



2016 Council Report to Members

The Council is pleased to present its report for the 2015/16 year.

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OVERVIEW

The 2015 Report to members listed a broad agenda of activity for 2016, and whilst not all nominated issues have been progressed as envisaged, through a continued program of providing a diverse range of activities for members, and importantly, conduct of the Australian Geography Competition, the object of the Society – to stimulate and promote the study of geography - has been effectively fulfilled.

Later sections in this report comment on some of the specifics, however the successful outcome of the year has been achieved only through the dedicated efforts of the Executive team, and critically, the members who so generously provide their time and expertise to arrange, manage and conduct activities and provide overall support. Member input to the Australian Geography Competition is fundamental to the success of this substantial annual undertaking.

Member support and participation in the program of activities continued to be strong. Two (2)

overseas tours - Sri Lanka in September 2015 (24 members), and Tanzania, Madagascar and South Africa in May 2016 (20 members) were outstanding successes. Visiting these new lands, and encountering new cultures ticked all the boxes of truly geographic experiences. The Tanzania visit, however, was not without real sadness, when one of the travelling party, Christine Taylor, suffered a severe medical event whilst in the Serengeti, from which she did not recover. The support shown for Christine and her travelling companion (and sister), Katherine Fleming, in remote and challenging circumstances epitomized the spirit amongst the Society members who forwent some stunning wildlife viewing opportunities in efforts to minimize the discomfort involved.

Access to these bespoke overseas tours, with imaginative itineraries to not-so-common places, should be viewed as a valuable characteristic of Society membership.

The two (2) week overland trek to Kangaroo Island in October 2015 involving 27 participants provided the opportunity for members to experience the diverse landscapes of a less well travelled part of Australia, and to undertake other activities in Adelaide and its environs.

Daytime activities, in and around Brisbane attracted strong interest, with 317 members participating in 11 events, encompassing a range of activities exploring the geography and history of the area. The Walk around Milton, researched and conducted by the Executive Officer, Bernard Fitzpatrick, demonstrates the opportunities on our doorstep for interesting and informative outings.

The time and effort applied by volunteer members to thinking up, arranging and managing these events deserves special acknowledgment. Regrettably, several members who have contributed substantially in this area over many years are, by necessity, reducing their level of involvement, and in the absence of other members becoming involved, the scope of activities offered will inevitably come under pressure and the annual activity program curtailed.

The Lecture program continued to enjoy sound member interest, with ten (10) monthly lecture evenings attended by 555 members and guests. In addition to the opportunity to experience authoritative and interesting presentations by experts in various fields, the evenings provide a social setting for members - all supported by a tasty refreshment offering arranged and provided by Mary Comer and a band of member volunteers.

The May 2016 lecture saw Kath Berg deliver the JP Thomson Address, providing an insightful reflection on the Society's vision, and offering some challenging and valuable observations. Kath's award of the JP Thomson Medal for 2016 was endorsed warmly by what was one of the largest lecture attendances for the year.

An initiative to expand accessibility of monthly lectures to members not able to attend at Milton, through the use of on-line technology, as foreshadowed in the 2015 Report, has not been fully resolved. To ensure distribution of presentations to an acceptable standard, the 10 year old AV equipment in the Milton auditorium requires total replacement, and the Council has recently approved expenditure to achieve this - an initial necessary step to providing on-line access. Further, yet to be clarified expenditure will be required on internet cabling and associated equipment. This is being progressed.

Those elements of the Strategic Plan adopted in 2015 dealing with addressing the financial security of the Society have seen initial encouraging results, with the financial result for 2015/16 – an Operating Surplus of \$7,278 - reflecting a pleasing reversal of the deficit of the previous year. A later section of this report offers additional commentary on the year's financial performance. In overview, whilst the present financial position can be viewed as acceptable, by virtue of being a self-funded, member based, not-for-profit organization, the Society's financial position is unlikely ever to be overly robust.

