



AAFBG AGM April 2021

Report for the Year April 2020 to March 2021

Our last AGM was held in October 2020, deferred from April of that year and held in a virtual environment. The current AGM is back in the usual month of April, held immediately after the end of the reporting year, and here we are in a hybrid environment of face-to-face and virtual. Maybe things are starting to become normal again.

At last year's AGM I commented on the drought and the wildfires that challenged so many Friends groups, compounded by the social disruption of the pandemic shutdowns. And now our environment has just delivered the trifecta in some eastern states, re-affirming the need for communities to be resilient and be prepared for almost anything. Governments have spent amounts never dreamt of before to shore up businesses and the economy in general. The experts tell us the economy is showing resilience and that our prospects for economic recovery are good. As important as the cash injections are, we should not overlook the contribution by the unpaid workforce, the volunteers, who in every community continue to make a difference.

National Volunteers Week will be held next month across the country, staged by Volunteering Australia. This designated Week in May is designed to acknowledge the contribution of Australia's six million volunteers. Each year these volunteers are estimated to give over 600 million hours of their time, their skills and their experience. While that sounds like a lot, it equates to 100 hours per person per year – 2 hours each week. Recent evidence suggests that two-thirds of those volunteers stopped volunteering in 2020 because of the pandemic. A study quoted by Volunteering Australia showed that “social purpose” organisations (ie those for whom commercial profit is not the driver) continue to lose one in four volunteers due to illness, caution or caring responsibilities.

We also know that while volunteers come at no direct cost, volunteers usually need orientation, supervision, and the infrastructure through which they make their contribution – and all of that has a cost – maybe not obvious but still a cost to someone.

Volunteering Australia suggests we need to reimagine how volunteers, and the organisations they help, do things and have launched a “Reinvigorating Volunteering Action Plan” to begin the work. There is a view in business circles that the so-called “Rinse and Repeat” approach is not enough when re-establishing an organisation after a major adverse event. Going back to doing the same things in the same ways is not always the best way to keep moving ahead.

Quoting the CEO of Volunteering Australia “...volunteers make a huge contribution to Australia's social and economic well-being and are now needed more than ever to ensure stability and recovery in the wake of COVID-19.”

The AAFBG represents a small segment of those 6 million volunteers and provides a forum for volunteer workers in the gardens, parks and the arboreta that are found in most towns and cities. We like to celebrate volunteers. Our annual Handbury Awards are one way in which we can acknowledge exceptional contributions to gardens, parks and arboreta. Since launching the Handburys a couple of years ago, the response has been very heartening, and we have more Handburys to present later today. Clearly, a number of our member organisations are keen to acknowledge their own volunteers. These annual awards are named in honour of Dr Geoffrey Handbury, a generous benefactor to the Association. We are delighted to welcome Penny Fowler, representing the Handbury Family, to make the presentations for us this year.

The task of running the AAFBG falls to the Management Committee and I thank each of them for their own contribution – always as willing volunteers. AAFBG will, through its Management Committee and its member organisations, continue to have access to a group of enthusiastic and willing people to help the Association to bring value to its members and to grow its capacity to do even more to advance the objectives of the Association.

Wayne Harvey
April 2021