



President's Report 2016-17

Since I took up the position of President on 1 May last year there have been some challenges as well as many rewarding moments.

The first major task I faced was a challenge to the validity of the election of the Vice President by an unsuccessful candidate for the position. After examining the original election-related documents I determined that the pre-election timelines had not been breached and that the election of the Vice President was valid.

One outcome of the election was that the Association was left without a Secretary. This was an untenable situation as this position has statutory obligations under the Association's Rules and the Committee cannot operate without the position being filled. I therefore would like to thank the Vice President, Elizabeth Gilfillan, for agreeing to take on both positions in which she has served with outstanding dedication.

In August last year we received legal advice from the Friends of the Royal Brisbane Botanic Gardens and Sherwood Arboretum that our Rules did not permit more than one representative of a member group to be a member of the Association's Committee. At the time the Friends of the Geelong Botanic Gardens had two representatives on the Committee.

The Committee asked the Geelong Friends' Committee to address the situation however they were unwilling to do so and subsequently chose to resign from the Association.

That left two vacant positions with one of the representatives from the Friends of the Royal Melbourne Gardens having resigned in July.

One of the vacant positions was filled by Robyn Saunders from the Friends of Benalla Botanic Gardens, which will be convening our next biennial conference in 2018.

The requirement for a Member to only have one representative on the Committee has been made explicit in the amendments to the Rules that are being proposed in the Special Resolution later in the agenda.

I see the Committee as having three equally important objectives for the coming year;

- secure our future funding through either grants, philanthropy funding or some other mechanism.
- concentrate much less on internal processes and much more on what we can do for our members.
- ensure the success of our 2018 Conference in Benalla.

Regarding the first objective of securing our funding, as we are all aware the Association operates on the smell of an oily rag with a total expenditure each year of around \$16000-\$18000. Our three streams of revenue are the gift from the Handbury Trust of \$10000 per year, membership subscriptions of about \$5500 per year and in conference years about \$6000 in proceeds from the Conference.

Unfortunately proceeds from the Geelong Conference last year were a disappointing \$500, well below that from previous conferences.

From next year the oily rag becomes smaller with the last donation of \$10000 from the Handbury Trust having just been received and not being renewed in 2017-18.

This means that the Committee will need to redouble our efforts to find a donor willing to contribute a similar or greater amount to us to keep us operating at the same level as we have for the past few years.

In this regard we have had some preliminary contact with a philanthropy sector regarding a possible donor. Things have gone quiet but we are hopeful of an outcome that could see us having funds for small projects, internships and the like to be undertaken by members.

On the second objective of concentrating less on internal processes and doing more for our members, it must be recognised that the Association had taken a reputational hit and the nature of the issues being dealt with were mostly about internal matters. This was costly in terms of time and energy but I am confident that is behind us and the Committee can begin to look more to the needs of our members.

The 2018 Conference in Benalla will be important in restoring the reputation of the Association and it is vital that is a success both from the point of view being a well run, informative and enjoyable event as well as a financial success.

One achievement stands out over the past few months and that is the birth of our fabulous new website as well as the more recent introduction of our Mailchimp service which is essentially a regular email newsletter. Both are products of cooperation and consultation between our Administrative Assistant, Lisa Tuck, our Vice President/Secretary, Elizabeth Gilfillan and the team at Wordsworth Communications, our IT contractor.

Another achievement has been the production of our newsletter *Eucalypt*. It is a high quality, informative production ably overseen by our own Ann Rawson and is a testament to the resilience of our Association that it is so widely read and enjoyed. I cannot thank Ann enough for her efforts.

I cannot finish without thanking Elizabeth Gilfillan, Kathy Wright and the rest of the Committee for their outstanding support and contributions over the past year especially during the turbulence following the elections. I especially must thank Elizabeth and Lisa Tuck for their counsel and advice.

Yours Sincerely,



Dennis Ayliffe
AAFBG President

20th May 2017