MEMBERSHIP

Of the 292 memberships at June 2015 (around 400 individual members, reflecting multiple members included in Household memberships), 225 memberships (297 members) renewed their memberships for 2016 - a 23% reduction.

The membership/member base profile, by membership category as at 1 June 2016, was:

Membership Category	Memberships	Members
Ordinary	99	99
Household	65	136
Educational	4	4
Student	3	3
Life	53	54
Honorary Life	1	1
Total	<u>225</u>	<u>297</u>

Responses to an 'Exit survey' (25% of non-renewing members provided responses) showed that age and health issues, and inability to participate in activities offered, were the dominant factors in decisions not to renew for 2016 membership.

In the 2015/16 year, twenty four (24) new members (twenty (20) memberships) joined the Society.

Whilst records are not held to develop an age profile of the membership base, an analysis of years of membership, for both the current membership and those who did not renew for 2016 may be of interest:

When joined	Years of Membership	Number of Memberships	
		Non-renewals	As at June 2016
2013 or later	1-3	21	45
2010-2012	4-6	12	23
2007-2009	7-9	8	17
2004-2006	10-12	3	16
2001-2003	13-15	2	10
1996-2000	14-20	6	21
1991-1995	21-25	9	32
1985-1990	26-30	3	29
1980-1984	31-35	2	14
1975-1979	36-40		9
1970-1974	41-45		4
1965-1969	46-51	<u>1</u>	<u>5</u>
TOTAL		67*	225

*42 ordinary memberships (42 members); 25 household memberships (50 members)

An analysis of these data shows, amongst other characteristics:

- The member loss ratio (in the 2016 renewal) from the group of more recent members is substantially higher than from the group in the longer term membership category.
- Pre the 2016 renewal, there were 135 members in the 15 years + category, of which 21 did not renew - a loss ratio of 15%. With 50% of the current membership in this category, and given ageing etc. issues, it is not unlikely that future renewals will reflect a similar, or perhaps accelerated outcome.

This demographic suggests that mounting pressure on member numbers is, in the absence of effective interventions, inevitable. This trend has clear implications for the Society on a number of fronts - not least of which is the availability of member volunteers to support society activities.

The imperative for the Society to ensure that its offering is sufficiently attractive to retain, and gain new members is behind the Member Survey process initiated in August 2016. Member input from this survey will be a valuable resource available to the Council in an overall review of the Strategic Plan. The Council is hopeful of strong member response to the survey.

GEOGRAPHY PROMOTION

Australian Geography Competition (AGC)

The AGC, now in its 22nd year, is a joint initiative of the Society (which operates and manages the Competition) and the Australian Geography Teachers' Association (AGTA). The importance of the AGC, both in terms of its contribution to promoting the study of geography, and the heavy commitment of Society resources applied to its conduct, will be well recognised by members.

In 2016, the timing of the competition was moved to the second school term to accommodate differences in school holiday periods around Australia. The Competition again attracted strong schools and student support - albeit at levels reduced from 2015. 670 schools, from all states and territories, and 67,000 year 7, 8, 9 10, 11 and 12 students participated. 2016 Competition winners will be announced in early September.

This year's competition saw the introduction of grading and prizes for each of the six (6) individual Year levels. Previously, only three (3), age based grading and prizes categories were used. In addition, a new certificate level of "Top 1% in Australia" in each Year level was introduced. These changes provide high performing students in each Year level across Australia with greater recognition than in previous years. While this redesign has added to the complexity of conduct of the Competition, it creates an improved platform for future years.

Member volunteer assistance was again fundamental to the smooth running of the Competition. At the time of preparation of this report, further member input is still to be applied to the final stages of the 2016 Competition, and by the end of the process, an estimated 320 man hours of valuable volunteer time will have been contributed.

Geography's Big Week Out

The 2015 Geography's Big Week Out - an infield geography experience for 16 high performing intermediate students (Years 10 and 11) – participation in which is a major prize for students sitting the competition, was held on North Stradbroke Island in September 2015. Society and AGC Committee members Margaret McIvor and Kath Berg, and Bernard Fitzpatrick, in his capacity as Competition Coordinator, were actively involved in the week's activities.

