

## Community Exchange

*Alison Bird, Russ Grayson, Annette Loudon*

How about an informal trading system that is equitable, resists corruption and has facilitated community sharing of resources even in times of economic crisis?

Sounds too good to be true? That's not the view of people in the world's 800 community exchanges or mutual credit schemes, 50 of which are Australian. As an avenue to cashless trading, the Australian experience of Community Exchange Systems (CES) and Local Exchange and Trading Systems (LETS) has much to teach us in our economically and politically troubled times.

We propose a panel discussion to outline the workings of modern community exchange systems, to consider the lessons learned over the last 25 years, and explore how these schemes have the potential to benefit us in the future.

- Alison will explain how a successful LETS system works with reference to a thriving group in Far North Queensland
- Russ will describe the way LETS systems emerged in NSW from metropolitan permaculture groups, and how trading was facilitated before online accounting
- Annette will give an overview of the Australian CES network and identify elements that are important to a well-functioning trading system. She will cover some of the common challenges and suggest ways we might overcome them for local exchanges to become more effective.

In countries around the world faced with financial crisis, we have seen that those with community exchange systems in place fared the best. The schemes complement the federal dollar-economy and enable access to goods and services perhaps otherwise unaffordable. It is an economic model with valuable potential for community building and resilience regarding an uncertain future.

**Conference Themes:** exchange, work, money, care

**Bio:**

Alison Bird was a founding member of the Far North Queensland Community Exchange System and has been a keen trader for over 25 years. Since giving the opening address at the National LETS Conference in 2015, she has been presenting talks and workshops about community exchange, aiming to increase awareness of this active alternative economy. Alison readily points out she's not an economist - she has a PhD in Marine Ecology as well as 20 years' experience in the arts and small business. Her enthusiasm for green innovations is compelling.

Russ Grayson was a pioneer during the first wave of LETS in Sydney in the nineties. He has included LETS training as a component in community education. Russ' background includes international development and urban agriculture consultancy in the SW Pacific, PNG and Australia. He was a journalist and editor with an international publisher, reporting the development of the early environmental industries and issues. More recently, he has worked in advocacy organisations centred around food security and food sovereignty. With this broad range of experience across permaculture, international development, and journalism he keeps an eye on innovative community initiatives.

Annette Loudon's involvement with community trading systems began in 2008 when she took on the role of co-chair of Sydney LETS. As co-chair she got Sydney LETS trading online and facilitated the transition of Australian trading groups to the Community Exchange System (CES). When Australia outgrew the global system in 2012 Annette helped set up CES Australia. Annette believes local trading exchanges can support local projects, providing the skills and energy required to build more resilient communities. She would love to see Australia's community trading groups partner with ethical enterprises to strengthen the New Economy movement in Australia.