

FRIENDS OF THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL BOTANIC GARDENS INC

President's Report for the year ended 30 June 2016

I would like to welcome all of you to the 2016 Annual General Meeting of the Friends of the Australian National Botanic Gardens, and my second as President. The Friends provide community support for these beautiful Gardens – ‘helping the Gardens grow’. I want to tell you what we have been doing over the past twelve months and mention some future challenges. I will do this in the context of the old strategic plan for the Friends, which has just been replaced. Once more, the Friends have had a very active and successful year working hard to support the Gardens.

Public Promotion and Engagement

The first goal in our strategic plan deals with public promotion and engagement.

Looking at some high points of the year:

- the Thursday Talks raised just over \$5,000 in 2015/16 and were attended by 3,100 people; and
- the success of the 2016 summer concerts, attended by around 6,600 people, was greatly helped by a generous sponsorship from Maliganis Edwards Johnson, and our continuing relationship with Icon Water. The Friends also helped out with another sell-out Luminous Botanicus.

Partnership with the Gardens

The second goal in our strategic plan is partnership with the Gardens. This partnership is close and constructive.

To touch on some developments:

- we had a new Guides intake for 2016, with a joint training program run in March and April. We now have 70 guides who, as well as leading the twice daily guided walks, take Flora tours, booked walks and booked Flora tours. The guides make a considerable daily contribution to promoting the Gardens and understanding of our native flora;
- the Friends assumed responsibility for the production of the former *In Flower This Week*, now re-badged, very successfully, as *Flowers Fruit and Foliage*. You will find copies of the new beautifully-illustrated guide around the Gardens and on the Friends website. I can tell you that Barbara Daly is very taken with the product; and
- we continued to support the annual intake of botanic interns at the Centre for Australian National Biodiversity Research.

I should make specific mention of the treehouse gazebo project, which is a partnership involving the Friends (incl the Public Fund) and the Gardens). It involves creating a unique, magical, whimsical site-specific ‘gazebo among the trees’, which would be elevated within the vegetation or tree canopy level (probably around three to four metres off the ground).

The project consultant ran an expression of interest this year from which four artists were chosen to prepare designs. Gardens management is now working, with input from the Friends, through a process to choose an artist and design for the project. Once the decision is made, we plan a fundraising campaign for our Public Fund featuring the successful design and some other recent Public Fund activities.

Raising Funds

Another Goal is to raise funds to manage the Friends organisation and support the development of the Gardens as the national showcase of Australia's plant diversity. The Treasurer will mention many of the ways in which the Friends raised money during the year in her report.

It's important of course to put the money we raise to good use supporting the Gardens. This year we have supported such things as:

- another two artworks to the Gardens from this year's botanical art exhibition;
- attendance by two Seed Bank volunteers of the National Science Seed Forum held at Mount Annan last March;
- a donation to the Roger Good Alpine Development Fund;
- the ANBG Library; and
- we have made changes to the schools' photographic competition in the hope of attracting more entrants.

The Public Fund of the Friends supported the Aboriginal Plant Use Trail that was launched in December 2015. And very recently the Public Fund agreed to support two other very interesting Gardens project proposals:

- conservation of high altitude climate change-threatened tropical rainforest flora; and
- digitisation of lichen type specimens held at the CANBR cryptogam herbarium.

During the last year, the Project Committee has been less active than usual in approving new Friends project support for the Gardens. When we made the very large commitment last year to underwrite the treehouse gazebo, it was agreed with the Gardens that the Friends would observe existing commitments but restrict new ones until the financial result was clear. As a result there was limited approval of new projects in 2015-16, including the purchase of new computers for the BRC. There was also some expenditure on projects that had been approved in the previous financial year. And there are one or two other garden projects under development to which the Friends have made a commitment.

A small group of Friends provided advice to the Gardens on the development of the bushland precinct project and will continue to be involved with it.

Being lively, stimulating, rewarding and dedicated Friends of the ANBG

Finally we aim to create a strong identity of being lively, stimulating, rewarding and dedicated Friends of the ANBG.

One of the things that we need to do for the health of the organisation is retain our existing Friends and attract new ones. Our membership figures this year are very similar to this stage last year, with 1,567 memberships comprising 2,143 individuals.

Our Membership Team has been central to our successful engagement with our members, and I would like to thank them for their hard work. This includes the contribution still made by Les Fielke who provides technical support to Membership from his new home on the central NSW coast and also various exciting holiday locations. Without Membership, and also the web team, we would not know who our members are, nor could we communicate with them.

We do of course offer a range of services that enable our members to engage with the Gardens. There are many ways old and new:

- we work hard to keep you in touch with what is going on, through Fronds, the broadcast emails and the website;
- we are fortunate to have various membership discounts. I should mention that the Hellenic Club will not be continuing to run Floresco from early next year and I would like to thank the cafe staff warmly for their support over the years;

- the various special interest groups provide many opportunities to the Friends. The Plant Science Group is running a field research project with the ANBG to help ensure the long-term survival of two Fan *Grevillea* populations (*Grevillea ramosissima*) on ANBG land. And the numbers are such that the Friends now have a third botanic art group, which meets on the weekend. It has room for some more members;
- we continue to have special parking arrangements for Friends who volunteer; and
- there are many Friends who don't have time to volunteer but enjoy visiting this very special place.

How we manage ourselves

One of the things that we have been busy with in recent years is working on how we manage ourselves. The new Constitution is now in effect and our new strategic plan will take us through to 2020.

Our accounts are now on MYOB, and work is underway on our archiving and retention policy. We will shortly implement confidentiality declarations for the new Council, and we now have a sponsorship policy.

Several of us also attended the AAFBG conference in Geelong in April. Our Friends group makes a strong contribution to AAFBG. I really valued the opportunity to talk to counterparts at the conference and in some cases afterwards, whether face-to-face or by email. We all face similar challenges and it is good to share ideas about managing friends' organisations and contributing to our respective botanic gardens.

Looking ahead

There are some challenges for the future:

- we need to assess our IT needs, especially any gaps between what we have now and likely future needs, in areas such as membership, fundraising and volunteer management; and
- the 2017 Australasian guides conference will open in 12 months, an important opportunity for us to showcase the Gardens to a broader group of guides, but also requiring a major effort on the part of our guides.

I should also mention the need for us to attract and retain volunteers for our social events and activities committee. Many of our long-standing volunteers have concluded (as is their right) that it is time for them to step down from active volunteering. We are not well-placed to continue the many popular social activities and events that we have run in the past. We had, for example, to cancel the annual Friends dinner we had planned for early October. There are also popular external excursions to places such as the National Library and Parliament House that we can't offer at this stage. So, if you know anyone who might enjoy helping out, suggest they make contact with us.

Finally, I would also like to thank everyone from the Gardens who makes us feel so welcome. It is a privilege to be involved here. I would like to thank all who support us by becoming Friends, and those who find time to volunteer in the many activities. And today some people are now leaving Council. I would like to thank them for their contributions and look forward to welcoming their successors.

Thank you very much

Lesley Jackman
President

19 October 2016