The 2016 Geography's Big Week Out will again be held on North Stradbroke Island, in December 2016. Due to the introduction of Year levels in the Competition, only students in Year 11 will be eligible to participate. The 2017 event will be held in South Australia. The state branches of the Geography Teachers' Association provide organisational support for these events.

International Geography Olympiad

Four (4) students, selected from amongst the 2015 Geography's Big Week Out participants represented Australia at the 13th International Olympiad held in Beijing in August 2016, and achieved outstanding success. The team was awarded **first place** in this global event, eclipsing teams from the other 45 competing countries. Individually, team members also excelled:

- Clair Young, Narrabundah College, ACT – Gold medal and overall second in the world
- Andreas Orsmond, Sydney Grammar School, NSW – Gold medal and overall fifth in the world

- Deepan Kumar, Narrabundah College, ACT – Silver medal
- Georgia Worner, Loreto College, Kirribilli, NSW – Bronze medal

The Australian Team which competed at the 12th International Olympiad held in Tver Oblast, Russia, in August 2015, selected from amongst the participants in the 2014 Geography's Big Week Out, also registered impressive results. Esrom Leaman (Pembroke School, Adelaide) and Samantha Dixon-South (Ballajura Community College, Perth) each won silver medals, Giselle Pickering Wavell State High, Brisbane) a bronze, and Canada Gavin (Kinross Wolaroi School, Adelaide) performed well.

RGSQ Councillor (and AGC Committee member) Margaret McIvor accompanied students to both Olympiads, along with a representative from AGTA. Kath Berg (RGSQ member and AGC Committee member) continued to co-chair the International Geography Union's Olympiad Task Force.

Primary School Geography Competition

In association with the Australian Geography Teacher's Association (AGTA), the Society's partner in the AGC, an assessment was conducted into the viability of developing a geography competition for primary schools. Whilst this remains as an opportunity for the future, no specific timeframe has yet been established.

Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) - RGSQ and AGTA

Formal arrangements between the Society, and AGTA governing the AGC (and possibly a Primary Schools competition) have now been documented and agreed between the parties. This provides a secure foundation for further development of the Competition. The MoU will be reviewed in the fifth year of operation.

Other Educational Support

The Society provides Academic Prizes (\$500 bursary and an engraved medal) for high achieving university students majoring in geography. Three (3) institutions currently offer qualifying study programs - James Cook University and University of Queensland (from which nominations for 2015/16 prizes are pending) and the University of the Sunshine Coast, from which Jason King was awarded a prize. Central Queensland University, from which students have gained awards in previous years, has changed its geography program and no longer meets the Society's requirements for participation in the prizes program.

Queensland Senior Syllabus Review

The Society submitted a response to a draft of the Senior Geography Syllabus currently under review by the Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority. Further drafts are expected to be released publically over the coming months, and additional input will be provided if deemed appropriate.

Special Interest Groups

Two (2) Special Interest Groups – Mapping and Library - were established during the year, and initial member interest suggests that the concept of groups of members exploring specific (and perhaps reasonably narrow) areas of interest from within the broad topic of geography may have some appeal. Member involvement in the identification of subject topics, and leading the formation and functioning of such groups will be essential if this concept is to progress further.

The Membership Survey specifically seeks member input on this idea.

Scientific Studies

A major disappointment for the year has been continuing delay in finalising and publishing the Pungalina Studies Expedition Report. Peer reviews of the twelve (12) scientific papers compiled

from this 2012 expedition have now been completed, however a number of copyright issues surrounding mapping and other references included in some of the papers needed to be fully resolved, and resources available to complete this task have been limited and difficult to access.

Special acknowledgement is recorded for the considerable assistance of member, Stuart Watt, in following up papers, referees' reports, and edits.

On present indications, it is expected the report, which will be produced in digital form only, will be issued by October 2016.

