

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE PRESIDENT – 2007/08

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 2007/08.

Apart from the Annual General Meeting for 2006/2007, which was held on Sunday 14 October 2007 at the headquarters of the Royal Historical Society of Victoria, 239 A'Beckett Street, Melbourne, the Committee held four ordinary meetings, one immediately following the AGM on 14 October 2007 and three teleconferences (July 2007, February and May, 2008).

The Federation's *Report on the Outcomes of the Triennial Operational Plan for the years 2004/05, 2005/06, 2006/07* was ratified at the AGM. I am delighted that over the life of the Plan the FAHS addressed all the goals through implementing most of the planned strategies. Lack of personnel and financial resources prevented the completion of some of the strategies and all of the planned evaluation strategies with the exception of the one to investigate the value of the Newsletter to the target readership. Nevertheless, informal feedback to delegates in their respective States and Territories indicates a greater appreciation of the work of the FAHS by historical societies across the nation and recognition that it is an organisation that can provide them with the kind of support that will assist them in their work of promoting history and managing their valuable moveable and static heritage. The number of invitations to respond to government and historical society proposals and/or concerns increased markedly over the life of the plan as has also the level of participation in government-initiated and history community-initiated forums and discussions at the federal level.

At the AGM, delegates also adopted the Federation's *Triennial Operational Plan for the years 2007/08, 2008/09, 2009/10* which, subject to increased funding, makes provision for an expanded role for the organisation with regard to supporting and promoting the historical society movement.

The office bearers for 2007/2008 were 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); Hon. Treasurer: Dr Lyn Reid (Dr Lyn Reid, a member of the Historical Society of Northern Territory);¹ Dr Ruth Kerr was Advocacy Delegate. The remaining members of the Committee were:

Ms Margaret Anderson and Ms Kate Walsh (History Trust of South Australia) – from February 2008 when the HTSA replaced the History Council of South Australia.

Ms Jan Barkley-Jack (Royal Australian Historical Society) – until 16 July 2007;

Ms Judy Becker (Canberra and District Historical Society) – from March 2008.

Ms Diana Chessell (History Council of South Australia) – until 27 August 2007;

Mr Manfred Cross (Royal Historical Society of Queensland) – from October 2007;

Mrs Esther Davies (Canberra and District Historical Society);

Ms Yvonne Forrest (Historical Society of the Northern Territory);

Associate Professor Donald Garden (Royal Historical Society of Victoria) - until October 2007);

Mr Don Gibb (Royal Historical Society of Victoria);

Ms Joan Hunt (Royal Historical Society of Victoria) - from December 2007;

Ms Jean Stewart (Royal Historical Society of Queensland) - until September 2007;

Dr Dianne Snowden (Tasmanian Historical Research Association) – from March 2008;

Mr Ian Terry (Tasmanian Historical Research Association) – until February 2008;

Ms Marilyn Truscott (Canberra and District Historical Society) – until March 2008);

Mr Alan Ventress (Royal Australian Historical Society) – from May 2008.

Following his resignation as a delegate, Professor Garden was invited to become the Federation's Advisor and Project Assistant. He agreed and was confirmed in that office.

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

Mr John Davies continued as Administrative Officer and in that role maintained an FAHS office presence in the ACT to comply with the ACT Incorporations Act.

Finance and administration

Following the completion on 30 June 2007 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), an application was made for a GVEHO grant for triennial funding for 2007/2008 – 2009/2010. Due to a change in government policy, we received a grant for the year 2007/2008. Although it was disappointing that GVEHO triennial funding was discontinued, at least for 2007/08, and that our grant was reduced by six percent, I acknowledge with gratitude the confidence the Australian Government has shown in the Federation by providing this grant which enables us to continue to operate at a reduced level. We look forward to continued federal government financial support.

The Administrative Officer, Mr John Davies, continued to be engaged on a part-time basis for 6 hours a week and to maintain the Federation's office presence at his residence. 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.

Member constituent societies' annual subscriptions were increased by 20% during the year. While this will provide some additional funds to cover operational costs, ongoing federal government support is vital to enable us to continue to employ the Administrative Officer, to maintain an office presence in the ACT and to hold a face-to-face AGM and general meeting of delegates each year.

