

The elephant in the SAARF boardroom

 By [Chris Brewer](#)

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I remember, very well, the agony of SAARF Council meetings...

They were boring beyond belief and, to this day, I cannot believe that anything any good can happen on time and within budget from a committee meeting - whether that's your local neighbourhood watch or a session in Parliament.

However, during my days at the South African Audience Research Foundation (SAARF), really meaningful research was being produced with robust samples. In fact, we were the envy of the advertising world.



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And then someone did what we've come to expect in human nature. A major player in one of the groups decided that, as times were tough, they wouldn't contribute so much.

How SAARF was paid

This, naturally, caused an uproar, because it raised the question: "whose money is going into SAARF?" Originally, you see, it was 1% added on to all media rate cards.

Over the years most media paid, others didn't. Until the time came when media "absorbed" the SAARF "levy" into their rates. Everything got blurry after that. Marketers said it was their money, Media said it was theirs.

And so it came to pass that all the media (once a cohesive unit) splintered. Arguments began. Organisations threatened to pull out - some actually did.

It fell to its knees and the prospect of losing one of the finest pieces of research in the world became very real.

It looks as if the AMPS and RAMS surveys may be funded separately (which is insanity since although they interview the same people, they would now have to do it twice).

There's a strong suspicion that AMPS will be dramatically pruned and that the number of radio reports (RAMS) will be reduced. Television measurement (TAMS) may stay stable for a while, however, there's a tsunami heading their way - but that's another subject.

It's all going to cost more.

However, amidst all the chaos, my friend, Virginia Hollis (not a lady you want to fight with), who is the current Chair of SAARF has issued a statement and although it sounds a little desperate, maybe, just maybe, this might save the day.

The statement is:

"There has been much talk about the report that Johann Koster has been researching for SAARF. So we'd like to provide an update on the progress of the report and our roll out plan.

"The study was commissioned by SAARF to help us understand whether there is still a place for an industry research body like SAARF and if there is, what its mandate should be and how it should be funded.

"Initial findings were presented to the SAARF Business Committee and Board in the last week and since then, Johann has finalised the report. From here, the SAARF Board intends taking the report to its members thereafter the other stakeholders in the industry who kindly contributed. Once this has been done, SAARF will host general meetings for the industry and distribute the report.

"While the report does give some interesting perspectives and direction to the industry it certainly does not supply all the answers. It will take strong leadership to determine how the industry should progress. The SAARF Board will use the report as a base to develop recommendations which will then be discussed with its constituencies and the broader industry.

"SAARF looks forward to positive engagements so that we can all benefit from a healthy research future.

Virginia Hollis: SAARF Chair"

Well, amen to that and good luck to the SAARF Board. It's a giant task with odds stacked against you.

But I still don't understand why SAARF AMPS "Tools" courses are still being offered as if nothing is going to change. This is the eleventh hour, after all.

With the amazing advances in technology and the incessant in-fighting going on maybe Dickens summed it up rather neatly; "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times; it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness..."

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