



Friends of the
Australian National Botanic Gardens

Friends of the National Botanic Gardens Inc.

GPO Box 1777, Canberra ACT 2601 • ABN 57 096 639 836

p 02 6250 9548 • e info@friendsanbg.org.au • w www.friendsanbg.org.au

President's Report
Annual General Meeting
31 October 2017

Introduction

I would like to welcome all of you to the 2017 Annual General Meeting of the Friends of the Australian National Botanic Gardens, and my third as President.

Before I begin my report I should explain that Judy West will not be here in person to present her Executive Director's report. Her extensive responsibilities include Christmas Island and this evening she is flying from Christmas Island to Perth. Judy sends her apologies and has asked Steve Speer to deliver her report on her behalf. Peter Byron will, of course, be our guest speaker and, in Judy's absence, conduct the election to Council.

It gives me great pleasure to present the President's report for the 2016-17 year. As in previous years, the report addresses the goals enunciated in our new strategic plan approved for 2016-2020.

I also want to discuss the major developments of the year just ended – I will also cross into the current financial year as some major projects of recent years have just concluded or will do so shortly. There is, of course, detailed discussion of the ongoing activities of this most recent year of the Friends in the document circulated for members. This will shortly be placed on our website.

In my address last year I noted that the Friends would have a very busy year ahead and this has been borne out.

In short:

- the treehouse is almost built;
- a related campaign to raise the profile of the Public Fund is running very well;
- we ran a sold-out and content-rich botanic guides conference;
- we are making major advances in our IT; and
- we wrote a submission to the Commonwealth Treasury commenting on proposals for changes to Deductible Gift Recipient arrangements.

I will now discuss each of these.

The Paperbark Treehouse

By the time I deliver this address, the treehouse may well be completed. This is the largest project of our 27 years of helping the Gardens and has been a major focus for the Friends since August 2014. The project involves a partnership of the Friends, the ANBG and the Public Fund, with the Friends underwriting the project up to a limit of \$280,000: we will meet any gap between an initial \$100,000 Friends contribution, \$40,000 from the ANBG, and an initial \$30,000 from the Public Fund (plus the results of this fundraising campaign).



Friends of the Australian National Botanic Gardens

Friends of the National Botanic Gardens Inc.

GPO Box 1777, Canberra ACT 2601 • ABN 57 096 639 836

p 02 6250 9548 • e info@friendsanbg.org.au • w www.friendsanbg.org.au

The project for various reasons took a long time to come to fruition; once the decision was made to run with Cave Urban, an international design collective based in Sydney, the building stage has been very fast. Work began in late August and is all but done. Landscaping will follow and the Paperbark Treehouse will be launched in late November. It should be a wonderful drawcard to the Gardens. The Friends see the treehouse as a wonderful way of encouraging people to engage with Australian flora.

As many of you will know, Cave Urban were keen to engage the Friends in the project and a number of people enjoyed an opportunity to do some of the charring needed to preserve the timber. I would like to thank all of those involved, including the Photographic Group, who recorded this effort.

Campaign to promote the Public Fund

We felt that such a visible and attractive project would be an excellent opportunity to promote our Public Fund to our membership. The Public Fund was established in 2004 to provide tax deductibility for donations to the Friends. Over the years the Friends have contributed almost \$1,000,000 to the Gardens, which includes \$150,000 raised through donations to the Public Fund.

The management committee agreed in 2015 to designate the treehouse as a special project and enable tax-deductible donations for it through the Public Fund.

Many people will by now have received in the membership mailouts a brochure promoting the Public Fund and its current projects – the treehouse, a Gardens collecting trip to northern Queensland and a lichen digitisation project. I would like to thank those who have supported the campaign to date.

Friends project support to the Gardens

As I have mentioned previously, the treehouse commitment has meant that the Friends have been putting money aside for the project for some years. This has affected the extent to which our funds have been available to the ANBG during this period. Nevertheless, we have still been able to assist the Gardens in small but useful ways, including the conservation and framing of the two lovely *Florilegium* prints that you may have seen in the Dickson Room. There are some projects yet to come to fruition.

Once the bills for the treehouse are paid (by earlyish next year), we will discuss with the ANBG ways in which the Friends and the Public Fund can support a number of upcoming projects, including the celebration of the Gardens' 50th anniversary in 2020.

