

25th Annual General Meeting, 10 October 2013

President's Report

This is my third report as President of the Friends. It has been an interesting and rewarding year, with some challenges to meet. The Friends is a voluntary group that is dedicated to the Australian National Botanic Gardens. I am grateful to the number of members who give their time freely to support our various activities.

Our membership numbers continue to grow. At the end of September there were a total of 1437 memberships. When an adjustment is made for family memberships that means we have at least 1826 individual members. This compares to figures of 1374 and 1768 at end August 2012. This continued growth is encouraging and I hope it can continue. Our membership team is dedicated and does a great job on this important task.

Some key matters from the past year are

- The Plant Science Group was formed. This is intended to act as an umbrella for Friends involvement in research programs at the gardens and to advise on support for such programs. It is bringing together those who have a particular interest in the research side of the Gardens and it will provide opportunities to expand members' knowledge of the technical aspects of native plants. The series of technical talks established for the BRC facilitators continued throughout the year.
- The Friends continue to support research activities at the Gardens, including in relation to the seedbank (including the alpine project, the seedy volunteers and assistance to the Australian Seedbank Partnership). Assistance is also being provided to the most important stock take currently underway for the living collection.
- The 6th Botanic Art Exhibition was held from 8 March to 7 April. The theme for the exhibition was Celebration of Native Flora, in keeping with Canberra's centenary. The Friends continued the policy of purchasing one of the artworks to donate to the Gardens for display. This year the painting was by Wendy Antoniak of *Brachychiton populneus* (Kurrajong). These paintings are being hung in the Dickson Room.
- A full program of Summer Sounds concerts was put in place and is covered in the Treasurer's report.
- The new Red Centre garden is the major recent development at ANBG and will open at the beginning of November for the Bush Capital celebration. Our centenary gift to the gardens is a central feature that will be known as the red centre gathering place. This uses cutting edge technology to put in place an original artwork by Teresa Purla McKeenan from Central Australia.
- The Growing Friends held sales in spring and autumn and the high standard of plants offered was maintained.
- A Family Picnic Day was held on 7 April, with a special focus on recognizing senior members of the community. The day was opened by the ACT Minister, Shane Rattenbury, and involved a wide range of Friends and community groups.
- A new intake of volunteer guides occurred during the year. Approximately 20 new guides have been trained and are going through their final assessments before taking up full guiding duties. During June to August the guides provided 'Turned On' walks, which attracted significantly larger numbers than the normal walks.
- The program of Thursday talks has continued with a range of very interesting speakers. In particular there has been a series of 'Centenary Chats' to mark the Centenary of Canberra.
- A Centenary dinner was held at Floresco on 21 February. The menu was based on what might have been on a menu one hundred years ago with a talk by Canberra historian, Dr Lenore Coltheart. There were a number of other activities organized by the Social Committee, including a visit to Parliament house Gardens and to the ANBG nursery.
- The Eucalypt Discovery Walk was launched by Murray Fagg on 17 May. This was developed by a small team from ANBG staff and the Friends. A guide brochure has been produced and has proved so popular that a reprint has just been approved by the Friends.
- We have been trying to improve short term communication with members by sending broadcast emails out when necessary. After a few teething problems with the formatting this now seems to be working well technically. We are still thinking about how often this should be done and what should be included.
- Improvements to the Friends website continue to be made and we now have a small dedicated team who do their best to maintain the quality and keep the website up to date. Feedback and suggestions for the content are always welcome to website@friendsanbg.org.au
- The Flora Explorer electric bus donated by the Friends was used throughout the year and has become a popular attraction for visitors, especially as it opens up the Gardens for those who have limitations on mobility.
- Our Fronds team maintains their high standards with 3 great issues this year.

In June this year the Gardens made a proposal to the Friends Council that volunteers become involved in servicing the Visitor Centre. Council considered this proposal very carefully, especially from the perspective of the appropriate balance between volunteers and paid staff. Overall Council had to acknowledge that the Gardens is

under pressure for resources, as are most institutions at the moment, and in the end the horticultural and research functions are the highest priority and where staff must be maintained at all costs. Council also noted that many other institutions, including major botanic gardens, use volunteers in this role. In addition I must say that I see this role as potentially a most rewarding and interesting one for our volunteers, who will be meeting, greeting and directing visitors to the Gardens. While not completely at ease with the proposal Council agreed that the best course was to cooperate with the Gardens request on the basis that we will review the situation at the end of this year in the light of experience and the situation at that time.

Looking at the year ahead I can see a continuation of the active role of the Friends. Some highlights are:

- As a major contribution to the Centenary of Canberra the Gardens will hold a Bush Capital Celebration on the weekend of 2/3 November. This will showcase the Gardens and in particular the new Red Centre Garden through a wide variety of activities involving a number of organizations and include exhibitions, stalls, roving guides and guided walks and special activities for all the family. A highlight will be a ticketed concert on the evening of Saturday 2 November.
- Seven guides will attend the 13th Australasian Conference of Botanic Gardens Volunteer Guides in Christchurch at the end of October.
- A full program of Summer Sounds (8 concerts) is planned for January 2014, hopefully with the weather favouring us. We are anticipating that some new sponsors will come on board and negotiations are advanced by the Gardens.
- The 7th BAG exhibition will be held in March/April 2014
- The Growing friends plant sales will continue, with the next sale scheduled for 9 November and a further sale planned for the Autumn
- The Social Activities group is planning an interesting range of activities over the next year, including the annual dinner at Floresco in February.
- An exhibition focused on Eucalypts is being put together for the second half of 2014. A further grant from the Dahl trust has been sought to support this exhibition.
- The Projects Committee will be looking in October at about 8 proposals for projects in the Gardens over the next year or so. Some restraint will be necessary, given the large grant provided for the Red Centre artwork in 2013.
- The Photographic group is hoping to mount its first exhibition in January/February next year.
- The technical talks will continue under the umbrella of the Plant Science group and are open to all members with an interest in the more technical aspects of native plant science. A review of the BRC is underway and should be considered before the end of the year.

The above list is by no means exhaustive and details will be available on the website, in Fronds and through occasional emails. Some of the activities need volunteers so whatever members can do to answer calls for such support is greatly appreciated.

Unfortunately it is unlikely that the resources available to gardens management will increase in the medium term at least. However the Friends will be making representations to the new Minister and the Department to do what we can to raise awareness of the importance of the Gardens. Any opportunity members get to reinforce those views would be greatly appreciated. We will also be working with the Gardens to seek additional funds from non Government sources and our tax deductible Public Fund will be part of those considerations.

I want to conclude by thanking all those who have given their time and expertise during the past year. There are too many to name but I can only say that running such a large totally voluntary organization would be quite impossible without such support. We can see from the information above just how many things the Friends are doing, all of which depend on our willing volunteers.

We have nominations for the small number of positions becoming vacant this year on Council. I would just note that there will be a number of key vacancies at the next AGM, including the President, as I will have completed my statutory two terms. I would ask members to seriously consider taking a position on Council. It is very interesting and rewarding and not an excessive burden on your time. If anyone is interested to know more please get in touch with me.

Lastly, I must thank our retiring Vice President, Barbara Podger. Barbara has been on Council for a number of years and has made outstanding contributions, including to the guides, social activities and to Fronds. Barbara is standing down from Council but assures me she will continue her involvement with the Friends activities.

David Coutts
President