

# FEDERATION OF AUSTRALIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETIES INC

## ANNUAL REPORT OF THE PRESIDENT, 2010 - 11

The last year has been a mixed one for Heritage at the national level in Australia.

This was perhaps encapsulated by the title 'Heritage' being dropped from the name of the Commonwealth Department; and by the 2011 federal budget which saw the Heritage Division of SEWPAC lose a substantial part of its budget, resulting in a loss of staff and functions and the Heritage Division being absorbed into the Wildlife and Heritage Division.

All this while, on the positive side, the budget announced \$4 million per annum for three years for Community Heritage Grants, and a significant proportion of that money is expected to be made available for application by historical societies. FAHS has been consulted on this matter and we are waiting for an announcement.

Other positive moves from the government are the ongoing [Australian Heritage Week](#) and that there are early steps towards developing an Australian Heritage Strategy.

There has been little progress on the finalisation of the National Curriculum, but FAHS is proposing to provide advice and information for societies when the role of History becomes clearer.

The FAHS has had a busy and successful year within the limits of our human and financial resources. As I have commented previously, our limited income is a major challenge for the FAHS in such ways as restricting the hours for which we can employ our Executive Officer, limiting our capacity to commission authors to prepare further training manuals for the website, and in restricting the capacity for the Executive to travel in performance of their duties. In our submissions to government we have emphasized the need to be able to employ more staff time for such matters as liaison, writing submissions and coordinating training matters.

In June and July 2011 we have been going through the process of preparing our triennial Operation Plan and applying for our next grant from the Australian government. This has made us very conscious of how much we DO achieve on such a limited budget, using mainly voluntary work by the Executive and Committee, complemented by ten hours per week from our Executive Officer.

This situation brings into stark contrast the level of support that is given to other national heritage organizations, some receiving many times more than the FAHS. Some state bodies also receive considerably more. Consequently, as the organization representing the largest body of voluntary heritage members in Australia (about 100,000), FAHS is seeking a more appropriate level of support.

### **Representation, Cooperation and Promotion.**

I have seen one of my main responsibilities as President to achieve greater recognition by the Australian government and the wider community of the purposes of the FAHS, and to promote the work of the societies and their members whom we represent. To this end I have sought to meet and network with Ministers and other politicians (both within the government and from other parties), political advisers, public servants and representatives of kindred organizations.

I have met with Minister Tony Burke who expresses a keen interest in Heritage matters, although he has abandoned the Heritage Minister's Working Group. We understand that there may be some new form of consultation in the future.

Both the Opposition and Greens have shown support for Heritage, and have raised the issue of the impact of the budget on the Heritage Division and community. FAHS will continue to work with all parties for the best Heritage outcomes.

In the absence of the HMWG, FAHS has been meeting with representatives of Australia ICOMOS and the Australian Council of National Trusts to discuss matters of common concern and have now formed The Australian Heritage Partnership. Professor Carmen Lawrence, Chair of the Australian Heritage Council, has also expressed a wish to provide some form of consultative forum with community and professional organisations.

FAHS continues to be represented upon and support [Blue Shield Australia](#), the cultural heritage disaster preparation and advice organisation.

When opportunities arise, I speak with the media and I meet with historical societies and attend historical societies' conferences. I look forward to doing more of this. In the coming year I have plans to visit the WA conference in York and the NSW conference in Maitland. I hope also to be in Brisbane for the official re-entry of the RHSQ into its headquarters following its disastrous damage coinciding with the Brisbane floods early in 2011.

## **Outreach**

Ruth Kerr and Esther Davies are respectively editors of the *e-Bulletin* and *Newsletter* which have been very successful in communicating with historical societies across the nation, maintaining a flow of information, news and matters of interest and opportunity to historical societies and their members. We continue to encourage all societies to join the [Australian Historical Societies Support Group](#).

FAHS has commissioned a guide to the identification and protection of heritage landscapes that will appear on the website later in 2011. In this way and others, EO John Davies ensures that the [website](#) successfully presents our access and face to the world.

FAHS has been ready to support our member societies and their affiliates in Heritage issues, and when asked has become involved on a number of occasions. We invite societies that are in need of support to approach us.

## **The future - the media will be the message**

Periodically I hear gloomy talk that the membership of historical societies is ageing and in the future they will have difficulty maintaining membership and relevance. I disagree with that and actually see considerable promise. As the population ages the growing number of older citizens will in fact increase the pool of people with the time and interests to contribute, and therefore widen the range of potential volunteers upon whom we can draw for membership – and they will be people with a rich range of professional and technical skills.

As more of us have leisure time to travel, historic and heritage tourism will continue to grow and our museums and exhibitions should increase in the number of visitations. I expect that there will be an accompanying recognition of the work that societies and volunteers do to promote an appreciation of heritage.

However, to be attractive, relevant and most effective, the community history movement will need to adopt new technologies and the new media in presenting their face to the community. Some excellent work is being done by History SA in piloting and promoting such matters as a heritage wiki which offers interactive websites where people can place photographs and other heritage material and exchange information, etc. I suggest that you check out the website of the Mallala & District Historical Committee to show what can be done – and I predict will be done increasingly in the next decade.  
<http://www.nowandthen.net.au/>

This, I predict, is where an important part of our future as a dynamic force in Australian heritage will be found.

## **Acknowledgments**

I am deeply indebted to members of the FAHS Committee for their support in all this, especially the Executive – David Carment, Esther Davies, Ruth Kerr, Nick Drew and Helen Henderson.

I note in particular that Helen Henderson has put in an immense effort revising the Operation Plan and chairing the Fellows Committee, and Ruth Kerr devotes a great amount of time as Honorary Secretary, *e-Bulletin* editor and Advocacy Officer.

John Davies, the Executive Officer, has been an immense support. His careful administration and eye for detail are invaluable.

Don Garden  
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