I have much pleasure in presenting the report for the year 2016 on behalf of your Council.

The Council met for eight formal meetings and several informal meetings during the year. Members of the Council took on specific responsibilities in the conduct of Branch activities. (See Appendix).

1. **Maj. Gen. Anton Muttukumaru Memorial Cricket Trophy:**

The third match of the revived Competition was held at the Reid Oval on Sunday 21st February between the Commonwealth High Commissions and DFAT and was once again won by one run in the last over by DFAT. Eight High Commissions made up the Commonwealth Team led by Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. The trophy was presented to the winning team jointly by Her Excellency Deputy High Commissioner for Sri Lanka Ms Himalee Arunathilake in the absence of HE Somasundaram Skandakumar. She was joined by the Acting Secretary for DFAT Mr Ric Wells, Mr Anton Muttukumaru (Jnr.) and RCS President Kanti Jinna. The sum of A$500 raised from the match was forwarded to a charity Oru Panaii (One Pot) in Sri Lanka which provides mid-day lunch to 40,000 children from 390 different schools. RCS coordinates the match logistics with the Sri Lankan High Commissioner and DFAT and all three stakeholders share the payment of the ground fees and other costs. The next match will be the 50th and played at Duntroon (where the first match was held) on Sunday 19th March 2017 commencing at noon.

2. **Commonwealth Day Celebration:**

The 9th Commonwealth Day Celebration was organised by the Commonwealth Day Celebration Committee consisting the Royal Commonwealth Society, The Commonwealth Round Table in Australia and the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture and community leaders in the ACT. It was held at the ACC&C Barton on Monday 14th March 2016 and attended by about 250 people. His Excellency General the Honourable Sir Peter Cosgrove AK MC (Retd) Governor General and Her Excellency Lady Lynne Cosgrove graced the occasion and His Excellency read Her Majesty the Queen’s Message. The theme for 2016 was “An Inclusive Commonwealth”. Ms Diana Abdel-Rahman OAM of Canberra was invited to present a reflection on the theme. Ms Abdel-Rahman is the Chair of the Canberra Multicultural Community Forum and the Canberra Community. The program consisted of multi-faith presentations by religious leaders and cultural presentations by community groups.

3. **Commonwealth Week Australia Seminar 2016:**

An evening presentation on the Commonwealth Theme for 2016 “An Inclusive Commonwealth” was organised by the Commonwealth Round Table in Australia Canberra in conjunction with the Australian Institute of International Affairs (AIIA) at the Institute in Deakin on Wednesday 16th March. The speaker was Dr Lachlan Strahan, First Assistant Secretary, Department of Foreign Affairs
and Trade on the topic “Does the Commonwealth Matter?”. The presentation was chaired by Dr Hugh Craft and very well attended.

4. The 2016 Commonwealth Dinner:

The Commonwealth Dinner was held at the Commonwealth Club, Yarralumla on Thursday 17 March 2016. The Guests of Honour were His Excellency the High Commissioner for Malta Mr Charles Muscat and Mrs Victoria Muscat. His Excellency spoke with passion on his upbringing in Malta, the history and the people of the country of his birth and then more formally about the role Malta is playing as the Chair of CHOGM and the European Union. Speaking on the 2016 Commonwealth Theme “An inclusive Commonwealth”, High Commissioner Muscat spoke of the close ties between Australia and Malta where many Maltese have made their home. His Excellency’s presentation was very well received.

Following His Excellency’s speech, the 2016 Phyllis Montgomerie Commonwealth Award winner Canberra resident Mr Stephen Fairweather was introduced and presented with a cheque of $5000 on behalf of the RCS by the Chairman of the Judges Panel. Stephen Fairweather, a PhD aspirant at the Australian National University is associated with research to find a biological means to control some parasitic diseases such as malaria that have had a devastating effect on human and animal health and survival for many years throughout much of the world.

A major activity during Commonwealth Week was a cricket match organised by the RCS and Australian Parliament Sports Club. High Commissioner HE Mr Somasundaram Skandakumar of Sri Lanka organised the team supported by HE Mr. Kazi Imtiaz Hossain, High Commissioner for Bangladesh. The Commonwealth XI won the match. The match was played at the Reid Oval on Monday 14 March immediately after the Commonwealth Day Celebration. The Parliamentary team consisted of a Minister (Captain) and several Members of Parliament.

5. Seasonal Lunchees:

Autumn lunch – The RCS Autumn Lunch was held at University House, ANU on Sunday 24 April 2016 commencing at 12.30pm. The Guest Speaker was Helen Jones MBE, Director of Youth Affairs and Education programs at RCS London who was attending the National Executives Meeting in Canberra. Ms Helen Jones spoke on the RCS and the Youth Affairs and Education programs. Guests included visiting heads of RCS Branches and the members of RCS ACT.

Winter lunch – Rama’s Fiji Indian Restaurant – Guest Speaker His Excellency the High Commissioner for India Mr Navdeep Suri. High Commissioner Suri spoke to a packed house on India and its current activities relating to social, economic and political development.

Spring lunch – Federal Golf Club – This was held jointly with the Australia Britain Society.

