

FEDERATION OF AUSTRALIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETIES INC ANNUAL REPORT OF THE PRESIDENT, 2013- 2014

The Federation continues its advocacy and promotion work that it has done on behalf of the community history movement in Australia for 37 years. The key work has been through advocacy of heritage conservation, grants for community history, development of a community heritage portal, promotion of the National Heritage Register, an Australian Heritage Strategy and a National Cultural Policy. Particular historical and heritage issues in all states and territories under these banners have been pursued.

We have maintained our program of teleconferences - three per year plus a face-to-face general meeting and an AGM - and a regular communication pattern of emails to administer the Federation's business. The Executive Officer, Mr. John Davies, has supported the Executive effectively, carrying out that work very well with a sense of great accuracy. The public face of the Federation through the website is maintained by the Executive Officer. The *E-Bulletin* is published monthly and the *Newsletter* twice yearly. The vast majority of recipients receive the publications and other communications electronically.

The Federation has taken regular opportunities to communicate with Australian government Ministers and Shadow Ministers on history, heritage and conservation matters. We have also liaised with the Australian Council of National Trusts, National Library and State Libraries as well.

Fellowships: Two fellowships were awarded to Professor Emeritus Allan Powell, Darwin and Dr Stefan Petrow of Hobart. The Fellowship for Dr Petrow will be presented in Hobart and the one to Emeritus Professor Powell as soon as possible. (He had been overseas for some time. It had been intended to be presented in July but Emeritus Professor Powell was indisposed then.)

Constitution: The Federation Council considered and accepted the revised Constitution reviewed and updated in accordance with the *Associations Incorporation Act 1991 (ACT)*. The Constitution was submitted to the relevant department in Canberra and approved.

Community Heritage Portal: This project has been completed but the technological requirements proved extremely difficult for the Department of Environment. The portal has been launched and operates, albeit not to the high standards that the Federation would desire. We have fulfilled our contract which has been audited.

National Cultural Policy: After announcement of the policy by the then Minister for The Arts, Hon Simon Crean MP the policy languished without action. The Federation understands that The Arts portfolio is now considering the policy anew with a view to revitalizing it.

Australian Heritage Strategy: The Federation is pleased that the Australian Heritage Strategy has been advanced by the new Commonwealth government elected in September 2013. Roadshows have been held throughout the capital cities outlining the new government's intention to have an Australian Heritage Strategy and discussing the principles. The Federation is very pleased and has lodged a submission supporting the need for a strategy.

Environment Protection Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC): In 2012 the Australian government considered delegating many of the Commonwealth's powers under the EPBC Act to the States under a regime of *Framework of Standards for Accreditation*. Although the Federation advocated that this not be done the Gillard and Rudd Labor governments proceeded with it. The delegation project has substantially proceeded.

Our Immediate Past President, Assoc. Professor Don Garden has done extensive advocacy work with the Department of Environment on all issues relating to history and heritage concerning our constituents and their legislative responsibilities. Assoc. Professor Garden and President, Dr Ruth Kerr have also advocated these issues personally with the Minister, Hon Greg Hunt MP.

History Teaching: Julian Ryan and Esther Davies have led a project to prepare guidelines re the local use of historical societies in teaching the history curriculum – Progress on developing the framework of a submission for a grant to fund the preparation of these guidelines. A report has been received on meetings with some historical societies in Queensland.

Funding: In the May 2014 Commonwealth Government Budget it was announced that the Federation will receive \$80,000 per year over three years. This is a major outcome of our advocacy over several years. A plan to fund an Outreach Officer has been developed as well as increasing the hours of our Executive Officer. The Federation also received a Grant for Voluntary Environmental Sustainable and Heritage Organizations (GVESH) grant and had a contract for the Portal with the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities (SEWPAC).

Surveys: The Federation does not have funding for undertaking surveys but advocates that the Australian Bureau of Statistics undertake this for a survey of the activities of cultural and history groups in the community. The Federation's core roles are advocacy and promotion of community history and it continues to do this with government admirably.

Other Issues: The Federation supported the retention of the current Mitchell Library Reading Room in the State Library of New South Wales and spoke with the State Librarian and wrote letters about it. The Reading Room space is being retained. The Federation has also advocated the retention and upgrade of skilled staff. This advocacy is ongoing.

The Federation wrote to the Minister for The Environment advocating retention of primary source material within the department's library which is to be closed. Our request has been successful to the extent that primary source material is to be retained either with the department or the National Archives of Australia.

Thanks: I express my thanks to all the delegates for their contributions in meetings and advice out of session, particularly the executive, particularly the Immediate Past President, Assoc. Professor Don Garden for his advocacy work in Canberra with the Commonwealth Department of Environment. The work of the Federation on all levels is recorded by the Hon Secretary in the Agendas and Minutes in accordance with the Business / Operational Plan.

Dr Ruth S. Kerr
President
9 October 2014