

PRESIDENT'S REPORT FRIENDS OF THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL BOTANIC GARDENS 2018/19

What a year it has been for me and the Friends!

Despite my predecessor Lesley Jackman briefing me handsomely it has been a steep learning curve.

And on top of that much has been afoot. It may look like ducks on the pond but much paddling has been under way.

With 2020 looming as the Garden's 50th Anniversary and the Friends' 30th Anniversary there has been a lot of planning, and spending. In the latter regard we have developed more simple Guidelines and encouraged more proposals from the Executive Director and for projects which meet the funding objectives of the Friends in support of Garden projects and I want to thank David Coutts and his team for managing this. We now have a raft of good projects in science and education as well as the development of projects that will roll out especially during 2020, but also on into future years.

One specific project of interest is to support the important work of Professor Adrienne Nicotra of ANU and a Trustee of the Friends' Public Fund, whom attendees at Thursday Talks will have heard. Adrienne in association with other universities and government agencies is carrying out a vital long-term project that will unlock secrets of plant behaviour in this rapidly changing environment. I think her work is absolutely crucial to dealing with the potential climatic disaster that is facing the world's plants.

As far as reporting on the health of the Association I am pleased to say that it is in robust good health from both membership and financial perspectives. As well it is delivering a huge range of "services" largely through its many Special Interest Groups who continue to do great work. I would like to say a special thank you to all the volunteers who dedicate so much time and expertise in support of the Friends.

The most 'public' of the Special Interest Groups, The Fronds Team and their beautiful publication, the Growing Friends and their massive sales, the Photographic Group and the Art Group are probably the best known and I thank them for their work. But the more low key Groups like the Seedy Vols, and the efforts of Wendy Antoniak to get out our Monthly E-Newsletter, along with the truly subterranean efforts of David More and others trying to keep our creaky IT system up to date, Jan Finley and her team that keep the Thursday Talks running deserve mention.

Members are for the most part not aware of the huge amount of work done by Lesley Harland and Pam Cooke, our Membership team who are totally 'behind the scenes' but keep us functioning as a membership organisation. Through them this last year, I was pleased to write to many people, for the most part, again, you would not be aware of, among our members who make significant tax deductible donations to the work of Friends which of course goes to the Gardens.

One activity which has been ongoing behind the scenes has been led by David More for a lengthy period and more recently by Alan Henderson, involves the search for a modern IT system for membership/donations etc. Sadly in the various 'beauty parades' that have been run, there have been a number of promising 'candidates' but further discussions with fraternal and other organisations have shown all of them to have failings which prevented them meeting our needs. Nevertheless the search goes on and I am deeply grateful for the participants in this working Group. We do want a good system for our needs.

The Council itself is a wonderful group of people at present who put in labour and intellectual firepower on a weekly basis to solve problems and deal with the running of the organisation. All of

them step up when an issue arises to contribute in various ways. But I especially want to mention the Executive of Linda Beveridge, Jann Ollerenshaw and Helen Elliot who I am most in touch with, sometimes multiple times per day, and thank them sincerely for their support and guidance.

The upcoming new projects are very varied and will require us to spend some \$295,000 over the next 3 – 5 years, the highlights are:

- A Hearing Loop in the Theatrette, while I did NOT suggest this I certainly appreciate it and can assure you for us hearing impaired this is one of the best I have experienced.
- A special book on the Gardens for the 50th anniversary next year, written and heavily illustrated by Murray Fagg and others, you will want to buy many copies as gifts I hope.
- An iconic display of spectacular large plants near the entrance and in other prominent parts of the gardens, this great proposal came from the Staff of the Gardens and we hope will serve to emphasise to passers-by that THIS IS A BOTANIC GARDEN!
- A contract for a specialist science communicator to put together a program of science communication relevant to the Gardens. It is essential that we publicise much more the scientific work going on in this institution to all sorts of communities.
- A video exhibition wall outside the entrance to the Theatrette. This will be used to promote features of the Gardens on current display, to educate about activities both in and through the outreach of the gardens to visitors, many of whom use the 'facilities' besides this space.
- Our Public Fund will support interpretation for the new Banksia garden, to open in 2020. This will become a 'national resource' I am sure.
- The Public Fund will assist bringing an international speaker for the Australasian Seed Science conference in Canberra in April 2020 and other engagements thereby establishing the status of the ANBG in the scientific community.
- Finally the Public Fund will support a special seed exhibition in the Visitor Centre for the Seed Science conference and I hope this will generally lead to our Members as well as visitors getting a good handle on the importance of seed science and the role of the new Seed Bank we are working towards.

All these are in addition to support for the major capital project, The Conservatory as well as numerous smaller projects that lead to staff development and public education about the work of the ANBG. On top of these projects funds have been used to support the great work of some of our Special Interest Groups such as the Growing Friends upgrade for their shade houses, necessary as this site is now publicly exposed with the development of the Banksia Garden, and a new approach should lead to better management of the seedlings so valuable to their work.

I have to of course acknowledge the engagement and collegiality shown by the Executive Director, Dr Judy West, the General Manager Peter Byron, and all the staff I meet and work with. It really is a pleasure to do so.

A number of us feel that the Gardens tends to be or is perceived in need of more support from the Federal Government. It has had significant staff and funding cutbacks for general operations over the last decade. I know from my business experience you cannot run down your assets without eventually the operation losing its status and attractiveness to the public. To this end I have written to Minister Sussan Ley, Minister for the Environment, seeking the opportunity to put a case for increased support for the Gardens. This is a national asset at least as important as many of the other institutions in Canberra like the War Memorial and the National Gallery and it needs high level care.

So I trust that you the members are comfortable with the direction of the Friends organisation, and I am always open to critical comment. But from where I sit it has been a very busy year with some

great outcomes. I thank you the Members, my colleagues on Council, and the Staff of the Gardens for achieving the outcomes laid out in our Management Plan.

I recently attended the Botanic Gardens of Australia and New Zealand (BGANZ) Annual Conference which was a rich and wonderful ideas packed event. But I must say that the Australian National Botanic Gardens and its staff are well up there in innovation. Just imagine what we could do with a few more resources!

Your Membership alone supports the projects we fund significantly, as does attendance at events and the icing on the cake is the tax deductible donations. Let us see if we can redouble our efforts for the next 50 years.

Max Bourke AM

President

9 September 2019.