



Report of the President to the 2024 AGM

The last Annual General Meeting of the Australian Chapter of the Anglo-Australasian Lawyers Society was held on 5 December 2023.

This report covers both the 12 months since that AGM (and which has been my 10th year as President of the Australian Chapter) as well the 2023-24 financial year.

The Executive Committee

The Executive Committee for 2024 (elected at last year's AGM) comprised:

- President – Gregory Nell SC
- Vice-Presidents – Justin Young and Judge Dale Kemp
- Hon. Secretary and Public Officer – Justin Young
- Hon. Treasurer – Richard Hughes
- Committee members – Terry Sheahan AO, David Miller, Paris Hart and Michelle Castle.

As in the past, the Executive Committee was supported throughout the year by the Executive Assistant of the Australian Chapter of the Society, Christina Bunbury.

Programme of Breakfast Seminars

As I have previously reported, one of the principal objectives of the Society is the enhancement of existing links between the legal professions of Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. The principal way in which the Australian Chapter seeks to achieve this objective is by arranging for distinguished speakers from both Australia and overseas to address the Society's members and by providing a forum for the discussion of issues of mutual interest to the various branches of the legal profession in the above countries. This is in particular by the Chapter's programme of regular breakfast seminars, which is also a key source of the Australian Chapter's income.

After an abbreviated start in 2023 (following the impact of COVID 19 and the associated restrictions in previous years), 2024 saw the resumption of our regular programme of breakfast events, with the following events held:

- (a) on 29 February 2024, at which Justice Nye Perram of the Federal Court of Australia delivered an address on "*Moveable Cultural Heritage: Give me back my marbles*";
- (b) on 14 March 2024, at which Michael Rhodes, maritime author, spoke on "*Duncan Dunbar's Legacy in Australasia*";

- (c) on 15 May 2024, at which Keith Mason AC KC, former Solicitor-General of New South Wales and former President of the New South Wales Court of Appeal, spoke on "*Exploring History as an Inhabitant*";
- (d) on 3 July 2024, at which Matthew Gibbs, author, speaker, advisor and teacher, delivered an address on "*Let's Kill all the Lawyers: Shakespeare on Justice*";
- (e) on 8 August 2024, at which Justice Ian Jackman of the Federal Court of Australia spoke on "*How fragile is the Legal System? A Centenary Reflection on the 1923 Victorian Police Strike*"; and
- (f) on 29 August 2024, at which Alan Sullivan KC presented a paper on the topic of "*In what circumstances will Australian Courts depart from the 'but for' approach to causation in negligence cases ?*".

Justices Perram's and Jackman's addresses are available on the AALS website at <https://www.aals.net.au/papers>, as is Alan Sullivan's paper.

Planning of the Society's 2025 programme of breakfast events is currently underway, commencing with an interview of Michael Sexton SC, Solicitor General of NSW, about Sir Garfield Barwick. Further events for the coming year will be announced to members in due course.

Financial position

As I have noted in my previous reports, the Australian Chapter's only sources of income continue to be its membership subscriptions and receipts from its programme of regular breakfast seminars. The Society's finances have improved somewhat in the 2023-24 financial year in comparison to earlier years, which were adversely impacted by COVID-19 and the measures taken by Government to deal with the pandemic. In particular, the Australian Chapter experienced a better than expected result with a small profit and an increase in funds on hand as at the end of the financial year, in particular as a consequence of our above breakfast seminar programme. Although the decline in membership that we experienced in the COVID years has not yet been fully reversed and unfortunately our membership numbers remain down. A goal for the incoming committee is to increase both our membership numbers, as well as the numbers of members and guests attending our events throughout the year.

A more complete picture of the 2023-24 financial year results and the current financial position of the Australian Chapter of the Society is to be found in the Hon. Treasurer's report to the AGM. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the Society's Hon Treasurer, Richard Hughes, for his efforts in undertaking that role not only over the past year, but also in the previous years in which he has held that role.

UK Chapter

The Australian Chapter of the Society has continued to maintain its liaison with the UK Chapter and its President Anne Bodley. This has included meeting with the President when she has been in Australia, and also an annual video meeting of the Executive Committees of both Chapters to discuss matters of joint interest.

As has occurred in the past, members of the Australian Chapter have been able to participate in some of the virtual presentations held by the UK Chapter in 2024 (even if this has been at otherwise inconvenient hours of the day down under). On behalf of the Australian Chapter and its members, I would like to thank the UK Chapter for extending these opportunities to our members.

The UK chapter has also had a busy programme of in person events in London. Members of the Australian Chapter who may find themselves in England are reminded to visit the UK Chapter's website at <http://www.aals.co.uk> to learn of its planned events, which they are always welcome to attend.

Western Australia Branch

The Western Australia Branch of the Society continues to have both a healthy membership and active educational and social programme under the stewardship of President Marcus Pullen (who took over from Alex Hickman last year). This programme has included a number of in person presentations by WA academics and judges, including Justices Matthew Howard, Sam Vandongen and Michael Lundberg, as well as Dr. Michael Douglas, as part of the Branch's "*Black Label*" Series. Once again, any members of the Australian Chapter visiting Western Australia are encouraged to consult the WA branch's LinkedIn page <https://www.linkedin.com/groups/5172851/> for information on that Branch's current activities.

New Zealand Branch

In 2022, the Society established a Chapter in New Zealand, under the patronage of Dame Helen Winkelmann, Chief Justice of New Zealand and presidency of James Warren. In July of that same year, the UK and New Zealand Chapters held a joint on-line event with an address by the Hon Sir David Baragwanath KNZM KC on "*Terrorism on Trial in Absentia*" the *Special Tribunal for Lebanon in International Law*". It is hoped that other events can be coordinated with the NZ Chapter in the future, in an attempt to grow interest in the Society on the other side of the ditch.

Executive Committee Members

Finally, I would like to thank the members of the Executive Committee for their continued support of the Australian Chapter of the Society and more particularly their efforts in the administration and management of that Chapter and the development and promotion of the Australian Chapter's programme of breakfast seminars over the last year. David Miller has indicated an intention to not re-stand for election this coming year. I would like to thank David for all of the assistance that he (and his firm) has provided over the many years he has been on the Executive Committee in securing possible speakers and also in the logistics of organizing our breakfast events.

On behalf of both the Executive Committee and all of the members of the Australian Chapter of the Society, I would also like to thank our Executive Officer, Christina Bunbury, for her continued and untiring assistance in administering the affairs of the Australian Chapter, as well as organising our breakfast seminars (when we were able to hold them), remotely from Melbourne.

Finally, I would wish all the members and friends of the Australian Chapter of the Society, as well as the members of the UK and NZ Chapters and WA branch, a happy and safe Christmas and all the best for 2025.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Gregory Nell', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Gregory Nell SC
President

10 December 2024