STRATEGIC PLAN

The 2015 Report identified a range of Strategic Plan implementation tasks - the majority directed at establishing a sound governance, financial and management platform on which to base the continuing functioning of the Society, and importantly, future development. Whilst not all of these tasks have been brought to conclusion, progress in this area has been encouraging. Review of the Strategic Plan, which will be commenced by the Council in coming months, will focus on the future, particularly:

- services offered to members, and
- how best to deliver on the Society's object (to stimulate and promote the study of geography), and importantly, does this object need revision to reflect a 21st century world.

Member responses to the Membership Survey initiated in August 2016 will, it is hoped, provide a significant body of input to this review. Additional engagement with members, through focus groups and workshops, both in Brisbane and Regional centres will aim to identify the appropriate strategies to underpin continued development of the Society.

Arresting declining membership, a factor noted earlier in this report, is one of the major strategic challenges, and will be a central issue in the review. This will be in an environment of declining memberships being experienced by many member based not-for-profit organisations, particularly those with a membership base profile in the older demographic, as applies to the Society.

MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION

Against the background of heavy resource demands of the Australian Geography Competition, and consequent limited capacity to address other important administration and management requirements, additional resources were introduced during the year to the Milton office, and some internal functions re-arranged. This includes arrangements for production of the monthly Bulletin, which is now wholly managed by Lilia Darii, and members will have noted a number of presentation, content, and distribution innovations.

The (remunerated) resources now engaged – Executive Officer (Bernard Fitzpatrick-full time); Lilia Darii (Business Manager-65%); and Gail Orr (Administration Assistant – 50%), in the Council's view, are now adequate to meet current routine administrative and management needs.

These resources are supplemented – at times substantially - by volunteer member input, and this will remain a characteristic of Society administration arrangements.

Following the IT upgrade in the previous year, a Society advisory group comprising member volunteers with IT expertise has been formed. A review of the Society's existing environment, future requirements, and solutions provided by technology innovations in cloud services and web design and hosting is underway.

Due to an unannounced non-continuance of supply of service by the Society's previous web provider, an unplanned and urgent change in supplier and resulting transfer of both of the existing Society and AGC websites was undertaken in 2015. The short unplanned timeline and resources

required to implement the change impacted on the ability to progress the overall development of new websites (RGSQ and AGC) as intended.

Maintaining tenancy of the two (2) rental units at Gregory House - an important source of income for the Society - has been a challenge over the past few years. Unit 1 was let in January 2016 after an 18 month vacancy, and Unit 2, occupied continuously for several years, was vacated in February 2016. A suitable replacement tenant has yet to be secured.

A program to increase (paid) use of the Gregory House Auditorium has achieved encouraging initial results. The installation of upgraded AV equipment noted earlier in this report will support this initiative further, as will overall improved presentation resulting from repainting undertaken by a band of member volunteers in early 2016.

Recent visitors to the auditorium may have noted that the portrait of AC Gregory, which has hung in the auditorium (and in former RGSQ premises) since 1989 has been replaced with a (near full size) photograph of the portrait. In addition to being the founding President of the Society, AC Gregory was also Grand Master of the United Grand Lodge of Qld (Masons) (1862-1905), and the portrait (history suggests) was held by the Society 'on loan'. At their request, the portrait was returned to the Masons to complete the full set of portraits of Grand Masters now displayed in the Masons Brisbane chambers.

FINANCIAL RESULTS AND POSITION

The Society had an overall surplus of \$7,278 for the year to 30 June 2016, compared to a deficit of \$1,510 in the previous year. However the Society had a good year at the operating level which excludes the effect of the investments movement on the overall result.

The Operating Surplus or deficit for the year is the result of our day to day operations for the Society (RGSQ) and for Australian Geography Competition (AGC). We transfer half of the AGC surplus or deficit which is attributable to the Australian Geography Teachers Association (AGTA) in line with the Memorandum of Understanding between us.

