



Friends of the National Botanic Gardens Inc.

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

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**President's Report**  
**Annual General Meeting**  
**27 September 2018**

**Introduction**

I would like to welcome all of you to the 2018 Annual General Meeting of the Friends of the Australian National Botanic Gardens, and my fourth as President.

It gives me great pleasure to present the President's report for the 2017-18 year.

I mainly want in my spoken address to discuss the major developments of the year just ended. As in previous years, the written report addresses the goals enunciated in our strategic plan, which is available on our website.

I might begin by saying that this time last year we were coming to the end of a very hectic year, with the botanic guides conference just over and the building of the Paperbark Treehouse well underway. The rhythm of 2018 has been different but much has been achieved, particularly in the area of raising and contributing funds to the Gardens. However, our success involves a high tempo for a volunteer organisation.

Here are the headlines:

**Raising and contributing funds**

The Treasurer will elaborate further on our project support but we have delivered hugely on our purpose as the community support group for the Botanic Gardens. You will see in the audited accounts that in 2017-18 the Friends contributed a massive \$293,000 (raised through the Friends and our Public Fund) to the Gardens in project support.

The Paperbark Treehouse was of course launched in late November, and the associated landscaping completed early in 2018. The treehouse has become a notable attraction at the Gardens. I had thought that, with the payments coming due in 2018 for the Treehouse, our biggest project to date, we would probably be short on funds for new projects. This is in far from being the case.

Our campaign to raise the profile of the Public Fund and increase the funds we can provide to the Gardens, raised \$35,000, more than double the average of recent years (\$15,000). As of 30 June 2018, the campaign brought in donations from 206 donors (up from 144 the previous f/y), with donations ranging in size from \$5 to \$10,000. Work is underway on a donor attribution plaque at the site of the Treehouse.

Council has reviewed the fundraising campaign and will probably look for new opportunities to increase the profile of the Public Fund, very likely in conjunction with the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ANBG in 2020.



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In the meantime, the Friends will help the Gardens promote the fundraising campaign for the new National Seed Bank by distributing a brochure with the October membership renewals. This is an important project for the seedbank network in Australia and globally. I very much hope that our members will support it.

## **Membership**

We have had significant growth in our membership income in the last financial year, as the Treasurer will explain. The new financial year has begun well too.

Why is this so? The Friends received excellent publicity through the Paperbark Treehouse, and the café is very popular, which possibly has encouraged café regulars to acquaint themselves with the parking privileges associated with being a Friend. I wouldn't be surprised if our having a relationship with Cool Country Natives has attracted some new members.

Importantly, in the Membership context, work continues on our IT upgrade. The team has identified the key requirements of a new membership database and is now assessing various systems against these. One element will involve the introduction of an online payment system. Once this has been done, the current membership brochure will need to be updated. For the moment, we are having it reprinted as supplies run low.

The IT hacking in May caused much worry and finally involved the expenditure of almost \$5,000 to resolve the issue, fingers crossed.

## **2020**

The Friends are participating in discussions at the Gardens of plans for celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Gardens in 2020. The main focus will of course be on the Gardens but 2020 will also be the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Friends. We have a committee looking into options for celebrating this anniversary.

The Friends have committed funds for the new banksia garden that will be opened in early 2020, and also expect to support other projects, including by making a material contribution to the Ian Potter National Conservatory.

## **Guides Professional Development Program**

As well as financial contributions the Friends make a substantial in-kind contribution to the Gardens, in particular through the guides.

There is a recruitment round underway with a view to a new intake in 2019. In addition, Council recently signed off on a Professional Development Program for the guides.

By way of background in mid-2016 the Guides formed a Development Committee to consider and develop products to improve the quality of guiding. The end goal was to better support the objectives of the ANBG, as well as to enrich the experience of guides. The first product was the



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Quality of Guiding Professional Development Program, implemented in 2017 as a two-year voluntary pilot. The two-year timeframe provided an opportunity to evaluate and fine-tune the program, which is voluntary for current guides but will be required for new guides from the 2019 intake onwards.

## **Something to think about**

It has become increasingly evident to me over the last four years that the very things that make us so successful - our strong financial support to the Gardens and our explosion in membership numbers - also present some challenges for a purely volunteer organisation. Involvement in the Council agenda can involve a pretty fast tempo, beyond the energy and availability of the most enthusiastic volunteer, in my view. We have achieved much in the last four years but we are not really resourced for this tempo.

Fundraising and the IT agenda are two examples of areas where we have big objectives but also only one or maybe two people with the requisite skillset. And management of our finances, including the many activities the Friends are engaged in, makes huge demands on the Treasurer. We don't really have enough people volunteering for the things we need to do. It took me some time to get to this point but I do wonder if we are at the point when we need to employ a paid staff member.

## **The Friends Strategic Plan 2016-20**

I would like to turn now to our ongoing activities, reporting against our Strategic Plan for the period 2016 to 2020. 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, at all levels. It operates formally (with ANBG participation in Council) and also informal contacts around the Gardens between staff and Friends.

This year there have been a number of changes in senior staff arrangements at the Gardens. Judy West has been acting Director of National Parks while retaining a close involvement in the Gardens. Steve Speer retired early this year and Peter Byron is acting in a new position in the department.

We have also welcomed some new arrivals. Sebastian Lang is acting in Judy's role and Tiffeny Horwood is acting General Manager.

### ***Public engagement and communication***

The Friends work to draw people into the Gardens and encourage their engagement with Australian flora. Wake Up with the Birds continues to be a very popular attraction in spring. The



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Thursday Talks have been so successful that this year that audience numbers sometimes exceed the Theatre's capacity. This requires careful management and explanation to the audience.

The Plant Science Group continues to provide monthly talks of a more technical nature to interested members and other opportunities for members. Our Schools Photographic Competition continues to draw local school groups into the Gardens. It is very heartening seeing the enthusiasm of the students at having their photographic efforts recognised at the annual award ceremony.

I would like to thank Growing Friends, the Botanic Art Groups and the Photographic Group for their continuing contribution to the Friends. One highlight for this year was the involvement of the Photographic Group in the Botanical Bookshop calendar for 2019. The PG provided the images and will do the same, I think, for the 2020 calendar.

Our communication with members remains strong with our regular magazine, *Fronds*, and of course the regular broadcast emails which we use for more time-critical matters. The IT coordinator and I share an ambition for a social media presence for the Friends but we have also agreed that, with limited volunteer resources, our key IT priority is the new membership database.

***Finances***

As the Treasurer will report in greater detail, our membership numbers and finances are very healthy, despite our paying the Treehouse bills in the last financial year.

***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 areas such as fundraising, compliance reporting and vetting nominees for Council.

***Member services***

I spoke earlier of membership the headlines for the year.

Finally, let me, as always, thank all who have supported and/or worked for the Friends during my four years as President. Involvement has many levels and I am always grateful to those who choose to join the Friends. In due course, a number of these people will become more actively involved in the Friends, perhaps as volunteers in the annual Summer Sounds concerts or by



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joining a committee, such as our Project Committee or webteam. In all cases your continuing support enables us to help the ANBG.

And may I thank my Council colleagues, including those who are leaving Council – Christianna Cobbold and Jonette McDonnell. I also welcome the new Council under a new President.

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. I would be happy to answer any questions.

Lesley Jackman

27 September 2018