop their own careers as natural resource managers. He was a great organiser, a great leader and got the best out of people through his interest in them as people as well as the science they could deliver. He had a natural ability for dealing with people and throughout his working life, he developed strong ties and enduring friendships in New Zealand, the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, but it was with PNG and its people that he developed the strongest links.

John's long association with PNG began in 1951 when he was successful in gaining a position as a Patrol Officer. Between 1951 and 1956, he was posted to several districts throughout PNG.

In 1957, John first joined CSIRO as a Transport and Logistics Officer for surveys in PNG with the then Division of Land Research and Regional Survey in Canberra. Between 1965 and 1970, he studied part-time at the Australian National University to graduate with 1st Class Honours.

Throughout his 35 year career with CSIRO, John progressed through the ranks from Technical Officer to Principal Research Scientist, and from the late 1960s through to early 1980 he was Scientific Assistant to the Chief for both Alan Stewart (Division of Land Use Research) and Dick Millington (Division of Water and Land Resources). In 1968, John was heavily involved in the seminal International Symposium on Land Evaluation held in Canberra that synthesised the approach used in Australia and internationally for many years.

While John was with CSIRO he participated in 11 of the 14 regional resource surveys of PNG developing his major research focus on land use and the climate and climate variability. He was also the driving force behind the preparation of four synthesising books on PNG. Together this impressive amount of information has led to his enduring legacy for the peoples of PNG. These survey reports along with two books, simply titled *Climate of Papua*

New Guinea and Climatic Tables, are the key to much of the resource use and development planning still done in PNG today.

Later, as desktop computers became accessible, John was the visionary and leader of a research team that created a computerised information system known as PNGRIS (Papua New Guinea Resource Information System) which is still being used in various forms today. It was the first of its type for PNG and also for the Pacific and south-east Asia. It set a standard for all developing countries and indeed set the wheels in motion for the development of modern geographical information systems for land resource use and management. John ensured that PNGRIS was not just a source of information but a planning tool for PNG, and not surprisingly was asked to establish a similar database for Vanuatu which became known as VANRIS.

In 1986, with the break-up of the Division of Water and Land Resources in Canberra, John and his team were transferred to the then Division of Tropical Crops and Pastures, and moved to Brisbane in late 1987.

In the early 1990's, John's team was contacted to undertake a rapid resource appraisal of the forests of PNG which ultimately led to the development of another geographic information system known as Forest Inventory and Mapping (FIM). FIM is still the most comprehensive assessment of forestry in PNG.

John retired from CSIRO in 1992 but continued to research, write and contribute while maintaining his many valued friendships and professional relationships to the end of his life.