

## New Zealand packs plain English punch

### WriteMark Plain English Awards Trust

12 September 2008

For immediate release

A visiting international expert says New Zealand is “punching above its weight” in using plain English. Dr Neil James, Executive Director of the Sydney-based Plain English Foundation, was a judge in the 2008 WriteMark New Zealand Plain English Awards held last night in Wellington.

Dr James says the calibre of this year’s 120 entries shows there is widespread awareness in New Zealand of the value of plain English.

“Kiwis are obviously way ahead of much of the English-speaking world in understanding the need for ‘saying it simply’. They’re also pretty good at doing it.

“The fact that so many entries came from government organisations and high-profile private sector companies speaks volumes. People in power here realise they have to provide clarity to give people a fair go, and that it can be done.”

However, “Brainstrain” awards, which are given to poorly worded or badly organised documents, also went to high-profile organisations, and Dr James says this shows New Zealand still has a way to go.

One hundred and sixty guests attended the Awards ceremony and gala dinner held at Shed 5 on Wellington’s waterfront.

The premier award for Plain English Champion—Best Organisation went to New Zealand Trade and Enterprise (NZTE), the Government’s economic development agency. The \$10,000 prize was given to acknowledge the company’s outstanding progress in creating an organisation-wide plain English culture.

NZTE Senior Business Advisor for Human Resources and plain English project leader, Lynda Jelbert, said the prize money will be spent redeveloping customer application forms that have received poor feedback.

Other winners included:

- Ministry of Education: Plain English Champion—Best Project
- Deborah Morris (Barnardos): Plain English Champion—Best Individual
- ASB: Best Plain English Document—Private Sector
- Cancer Society of New Zealand: Best Plain English Document—Public Sector/Non-Government Organisation (NGO)
- Ministry for Culture & Heritage: Best Plain English Website—Public Sector/Non-Government Organisation (NGO)
- Seafood Industry Training Organisation: Best Plain English Website—Private Sector
- Ministry of Civil Defence & Emergency Management: People’s Choice—Best Plain English Document
- Best Sentence Transformation: Steelbro New Zealand Limited.

Two well-known organisations received “Brainstrain” awards. Instead of the elegant trophy handed out to other winners, the prizes in this category were stainless-steel rubbish bins, appropriately filled with “sour worms”.

Pacific Blue received the People’s Choice—“Brainstrain” Document award for its *Terms and conditions of carriage*, which the judges described as almost impossible to understand in some places.

The Embassy of the United States, based in Wellington, won the People’s Choice—“Brainstrain” Website award because confusing “government speak” gave the website an unfriendly and impersonal tone.

David Russell—Awards judge and Plain English Power patron—says the “Brainstrain” awards are a friendly poke at individuals and organisations that, even with the best of intentions, produce confusing information.

“In most cases ‘Brainstrain’ winners take it on the chin and say, ‘Fair cop. Let’s see how we can make this better.’ When that happens, we see it as a really positive result.”

No one from either organisation was present to accept their “Brainstrain” award, but both issued statements saying the feedback would be taken on board.

A Pacific Blue spokesperson said the company was always happy to see how it could improve and simplify communications. The Embassy of the United States said it tried to provide clear information for customers and that the insights from the Awards were helpful.

The WriteMark New Zealand Plain English Awards are a non-profit event held each year and hosted by the WriteMark Plain English Awards Trust. The Awards aim to raise public awareness of the benefits of plain English, and to honour individuals and organisations that are attempting to communicate clearly and fairly.

An independent panel of professional plain English experts and advocates judges the entries and decides the finalists and winners in each category.

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**Neil is in New Zealand until  
Sunday, 14 September**

On the web:

[www.plainenglishawards.org.nz](http://www.plainenglishawards.org.nz)

## **2008 WriteMark New Zealand Plain English Awards**

### **Winners and finalists**

#### **Category 1**

Plain English Champion—Best Organisation: New Zealand Trade and Enterprise

Plain English Champion—Best Project: Ministry of Education

Finalists: Retail Institute, Ministry for Culture & Heritage

Plain English Champion—Best Individual: Deborah Morris, Barnardos New Zealand

Finalist: Beverley Dawn Stevens, nzfishing.com

#### **Category 2**

Best Plain English Document—Public Sector/Non-Government Organisation (NGO): Cancer Society of New Zealand

Finalists: Greater Wellington Regional Council, New Zealand Guidelines Group

Best Plain English Document—Private Sector: ASB

Finalists: A J Park, Deloitte

### **Category 3**

Best Plain English Website—Public Sector/Non-Government Organisation (NGO): Ministry for Culture & Heritage

Finalists: Department of Conservation, Northland Regional Council

Honourable mention: Ministry for Culture & Heritage

Best Plain English Website—Private Sector: Seafood Industry Training Organisation

Finalists: David Flaws Employment Advocate, RaboPlus

Honourable mention: BRANZ Limited

### **Category 4**

Best Sentence Transformation: Steelbro New Zealand Limited

Finalists: MAF Biosecurity New Zealand, Palmerston North City Library

### **Category 5**

People's Choice—Best Plain English Document: Ministry of Civil Defence & Emergency Management

Finalists: Balance NZ Bipolar & Depression Network, Auckland Regional Public Health Service

People's Choice—Best Plain English Website: Land Transport New Zealand

Finalists: Metlink; Child, Youth and Family

People's Choice—"Brainstrain" Document: Pacific Blue

Finalists: Bright Star Conferences, Ministry of Education

People's Choice—"Brainstrain" Website: Embassy of the United States, Wellington

Finalists: ACC, Qantas

### **The judges**

The 2008 WriteMark New Zealand Plain English Awards were judged by a panel of professional plain English experts and advocates. The judges were:

- Neil James, Plain English Foundation, Australia
- David Russell, Former Chief Executive, Consumers' Institute
- Rachel McAlpine, Director, Quality Web Content Ltd
- Jacquie Harrison, Senior Lecturer, School of Communication Studies, AUT University