

Annual Report of the President – 2006/2007

It is with pleasure that I present my report on the activities and achievements of the Federation of Australian Historical Societies (Inc.) (FAHS) for the year 2006/2007.

Apart from the Annual General Meeting for 2006, which was held on Sunday 2 September 2006 at the Residency, Alice Springs, Northern Territory, the Committee held four ordinary meetings, one immediately following the AGM and three teleconferences (November 2006, February and May, 2007). Once again the business agenda of each of these meetings was formidable but, as a result, considerable advances have been made in addressing and progressing the objectives of the Federation's *Triennial Operational Plan for the years 2004/05, 2005/06, 2006/07*. In between meetings the Committee conducted much business via email.

The office bearers for 2006/2007 and 2007/2008 are President: Dr Helen Henderson (Royal Western Australian Historical Society); Senior Vice-President: Professor Ian Jack (Royal Australian Historical Society); Vice-President: Dr Bev Phelts (Historical Society of the Northern Territory); Immediate Past-President: Dr Ruth Kerr (Royal Historical Society of Queensland); Hon. Secretary: Ms Lennie McCall (Royal Western Australian Historical Society). In the absence of a nomination from among the delegates for the position of Hon Treasurer, Dr Lyn Reid, a member of the Historical Society of Northern Territory, agreed to fill the position.¹ Dr Ruth Kerr was elected Advocacy Delegate. The remaining members of the Committee were: Ms Diana Chessell (History Council of South Australia); Ms Yvonne Forrest (Historical Society of the Northern Territory); Associate Professor Donald Garden and Mr Don Gibb (Royal Historical Society of Victoria); Ms Jan Barkley-Jack (Royal Australian Historical Society); Ms Jean Stewart (Royal Historical Society of Queensland); Mr Ian Terry (Tasmanian Historical Research Association); Ms Esther Davies and Ms Marilyn Truscott (Canberra and District Historical Society).

Finance and administration

The end of this financial year marks the completion of the 2004/2005 – 2006/2007 round of the Federation's triennial funding under the Australian Government's Grants to Voluntary Environment and Heritage Organisations Program (GVEHO). This grant has made it possible for the Federation to continue and grow its leadership role in promoting history and supporting historical societies across the nation. I acknowledge with gratitude the confidence that the Australian Government has shown in the Federation by providing this funding and look forward to continued financial support through the GVEHO Program for the next three years.

The Administrative Officer, Mr John Davies, has been engaged on a part-time basis for 6 hours a week. It was hoped that we might be in a position to extend his hours but unfortunately we were unable to do this because of financial limitations.

The Federation has received a satisfactory report on its 2006/2007 accounts from its auditors, Pender Holdings Pty Ltd.

Once again efforts have been made to obtain additional funding by providing opportunities for interested individuals or companies to advertise their services/goods on our website and in our newsletter. So far there have been two responses to these advertisements with one providing a sponsorship of \$100.

¹ This is in accordance with Section 11(j) of the FAHS Constitution.

Fellowship Award

A FAHS Fellowship was awarded to Dr Lionel Gilbert. Professor Ian Jack (Vice-President and Royal Australian Historical Society) presented Dr Gilbert with his FAHS Fellowship at a special function held at the Armidale Folk Museum on 14 March 2007. Professor Jack paid tribute to Dr Gilbert's outstanding contribution to the history movement at both the local and national level. Mrs Jean Stewart (Royal Historical Society of Queensland) was present and reported that it was a very well attended and pleasant occasion. At the invitation of the President of the Armidale and District Historical Society, Ms Judith Grieve, Mrs Stewart spoke about her association with Dr Gilbert and the Society in the 1970s and 1980s when she served two separate terms as its President.

I wish to thank the Armidale Folk Museum for its generosity in arranging the event at which the presentation was made.

Merit Award

I presented Ms Pearl Ogden with her FAHS Merit Award at the Annual General Meeting and annual dinner of the Historical Society of the Northern Territory held on 28 March 2007. The citation outlined Ms Ogden's significant contribution to the understanding and promotion of the history of the 'Top End' and to the community history movement in the Northern Territory. This was the Federation's first Merit Award.

The Federation thanks the Historical Society of the Northern Territory for the opportunity to present this Award at its Annual General Meeting and for the warm way in which it extended hospitality for the visit to Darwin.

Training and support for historical societies

1. Facilitating input from historical societies regarding history & heritage issues

A strategy designed to facilitate the flow of information to the Federation regarding history and heritage issues of concern to our constituent members and their affiliated societies was implemented early in the year. As a result the issue of the high cost of public liability insurance is currently under investigation. The Federation hopes to identify companies who are willing to provide insurance to societies at affordable cost. A further issue is storage space for artifacts held by historical societies.