	2015/16	2014/15
Operating Surplus/Deficit for:		
RGSQ	13,782	-13,354
The Competition (AGC)	44,540	-14,665
Half of AGC attributable to AGTA	-22,270	7,333
Operating Results	36,052	-20,686
Loss on sale of Investments	-40,153	0
Increase in Value of Investments	11,379	19,176
Overall Surplus/Deficit	\$7,278	-\$1,510

The **operating results** for the year show a good turnaround from the previous year.

RGSQ. The Society's income was very much in line with last year with even the dividends and interest being very comparable. Rental also remained constant. Membership fees were up due to the increase in fees. Costs were contained throughout the year with staff costs being lower due to the retirement of Kath Berg. This was offset partly in the second half of the year by employment of Gail Orr as Administrative Assistant.

AGC. Entry fees were considerably up due to the price increase of \$1 per participant and good follow up of slow payers. Sponsorships were also in line with last year. The timing of the AGC was put back this year and therefore not all costs were incurred in the financial year with some

printing and mail-out costs and prizes carried over to 2016/7. This could be as much as \$25,000, and therefore overstates the surplus.

Investments. Two investments were sold during the year which had been held for many years and were non-performing. These were sold at a loss of \$40,153. At the same time, we gained \$11,379 in value of the other investments.

Balance Sheet. The Society continues to carefully maintain and manage its assets. Investments are valued at \$1.16 million and the land and building at Gregory House are also recognised in the Balance Sheet. Cash varies throughout the year depending on receipt of AGC income and subsequent cost, but managed carefully to enable the Society to keep solvent at all times.

Much appreciation goes to Lilia Darii for her work in maintaining the accounts and preparation of the monthly reports to Council throughout the year.

Williams Hall Chadwick, the Society's auditors, has provided an unqualified audit report. The full set of Financial Accounts for 2015/16 (14 pages), which includes the Auditor's Report, can be provided to members on request.

COUNCIL, COMMITTEES

Earlier comments in this report dealing with declining membership numbers are particularly pertinent to Council and Committee composition.

Most members of these bodies have provided lengthy service, and given age and health issues, amongst others, continued contributions and commitment at current levels from a number of Councillors, and Committee members cannot be expected.

The need is clear for additional members, particularly those towards the younger end of the age profile to become involved in Council and Committee functioning.

Kathryn Scott joined the Council in February 2016 and brings a very welcome infusion of youth perspective.

As published in the February 2016 Bulletin, Audrey Johnston retired from the Council after contributing 15 years as a Councillor. Audrey is continuing her involvement in arranging travel related activities for members.

Committees, and particularly the Tours and Activities Committee, fill pivotal roles providing services to members. A number of long serving members of the Tours and Activities Committee have reduced involvement and the Council records its warm appreciation to Cheryl and Russell Saunders, and Frank Birchall for their contributions over many years.

The death, in August 2016, of Brian McGrath is particularly saddening. Throughout his 34 years membership, and up to earlier this year, Brian contributed extensively to the functioning of the Society, not least through his involvement with the Tours and Activities Committee – a body he chaired for a number of years. Members who have enjoyed the many imaginative events and excursions arranged and conducted by Brian over the years will particularly feel his loss.

Other Committees active during the year – Finance and Building, and Honours, continued to function effectively.

All members, in any age category, are encouraged to consider widening their involvement in the Society through Council or Committee participation. What is involved in serving on the Council, and acting as a Councillor, is set out in Role Descriptions which were published in the July 2016 Bulletin.

None of this 'plea for involvement' in any way diminishes the very valuable contributions made by many members providing service outside the formal Council and Committee structures.

2017- YEAR AHEAD

Apart from continued focus on established activities:

- the Australian Geography Competition;
- program of activities for members (day activities, lectures, tours and treks).

the major activities are expected to center on outcomes from the Membership Survey, and the review of the Strategic Plan.

On behalf of the Council,



Leo Scanlan,
President

12 September 2016