



Report of the President to the 2021 AGM

The last Annual General Meeting of the Australian Chapter of the Anglo-Australasian Lawyers Society was held in the offices of Colin Biggers & Paisley on 7 December 2020, followed by Christmas drinks.

This report covers both the 12 months since that AGM (and which has been my 7th year as President of the Australian Chapter) as well the 2020-21 financial year.

The Executive Committee

The Executive Committee for 2021 (elected at last year's AGM) remained unchanged from the preceding year and 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, Kylie Nomchong SC, and Dr Chantal Bostock.

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

Programme of Breakfast Seminars

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 of the Society 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 Australian Chapter's programme of regular breakfast seminars, which is also a key source of the Australian Chapter's income.

Unfortunately, the first half of the 2020-21 financial year saw the continued impact of both COVID-19 and the associated public health restrictions implemented by the Commonwealth and New South Wales Governments in response to the pandemic and to deal with its effects. As I said in my report last year, not only did COVID-19 and the above restrictions result in the cancellation of the Australian Chapter's 2020 programme of breakfast events planned from March 2020 onwards, but the ongoing impact of both the pandemic and those restrictions also effectively prevented that programme from resuming for the entire calendar year.

With the apparent easing of both the pandemic and associated restrictions, the Australian Chapter's programme of breakfast events resumed strongly in 2021, with breakfast seminars:

- (a) on 18 March 2021 at which Hon Dennis Cowdroy AO QC, Inaugural Integrity Commissioner for the Australian Capital Territory, former Chairperson of the Australian Electoral Commission, and a former judge of both the Federal Court of Australia and Land and Environment Court of New South Wales spoke on "*Integrity Commissions: Purpose & Pitfalls*";
- (b) on 22 April 2021 at which Prof. Mark Lunney, Professor in Law, Tort Law, Legal History and Comparative Law at the School of Law, University of New England (UNE) spoke on "*The Common Law and Independent Australian Britons: Some Thoughts from an Interested Party*"; and
- (c) on 19 May 2021 at which Dr. James Renwick CSC SC, former Independent National Security Legislation Monitor spoke on "*Terrorism and Foreign Interference: some comparisons between the UK and Australian laws and responses*".

The first two of these presentations are also available on the AALS website at <https://www.aals.net.au/papers>. The third presentation was a pre-cursor to the subsequent publication of a special edition of the Australian Law Journal, of which Dr Renwick was the guest editor. That presentation also followed on from an address that the first Independent National Security Legislation Monitor, Bret Walker AO SC, had earlier delivered to the members of the Society in August 2015.

However, despite this strong start, the Australian Chapter's planned programme of breakfast events was once again brought to a premature end, following the arrival in New South Wales of the Delta variant of COVID-19 and the lockdown and other restrictions imposed by the New South Wales Government in this State and more particularly in Sydney, in an attempt to initially defeat and later reduce the impact of that variant. As a result, the Society was once again unable to resume its programme of breakfast events for the remainder of the 2021 calendar year.

It is only now, with the recent lessening of the above restrictions that the Australian Chapter has been able to recommence planning for the resumption (yet again) of its regular programme of breakfast events, commencing in early 2022. Further, with the reopening of both Australia's international borders and certain State borders that have been effectively closed for much of the past 2 years, it is anticipated that the Australian Chapter's resumed programme of breakfast events may once again be able to include speakers from both overseas and inter-State.

Admittedly, all of that is subject to the recent discovery in Australia of the Omicron variant of COVID-19 and any measures that the Commonwealth and State Governments might introduce in response to it. However, with the current approach of government favouring Australians learning to live with COVID, it is hoped that 2022 will see a return to a full year's programme of events.

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. As with last year, the latter was severely impacted this past year by COVID-19 and the measures taken by Government to deal with the pandemic, effectively resulting in fewer breakfast events being held than normal. This has not only been felt in the 2020-21 financial year results, but has also impacted on the Society's financial position in the first half of the current financial year.

Further, with a second premature end to the Chapter's full year programme of events, and in consecutive years, the Chapter has also seen a reduction in the number of its memberships being renewed. The Society is especially grateful for those of its members who have renewed their membership subscription despite the interruption to the Chapter's usual programme over the last two years and hopes that more members will renew their subscriptions once that programme resumes in 2022. It is also hoped that the resumption of our usual programme of regular breakfast events will also encourage new members to join the Society.

As a consequence of the above factors, the Australian Chapter suffered a small loss of \$ 183.88 in the 2020-21 financial year. Admittedly, this was smaller than last year's loss. A more complete picture of the 2020-21 financial year results and current financial position of the Australian Chapter is to be found in the Hon. Treasurer's report to the AGM. It is anticipated that with the resumption of our regular programme of breakfast events in early 2022 as the remaining limited restrictions are lifted and we learn to live with COVID (as we have been told we now must), the Australian Chapter's financial position will improve, and the Chapter will return to making a profit once again.

I would take this opportunity to thank Richard Hughes for his efforts in undertaking the role of Hon Treasurer of the Australian Chapter, especially during what has been a trying two years.

UK Chapter

The Australian Chapter of the Society has continued to maintain its liaison with the UK Chapter and its President Anne Bodley. As occurred in 2020, members of the Australian Chapter have been able to participate in the several virtual presentations held by the UK Chapter in 2021 (and even if this has been at otherwise inconvenient hours of the day locally). On behalf of the Australian Chapter and its members, I would like to thank the UK Chapter for extending these opportunities to our members. With the current reopening of Australia's international borders and relaxing of international travel restrictions, members of the Australian Chapter may once again be able to visit the UK and if they do they are reminded to consult 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 Alex Hickman. This has included both in person presentations (most recently by Chief Justice Quinlan, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Western Australia), and online presentations (to which members of the Australian Chapter have also been

able to participate). Any members of the Australian Chapter who may be visiting Western Australia (if and when that State's borders eventually reopen) are encouraged to consult the WA branch's LinkedIn page <https://www.linkedin.com/groups/5172851/> for information on that Branch's current activities.

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 in what has proved to be a second difficult year. In particular, I would like to thank Kylie Nomchong SC (who has indicated that she will not be standing for re-election this year given her other professional commitments) for her service on the Committee over the last couple of years, in particular in securing speakers for 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). This is despite having relocated to Melbourne last year.

Finally, I would wish all the members and friends of the Australian Chapter of the Society, as well as the members of the UK Chapter and WA branch, a happy and safe Christmas and all the best for 2022.

In my report last year, I expressed the hope that 2021 would signal a return to the normalcy that we were more accustomed to prior to COVID-19. However, both the arrival of the Delta variant of COVID and the restrictions and lockdowns that Government imposed in response to that variant (especially in Sydney) thwarted that expressed hope, at least for much of the past year.

Despite both the experience of last year and the recent arrival of Omicron, once again I express the hope not only that 2022 will be characterised by a return to pre-COVID normalcy, but that it will be for the entire year.



Gregory Nell SC
President

7 December 2021