2 Guides to support the work of historical societies

Publishing History: A Guide for Historical Societies: This book was published early in 2007 and distributed free-of-charge to historical societies across the nation. The publication has been received favourably and there has been a strong demand for copies (on sale for \$11.00 including GST) from individuals.

History, Heritage and Tourism: A Guide for Historical Societies: It is pleasing to report that the Federation was successful in its application to the New South Wales Heritage Office for a grant to produce an online publication of a guide for historical societies to the use and development of local heritage in the promotion of tourism, and in the use of tourism to promote heritage. The Federation engaged Dr Dianne Snowden, a heritage consultant of Richmond, Tasmania to write the guide.

Continuous Cultures and Ongoing Responsibilities – A Guide for Historical Societies in Engaging Indigenous Communities in the Care and Management of Indigenous Cultural Items Held by those Societies.

This project is in abeyance until Museums Australia develops its national strategy for implementing its *Continuous Cultures and Ongoing Responsibilities* guide.

3. My Connected Community

The Federation-initiated online Australian Historical Societies Support Group has grown in membership over the past year. This service to historical societies across the nation has been made possible by Vicnet's *My Connected Community (mc2)* project through the Royal Historical Society of Victoria's Project Partnership facility. It encourages local history groups and local history networks across the country to participate in online mc2 groups which provide additional communication opportunities among group members and also to promote local history. This Federation has continued to promote the service to historical societies across the country during 2006/2007. I wish to thank Ms Vicki Court, IT Collections Manager, Royal Historical Society of Victoria for the support she has given to members of the online group during the year.

Raising the profile of the FAHS

Individual delegates have promoted the FAHS in a variety of ways during the year. They addressed meetings of local societies and networked with members of government agencies and other organisations. Unfortunately, I have not been able to meet in person with representatives of federal organisations with similar aims but I have maintained email correspondence with several of these bodies, including the Collections Council of Australia and the Australian Council of National Trusts. However, Immediate Past-President, Dr Ruth Kerr, has met with a variety of historical societies in north and central Queensland and on the Sunshine Coast, and met with professional historians in several states to advance the role of local history and heritage organisations. Some of these opportunities have arisen from meetings with public service staff and academic historians related to the history teaching and heritage care issues. I addressed the State History Conference of affiliated societies of the Royal Western Australian Historical Society which was held in Cunderdin in September 2006. I have also provided several articles on the activities of the Federation for inclusion in constituent members' newsletters.

The *FAHS Newsletter* Editor, Ms Esther Davies, has produced two issues of the *FAHS Newsletter* during 2006/2007 with assistance from the Administrative Officer, Mr Davies. Each issue was distributed to approximately 950 historical societies nationwide by post or email. The *Newsletter* was also sent to other State/Territory and national bodies with whom we have reciprocal arrangements. Twelve issues of the Federation's *E-bulletin* have been produced by Dr Kerr during the reporting year and distributed electronically to cultural groups across the nation. This is an important communication that is designed to grow our professional networks and hopefully increase the interest of community historical society members, who have access to the Internet, in national and international history and heritage issues and developments.

Advocacy

1. Advocacy delegate:

Under these arrangements, the President retains the right to represent the Federation on national bodies such as the National Cultural Heritage Forum (NCHF). However, when for any reason, the President is unable to attend such meetings, the Advocacy Delegate attends. Since I live in Western Australia and was not able to attend any of these meetings during 2006/2007, the Advocacy Delegate, Dr Kerr, has represented the Federation.

2. Regional Cultural Alliance:

The Federation has continued to be represented on the Regional Cultural Alliance (RCA) by Dr Kerr. The RCA has still not gained any funding and because of this does not yet have a formal governance structure. In the main, its aims continue to be maintained and advanced through contact by email and teleconferences. It continues to provide an important role in preventing duplication, mutually supporting each others' endeavours where appropriate and in opening up lines of communication. One face-to-face meeting was held in 2007 in March in Canberra where FAHS advocated issues on

preservation of documents in private hands and government reports. Dr Kerr's contribution to the Alliance has been valuable and is much appreciated.