15th biennial Australasian Botanic Gardens Guides Conference 15 to 19 October

Two weeks ago the Friends hosted a major biennial botanic guides conference, involving 175 registrants from Australia, New Zealand and Edinburgh. The theme of the conference was 'Informed Guiding – Discovering the mystery and magic of our Gardens'- and it provided a wonderful opportunity to showcase our Gardens, Canberra and the wider region during a week of almost perfect weather.

As well as discussion of guiding in botanic gardens, the conference took full advantage of what I call the competitive advantage of Canberra by including a most interesting session in which various national institutions discussed their approach to guiding.

Remarkably, the conference was fully subscribed, and we expect to make a profit. Planning for the conference began following the Christchurch conference of 2013; the effort involved for the conference organisers – guides and some other Friends – has been prodigious, and I would like to thank all involved.



Friends of the Australian National Botanic Gardens

Friends of the National Botanic Gardens Inc.

GPO Box 1777, Canberra ACT 2601 • ABN 57 096 639 836

p 02 6250 9548 • e info@friendsanbg.org.au • w www.friendsanbg.org.au

Information Technology

For some time now it has been Council's ambition to update our IT arrangements. During this calendar year we have embarked on a strategy to identify and address the requirements of the Friends overall and our special interest groups. Much progress has been made, including the following:

- replacing Dropbox with Google Drive for the storage of Friends documentation, such as Council papers, photographs and the papers of the various special interest groups;
- arranging an online donation option for the campaign to promote the Public Fund that I have mentioned elsewhere in this report;
- the Photographic Group has been trialling a point-of-sales system for our exhibitions and plant sales in their latest exhibition; and
- planning for online membership renewals to be worked on during early to mid-2018.

The Friends' Deductible Gift Recipient status

In 2004 the Friends established a Public Fund to encourage tax deductible donations to the Friends. The Friends are listed with the Register of Environmental Organisations (REO), with the Public Fund having status as a Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) under the Income Tax Assessment Act.

In 2015 the House of Representatives Standing Committee on the Environment established an inquiry into the REO, which reported in 2016. The Friends made a submission explaining the contribution of the Public Fund and its DGR status to our work for the Gardens.

In June 2017 the Treasury released a Discussion Paper on Tax Deductible Gift Recipient Reform Opportunities, which raised some questions about DGR status as it would apply to REO-listed organisations such as the Public Fund, if the measures proposed were implemented.

Some of the measures proposed were helpful, for example, plans to reduce the regulatory burden on organisations with DGR status. However, some other proposals seemed not to recognise the particular role that a Public Fund such as ours can play in assisting a botanic garden. The Friends accordingly prepared a response to the Discussion Paper, setting out our concerns. We await the next steps with keen interest.

The Friends Strategic Plan 2016-20

I would like to turn now to our ongoing activities. In September 2016 Council approved a new Strategic Plan, for the period 2016 to 2020, which can be found on our website under the About Us tab. It has five goals, against which we have made good progress during the year:

The Friends support the ANBG in meeting its goals through close partnership

The relationship with the ANBG is in excellent shape with close liaison at monthly Council meetings and also less formally.



Friends of the Australian National Botanic Gardens

Friends of the National Botanic Gardens Inc.

GPO Box 1777, Canberra ACT 2601 • ABN 57 096 639 836

p 02 6250 9548 • e info@friendsanbg.org.au • w www.friendsanbg.org.au

Once more the Friends worked closely with the ANBG over the summer concerts. The costs of these very popular concerts have risen in recent years, and sponsorship is essential for the concerts to attract as wide an audience as possible. The Friends were delighted to receive continued sponsorship support from Icon Water but we did not secure other hoped-for additional support. We agreed with the ANBG to run a shorter season, over two weekends, in late January and early February.

The lessons of the 2017 summer concerts have been identified and the results of this assessment fed into planning for the 2018 season. It is fair to say that there is a lot more competition with weekend outdoor events around Canberra in the summer and we need to work hard to maintain our position.

