

# **FEDERATION OF AUSTRALIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETIES INC**

## **ANNUAL REPORT OF THE PRESIDENT, 2011 - 12**

This will be my last annual report as President. I have been very fortunate to hold the position over the last four years as it has been stimulating and rewarding, and I have greatly appreciated the opportunity to meet so many of those volunteers who work for our history and heritage. I have been constantly impressed by what they do and achieve.

I was fortunate to attend the WA societies' conference in York in September and the NSW societies' conference in East Maitland in October.

However, it is sad to say that the last year has been a very mixed one, principally because of mixed support for historical and cultural heritage from the present Commonwealth government.

On the positive side, we have seen the introduction of the Your Community Heritage grants which are injecting good sums into community heritage, including the Heritage Portal scheme.

FAHS has signed a contract to participate in (at least) the early stage of the development of the Heritage Portal. It will involve a considerable amount of work, but there will be financial and other benefits for FAHS and there should be a significant promotion and facilitation of community history and heritage.

Another positive is the development of an Australian Heritage Strategy, which is ongoing.

On the other hand, cutbacks to the Heritage Division have meant that the administration of the above initiatives has been slow and inefficient.

FAHS has had a significant reduction in its GVESHO grant which reflects a general trend towards greater support for environmental matters over heritage matters within SEWPAC. As I commented last year, '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'.

The reduction in our GVESHO grant will hit us hard and the limitations of our human and financial resources will become more apparent. It will be necessary to reduce expenditure in such ways as reducing time demands on our Executive Officer, and moving to Skype teleconferences. The President and Advocacy Delegate will find it more difficult to travel to Canberra and to visit member societies.

The Office for the Arts within the Department of Prime Minister has also been disappointing. The National Cultural Policy initiative has faltered or been abandoned.

The Arts Office was initially supportive of FAHS undertaking a survey of collection management software and the development of suggestions and guidelines for what is required. However, the proposal appears to have run into resistance and Arts no longer shows any interest.

### **FAHS Networking**

FAHS is recognized as the one of the principal bodies representing and promoting cultural heritage in Australia and this has given us the opportunity to represent our constituents at the highest level.

However, an equally valuable contribution is the facilitation of networking between members of the community history and heritage movement across Australia. The sharing of knowledge, experiences and opportunities is very important and I believe is increasingly recognized among our member societies.

The three main avenues of communication are the *eBulletin*, *Newsletter* and website, and we owe much gratitude to Ruth Kerr, Esther Davies and John Davies who are responsible for them.

Later in 2012 we will publish online our latest training manual, a guide to the identification and protection of heritage landscapes. It is hoped that FAHS will be in a position to continue to produce such guides into the future.

### **Acknowledgments**

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

I note in particular that Helen Henderson put in an immense effort revising the Operation Plan and chairing the Fellows Committee, Ruth Kerr has devoted a great amount of time as Honorary Secretary, *E-Bulletin* editor and Advocacy Officer, and Esther Davies has done sterling work with the *Newsletter*. Nick Drew is always efficient and effective in managing our financial matters.

As I have commented previously, John Davies, the Executive Officer, has been an immense support. His careful administration and eye for detail are invaluable and the FAHS is deeply indebted to him for his work.

Don Garden  
July 2012