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. Unfortunately, no advertisements were placed.

The minutes of meetings and other records of the Federation since its inception in 1977 have been accumulated and digitised by the Administration Officer. These records will assist in the preparation of the Federation's history, which is being co-authored by Dr Kerr, Dr Donald Garden and Dr Alison Alexander to mark the 30th anniversary of the organisation. Arrangements have been made for hard copies of the records to be deposited at the National Library of Australia Archives.

The History Council of South Australia withdrew from the Federation in September 2007 because of the very limited personnel, financial and other resources available to the Council and the pressure of other commitments, particularly the early planning for the 175th Jubilee of South Australia's European settlement in 2011. The FAHS regretted that the HCSA found it necessary to come to this decision and acknowledges with thanks its support of the Federation and the contribution to its work by HCSA delegates. Fortunately, the History Trust of South Australia (HTSA) agreed to become a constituent member of the Federation to replace the HCSA..

Amendments to the Constitution

At the February 2008 meeting of delegates, the Constitution was amended to allow for the replacement of the History Council of South Australia with the History Trust of South Australia (HTSA) as a constituent member organisation. Ms Margaret Anderson, Chief Executive Officer, and Ms Kate Walsh, Manager History Unit, HTSA are the Trust's delegates.

The Constitution was also changed to reduce the time for the distribution of notices of ordinary general meetings from six weeks to two weeks.

A number of errors in the registered Constitution were amended and accepted by the ACT Registrar-General's Office.

Fellowship Award

A FAHS Fellowship was awarded to Dr Alison Alexander, Hobart, Tasmania. I presented this award at the general meeting of the Tasmanian Historical Research Association held in Hobart on 9 September 2008.

Merit Award

No award for this honour was made this year.

Training and support for historical societies

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

The 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, which was implemented in the previous year, attracted a number of requests for information and advocacy. Issues addressed under this scheme related to public liability, volunteer and general insurance, historical societies' eligibility to receive tax deductible gifts, registration of heritage sites, the teaching of history in schools, and funding for moveable and static heritage. The position with regard to historical societies and tax deductible gifts has been clarified. Options for cheaper insurance have been identified but, due to some pending information, as yet no decision has been made regarding which scheme to promote to our constituents. On other issues related to history and heritage, the Federation has responded in some detail as to the action it is taking in these matters.

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 favourably received and there has been a strong demand for copies (on sale for \$11.00 including GST) from individuals. The stock of this publication is now very low, however, it is now available on the internet via the Federation's website.

Heritage Tourism in Australia: A Guide for Historical Societies: It is very pleasing to report that this online 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 has been completed and is now available via the FAHS website. There has been very positive feedback from some federal and state government agencies, including the New South Wales Heritage Office, who part funded the project, and from various historical societies. The author, Dr Dianne Snowden and the designer, Ms Julie Hawkins, and the Editorial Committee, Dr Garden and Dr Kerr, are to be congratulated for the innovative, informative, easy to read and attractive publication they have produced. The Federation's Administrative Officer, Mr John Davies, uploaded the guide onto the internet and facilitated access to the many websites mentioned in the work by checking all the links and amending those that were problematic. He is to be congratulated for the work he did in this regard. A promotional article prepared by Dr Garden has been widely circulated.

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

FAHS Heritage Handbook - A Guide for Historical Societies

Efforts are being made to obtain funds to update this guide which was published in 2002.

3. My Connected Community

The membership of the Federation-initiated online Australian Historical Societies Support Group has continued to grow over the past year. The Federation has continued to promote the service to historical societies across the country during 2006/2007, but ongoing promotion of what it has to offer is required to expand its usefulness to historical societies. 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. 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. Through her contacts on the National Cultural Heritage Federation, the Regional Cultural Alliance and her meetings with federal government politicians and bureaucrats, Dr Kerr has promoted the activities of the Federation. I addressed the State History Conference of affiliated societies of the Royal Western Australian Historical Society which was held in Mundaring in September 2007. 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. Unfortunately, due to financial constraints, the August 2008 *FAHS Newsletter* will probably be the last hard copy issue. In future, the publication will be distributed via email and will continue to be available on the internet via the Federation's website. Efforts are currently being made to expand the email address list to include as many societies and other organisations as possible.