In addition:

- the Friends also provided support as volunteers to the ANBG for this year's Enlighten;
- guiding services continued with twice-daily tours and booked walks, as well as Flora Explorer tours twice daily on weekends and public holidays with additional tours during school holidays and also booked Flora tours. The guides' contribution is underpinned by a strong focus on professional development;
- Flowers Fruit and Foliage replaced In Flower This Week as a lively and well-received publication produced by the Friends with help from the ANBG;
- the Friends have participated in discussion about future options for the Botanical Resources Centre, which has been refreshed during 2017, and work is underway to expand its audience;
- we supported the 2017 Botanic Interns Program run by the Centre for Australian National Biodiversity Research;
- the Schools Photographic Competition continues with work underway to encourage a wider audience from beyond the ACT and nearby NSW; and
- a pool of Friends volunteers recruited through the Plant Science Group for ANBG research projects are helping Dr Rosemary Purdie in a field research project, managed jointly with ANBG staff and running for over two years initially, with a view to ensuring the survival of two Fan Grevillia (*Grevillia ramosissima*) populations on ANBG land.

Public engagement and communication

- The activities of the Botanic Art and Photographic Groups, and Growing Friends all encourage a greater awareness and understanding of native plants, as well as raising money for the Friends through regular plant sales and annual exhibitions;
- Wake Up with the Birds (a rebranded version of the popular Breakfast with the Birds) attracted visitors to the Gardens during Floriade;
- the Thursday Talks are a highly popular weekly activity open to all, so successful that this year they have almost outgrown the Theatre;



Friends of the Australian National Botanic Gardens

Friends of the National Botanic Gardens Inc.

GPO Box 1777, Canberra ACT 2601 • ABN 57 096 639 836

p 02 6250 9548 • e info@friendsanbg.org.au • w www.friendsanbg.org.au

- the Friends have good relations with likeminded local groups and publicise their activities where possible in broadcast emails; and
- we run an excellent website that is an important part of our public outreach, while Fronds magazine and the regular broadcast emails are important for communication within the Friends.

Funding

As the Treasurer will report, our finances are very healthy, but even so, sponsorship in the shape of funding and in-kind support makes an increasingly important contribution to our activities. We were delighted to receive sponsorship support for the guides conference and the summer concerts. We have developed a sponsorship policy to guide our negotiations with sponsors.

As I have mentioned, we have worked hard this year to publicise our Public Fund and also explain to Government its important contribution to the ANBG.

Governance and management

In recent years it has become increasingly important that the Friends provide effective governance and management. We have, for example, been registered with the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission (ACNC) since 2012; this gives donors and others some assurance of our bona fides. It does also mean we have to understand and meet our obligations to the ACNC.

In other areas:

- this year we began implementing the new Strategic Plan;
- work continued on the archiving and retention strategy; and
- I have mentioned our progress on IT, a key enabler across many of activities.

Member services

It is important that we provide member services that meet the interests of the Friends organisation and our members:

- our Membership team is very responsive;
- we offer a wide range of benefits for Friends and recently negotiated a new membership benefit with a local nursery, Cool Country Natives, in Pialligo, and have just been advised by the Botanic Bookshop that our members are eligible for a 10% discount at its sister-shop, Australian Choice;
- our membership numbers are healthy, standing in early October at 1,648 memberships involving 2,278 individual members, up from 1,567 memberships the same time last year; and
- we acknowledge the contribution of our longstanding volunteers through our Life Memberships.



Friends of the
Australian National Botanic Gardens

.....
Friends of the National Botanic Gardens Inc.

GPO Box 1777, Canberra ACT 2601 • ABN 57 096 639 836

p 02 6250 9548 • e info@friendsanbg.org.au • w www.friendsanbg.org.au

What have we not done?

We have achieved much in 2016-17 but we need to make progress in some key areas:

- early in 2018 I would like to try again to attract new volunteers for our social events and activities, as well as some other areas where effort relies on the skillset and willingness of a single person - this is a risk;
- the ANBG has arrangement to record and reward those who volunteer for its activities but the Friends are not yet well-placed to record and recognise the contribution of those who volunteer for the Friends; and
- committee work is not for everyone and we do struggle at times to attract suitable people to Council. David Coutts nobly stepped in to help with the secretary role and we now have a nominee for that role. However, we do not at this stage have a nominee for Vice-President. Finding such a person will be my most important task as this person will become my likely successor when my second term finishes in about 12 months.

Finally, let me, as always thank all who have supported and/or worked for the Friends in the last year, including of course the people in this room. Your continuing support enables us to help the ANBG.

And may I thank my Council colleagues, including those who are leaving Council – David Cox, Jan Finley, Rita Maclachlan, and David Coutts.

We are here of course to help the Gardens – and I would like to thank the staff and management of the Gardens for making the Friends so welcome.

Thank you very much

Lesley Jackman

President

31 October 2017