3. The National Cultural Heritage Forum:

NCHF members met with Department of the Environment and Heritage (DEH) officials in Canberra on 21 and 22 November 2006 to review the Forum's Vision Statement. Dr Ruth Kerr attended on the 21st and Ms Marilyn Truscott and John Davies attended on behalf of the FAHS on both days. The meeting commenced with a briefing from Mr Peter Burnett, head of the Division of Heritage, Department of Environment and Water Resource. He addressed the issue of 'What is the immediate and long term horizon for heritage in Australia from the Department's perspective?' This was followed by the Heritage Chairs and Officials of Australia and New Zealand (HCOANZ) review of the submissions made to the Productivity Commissions on Conservation of Australia's Historic Heritage Places led by Ms Marie Wood, consultant to the HCOANZ. Issues raised in submissions related to concerns about the governance structure of the heritage system nationally, education, policy and guidelines, tensions between planning and heritage and funding. The NCHF members then brainstormed major issues for the next ten years in relation to Australian heritage and then reviewed the existing Vision Statement. Dr Kerr committed to participate on the Heritage Care and the Teaching History Working Parties. Heritage Division has accepted the thrust of the revised Vision Statement and does not believe that it requires Ministerial approval. It will be revisited and refined after the federal election.

NCHF/HCOANZ break-out session: Mr Don Gibb represented the Federation at the NCHF/HCOANZ break-out session in Melbourne on 13 April 2007. The issues of grant funding and the different perspectives between government and non-government attendees were discussed energetically by state officials without any firm resolution.

Budget briefing: Dr Kerr attended a briefing on 11 May 2007 for the NCHF by the Heritage Division within Department of Environment & Water Resources on the Australian Government's Heritage Budget for 2007-08. Following this a detailed analysis of the heritage budget was prepared by the NCHF. Even though the discussion with public servants was expansive and assisted the NCHF to understand the government's intentions, the NCHF considered the expenditure insufficient, lacking vision and impetus. Dr Kerr reported that the NCHF will continue its advocacy with the federal government.

3. Teaching history in schools

The Federation has continued to be actively involved in issues relating to the teaching of history in schools within the NCHF and in direct representations to the Prime Minister and the Minister for Science, Education and Training. On 7 March 2007 Ms Esther Davies and Ms Julie Ryan (Canberra and District Historical Society) and Dr Kerr met with Mr Declan O'Connor and Ms Emily Cunningham, senior operations staff in Department of Education, Science and Training who are likely to be implementing the History Summit outcomes and government policy. The Federation has been particularly concerned with promoting the use of local history societies in the teaching of history in primary and secondary schools and in teacher development and is also pushing for appropriate funding to support the work.

Late in 2006/2007, a summit called by Museums Australia in association with the FAHS, the Australian Heritage Council together with staff of the major institutions in Victoria with the History Trust of South Australia and the National Museum and Old Parliament House in Canberra was planned to be held at the State Library of Victoria, Melbourne on 2 July 2007. The agenda included a briefing on the History Summit and progress towards implementing the outcomes and priorities of the History Summit, and discussions towards an action plan to advance history teaching in Australian schools. The outcomes of the summit will be reported in my 2007/08 annual report.

4. Submissions relating to heritage

The Federation made a number of submissions to State and Federal governments during the year on matters relating to the protection and preservation of heritage sites, namely the Burrup Peninsula Aboriginal rock art, Cossack town, the Old Treasury Building in Perth, and the North Bank, Brisbane development proposal. Other submissions were to the Chief Minister (Australian Capital Territory) expressing concern over the housing of the Canberra and District Historical Society's collections; to the Minister for Natural Resources, the Environment & Heritage (Northern Territory) regarding the review of the Northern Territory Heritage Act and a supplementary submission to the Productivity Commission on its *Conservation of Australia's Historic Heritage Places Draft Report*.

The Federation has also responded to invitations from the Collections Council of Australia (CCA) to comment on the CCA's Conservation Survey 2006 Report; National Standards for Australian Museums and Galleries – Exposure Draft; Survey regarding the *Significance: a guide to assessing the significance of cultural heritage objects and collections* (2001) and to participate in its Proposed Regional Hubs workshops.

In conclusion, the Federation has achieved much over the past year and I hope the Committee will maintain its momentum in supporting the work of historical societies and advocacy in the coming year. The members of the Committee are to be congratulated on the level of their commitment to the historical society movement and to the Federation itself. I thank them all for the generous way they have given of their time and expertise to the work of the Federation and for all the support they have afforded me in this my third year as President. I am especially grateful to the members of the Executive who have assisted me so ably in ensuring the continued smooth-running of the organisation. Thanks too, to Ms Esther Davies for editing the *Newsletter*, Dr Ruth Kerr for producing the *E-bulletin* and for her work as Advocacy Delegate. I am also grateful to Mr John Davies for the way he has so ably administered the affairs of the Federation.

Helen Henderson
11 September 2007