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 promote the FAHS, 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

The FAHS has continued to be actively involved in the work of the National Cultural Heritage Forum (NCHF) which the Federation considers to be a vital channel for the provision of advice and information to the federal Minister for Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts and his department on heritage-related issues of concern to the community. Although the Regional Cultural Alliance does not yet have a formal governance structure, its aims are maintained and advanced through contact by email and teleconferences. Dr Kerr, our Advocacy Delegate, has been an ongoing participant in these activities.

During the past year, the Dr Kerr, and others have represented the Federation at a number of meetings. These include:

- a. History Summit Round Table discussion arranged by Museums Australia. The meeting was held at the State Library of Victoria on 2 July 2007 (Dr Kerr);
- b. National Cultural Heritage Forum meeting in Canberra on 9-10 August 2007. The Federation considered and submitted agenda items: focussing on a proposed Cultural Heritage Fund, history teaching, and training for volunteers (Dr Kerr);
- c. Marie Hird, Manager and two other officers of the Curriculum Branch of the federal Department of Education, Employment and Work Place Relations regarding the proposed national curriculum, 4 March 2008, Canberra (Mrs Esther Davies and Ms Julia Ryan);
- d. Collections Council of Australia Round Table meeting, Canberra on 21 May (Ms Judy Becker);
- e. Mr Andrew Palfreyman, Senior Heritage Advisor to the federal Minister for Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts, on 11 June 2008 in Sydney regarding the importance of retaining the NCHF, and heritage and funding issues (Dr Garden and Dr Kerr);
- f. Unofficial meeting of the NCHF, 17 June 2008, Canberra (Dr Kerr and Mrs Davies).

The Federation has also made a number of submissions to politicians, federal, state and local government agencies regarding:

- Reinstatement of legislative protection for the Register of the National Estate;
- Proposed developments on the North Bank of the Brisbane River, Brisbane;
- Supporting the Institution of Engineers of Australia's submission to the review of the *Protection of Moveable Heritage Act 1986*;
- Seeking inclusion in the Prime Minister's 2020 Summit;
- Productivity Commission's final report on the conservation of Australia's heritage places 2005;
- Supporting the federal government's proposed program for Summer Schools for Teachers of Australian History;
- The draft of the proposed *Standards and Benchmarks for Museum Practice*.
- The proposed Heritage Care Program;
- Supporting the Collections Council of Australia's Regional Hubs Program;
- Supporting the federal government's proposed new national history curriculum for all students from kindergarten to year 12;
- Supporting the National Brains Trust Forum on Heritage submission to the Prime Minister relating to the omission of heritage from the agenda of the 2020 Summit and making certain recommendations concerning greater support for heritage by government.

Dr Kerr is the FAHS representative on the Australian Library and Information Association's Expert Group on Government Publications but since her appointment there have been no meetings.

I acknowledge with gratitude Ms Julia Ryan's contribution to FAHS advocacy relating to the teaching of history in schools. Ms Ryan is a member of the Canberra and District Historical Society Council and is a former SOSE (Studies of Society and the Environment) consultant in the ACT Education Department.

In conclusion, the Federation has achieved much over the past year including strengthening its role as an advocate and support for historical societies across the nation. 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 final year as President. I am especially grateful to the members of the Executive and the Administrative Officer, Mr John Davies, who have assisted me so ably in ensuring the continued smooth-running of the organisation. Special mention must be made of the contribution of Dr Lyn Reid, Hon Treasurer for the last two years, and of Ms Lennie McCall, Hon. Secretary for the past five years as neither will be seeking re-election this year. Dr Reid and Ms McCall have efficiently performed the duties of their respective offices and I greatly value the support they have given me during their terms of office. Thanks too, to Mrs Esther Davies for editing the *Newsletter* and for her valuable contribution to

submissions and meetings relating to the teaching of history in schools and to Dr Kerr for producing the *E-bulletin* and for her very considerable and important contribution to all the areas of advocacy in which the Federation was involved over the last twelve months.

Finally, I have enjoyed my two terms as President and wish the incoming incumbent and other newly elected office bearers all the best in their future endeavours to sustain the Federation and expand its influence within the political arena and the historical society movement.

Helen Henderson

20 August 2008