

**FEDERATION OF AUSTRALIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETIES
PRESIDENT'S ANNUAL REPORT, OCTOBER 2009**

I see the role of President of the FAHS as having three priority areas. They are:

- to lobby at the federal level for recognition of the invaluable contribution of community historical and heritage societies and museums to the collection and presentation of Australian cultural heritage, and to gain financial and other support.
- to facilitate communication and the sharing of experiences and expertise across the community heritage movement.
- to provide assistance to societies where it is needed and in the development of training manuals.

The last year has been a particularly active one for FAHS business, rather more than I expected when I was elected to be President in October 2008, and I believe it has been generally successful in these objectives.

On the first priority, the FAHS' financial position has been improved by being awarded a significant increase in our grant from the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts under the Grants to Voluntary Environment and Heritage Organisations. This enabled an extension and improvement in the employment of our Administrative Officer, and freed his time as well as that of the President and other committee members to tackle the issues that are central to the community history and heritage movement. As the grant is on a triennial basis, we will be in a good position for the next two years as well.

The Minister decided early in the year to establish a Heritage Minister's Working Group, an advisory committee focussed on built heritage and its contribution to heritage tourism. I was invited to become a member of the Working Group which has met on a number of occasions in Canberra, Sydney and Melbourne to offer advice in the development of heritage tourism in Australia. It has also offered the opportunity to raise a range of other heritage issues with the Minister and the officers of DEWHA. All this is lifting the profile of the FAHS and helping us to promote our causes.

Quite unexpectedly the HMWG members also found themselves playing a role in the distribution of the \$60 million that was allocated for heritage under the Jobs Fund in the Economic Stimulus Package. Some \$10 million was set aside for community heritage groups and the FAHS was invited to assist in the evaluation of the applications from historical societies. The successful applicants have been announced recently, bringing great joy to many societies. There was a success rate of about 50%. There was insufficient funding to meet all needs, but most of the applicants who missed out did so because they were deemed ineligible under the criteria. In particular, the grants were essentially for built heritage and those societies who proposed projects more related to their collections were not successful.

This experience has reinforced our awareness of the need to promote support for 'the distributed national collection', the diverse documents, images, ephemera and objects that are such an important part of our heritage and so many of which are held by community societies. We need also to encourage the Commonwealth, which is mainly focussed on national heritage, to play a bigger role in regional heritage. The FAHS is working towards these ends, and I will be meeting the Minister in mid-November to discuss these and other issues relevant to the work of community history and heritage societies.

On the second priority, I have been well supported by an excellent Committee whose members have given generously of their time in taking on responsibilities and facilitating communication between our nearly 1000 societies. The eBulletin and Newsletter have been very successful, and we have encouraged all societies to join the Australian Historical Societies Support Group. I have encouraged all delegates to take on a 'portfolio' responsibility in order to share the work of the FAHS and to ensure that each aspect has someone responsible for it. I thank you all for the contribution you have made.

Minister Garrett very generously gave the FAHS a small grant to update the FAHS website, and this was skilfully undertaken by our Administrative Officer, John Davies, and went online in August. It provides a clear and coherent insight into the activities of the FAHS, as well as providing links to our publications, our member societies and other resources.

During the year I have visited most capitals and met with local delegates and other society members. I am hoping in the coming year to make more extended and official visits to Tasmania, South Australia, the ACT and the Northern Territory.

The third priority objective, on the development of advice and training, has been the area which has seen less progress. Our revised website and other communication initiatives make a valuable contribution, but we have not been able to produce further training manuals. This is substantially because early in the year DEWHA suggested that they would be in a position to fund one or two manuals, but when their financial position later deteriorated they were unable to do so. I have not yet found other sources of funding but will treat that as a priority in the coming year.

My thanks to all the delegates and members of the Committee for their time and efforts over the past year. Specifically, I wish to acknowledge Ruth Kerr, Helen Henderson, Ian Jack, David Carment, Nick Drew and Esther Davies who as office bearers and/or willing volunteers have made extra contributions when called upon.

I wish to express my particular appreciation to John Davies, the Administrative Officer, for his very conscientious work. He has often put in longer hours than he is paid for and plays a central role in most aspects of our work.

Don Garden
October 2009