6. Her Majesty the Queen’s Birthday Dinner:

The Society was privileged to have The Hon Penelope Wensley AC, former Governor of Queensland as the Guest Speaker and with her husband Dr Stuart McCosker as our Guests of Honour at The Queen’s Birthday Dinner held at the Commonwealth Club on Thursday 16 June at 7.30pm. Ms Penny Wensley spoke on her memories of the Queen over the years in an informal and affectionate recall
and subsequent sixteen visits Her Majesty and her husband the Duke of Edinburgh have made to Australia. Ms Wensley has been a long-time member of the RCS ACT Branch and has served on the Council in the 1990’s. Before her vice-regal appointment, she had a distinguished diplomatic career serving as Australia’s Ambassador to France, High Commissioner to India and Ambassador to the United Nations. The Dinner was jointly organised with the Australia Britain Society and very well attended.

7. Message from Baroness Scotland, the new Commonwealth Secretary-General to Dr Hugh Craft OAM and an article on Global Food Security contributed to the Commonwealth Voices by Dr Denis Blight AO FRSA:

The new Secretary-General, Baroness Patricia Scotland QC has written to Dr Hugh Craft RCS ACT Vice President sending her “very best wishes and high regards to all Friends of the Commonwealth in Canberra” in response to his letter congratulating her on her election and assuring our support. Baroness Scotland said in reply that she “very much looked forward to serving the Commonwealth” and believed that “if we all choose to work together in partnership, there is nothing which we together cannot achieve”. She added “At CHOGM, it was said that ‘alone we are invisible but together we are invincible’ and I believe they are right”.

Commonwealth Voices September 2016 issue contains an article on the “Commonwealth and Global Food Security” by Dr Denis Blight AO FRSA, a member of RCS ACT Branch. Dr Blight is Chief Executive of the Crawford Fund, a former diplomat, public servant, Head of the Australian Aid program for South-East Asia and China and an advocate of International Agricultural Research for over twenty-five years. Dr Blight concluded his article by stating “Food security is a priority issue for all sectors in the Commonwealth-especially in Africa. A critical value-adding role for the Commonwealth, perhaps through knowledge generation and sharing, is a matter for consideration”.

8. National Executives Meeting of the RCS Branches in Australia hosted by ACT:

The National Executives Meeting of RCS Branches was held in Canberra during ANZAC Weekend from Friday 22 April till Sunday 24 April 2016. The venue was University House of the ANU and was chaired by host President Kanti Jinna.

The NEM brought together twenty-four branch delegates and Presidents of four of the nine Australian branches ACT, NSW, Victoria and South Australia. Also present were Ms Helen Jones representing RCS London and Regional Director for the Pacific Mr Darryl Stevens from Wellington. The Meeting welcomed a message from RCS Director Michael Lake CBE. The concluding reflections by Matthew Neuhaus of DFAT Africa Desk and Autumn Lunch Guest Speaker Helen Jones updated Commonwealth and RCS issues and what we may expect after the Malta CHOGM and the election of Secretary General Baroness Barbara Scotland.

The most successful aspect of NEM2 was the Youth Meeting at which five key issues including an RCS Communication Strategy were adopted. A draft twelve month Action Plan on Youth Engagement was developed, ten Key Issues and nine action items were decided and the cementing of a deep and meaningful relationship between the four RCS branches and another five who could not attend. A summary record of 2016 NEM prepared by Dr Hugh Craft is available upon request. The June issue of “Commonwealth News” has an excellent synopsis of the 2016 NEM.
The next National Executives Meeting will be held in Adelaide hosted by the South Australian Branch under the Presidency of Ms Libby Ellis OAM from Friday 5th to Sunday 7th May 2017 and promises to be an excellent one. The Queensland Branch is considering the hosting of the 2018 NEM to coincide with the Commonwealth Games.

9. Commonwealth High Commissions:

In 2016 the Society and the 23 Commonwealth High Commissions had several projects in which we worked together. Your President and Council members have visited and were invited to attend National Day functions and briefings at several High Commissions. These include seventeen of the twenty-three High Commissions in Canberra: United Kingdom, Sri Lanka, Malta, India, South Africa, Pakistan, Kenya, Cyprus, Fiji, Bangladesh, Ghana, Papua New Guinea, New Zealand, Canada, Mauritius, Brunei Darussalam and Botswana. More effort now is required to develop links between the RCS ACT and Commonwealth countries of the Caribbean and South East Asia.

The High Commissioner of Malta HE Charles Muscat and Mrs Victoria Muscat attended the 2016 Commonwealth Dinner and Mr Muscat spoke on the special relationship between Malta and the Commonwealth and especially Australia.

The annual RCS winter lunch is dedicated to a speaker from one of the High Commissions and His Excellent Mr Navdeep Suri was invited in 2016. The venue was well subscribed and the High Commissioner spoke very eloquently on India Australia relations, the current status of the Indian economy and some key strategies the country has in place for the future.

Courtesy calls continue to be made on newly arrived High Commissioners. In turn High Commissioners invite members of the RCS to their Consulates or High Commissioners’ residences for briefings on their countries.

We are encouraged that as Honorary Vice Presidents of the RCS, High Commissioners in Canberra have expressed a willingness to speak at State and Territory RCS Branches when they are on tour. High Commissions can join the RCS as Corporate Members by subscribing A$55 annually.

10. RCS ACT Website:

The Branch website http://commonwealthfriends.org.au/ continued to attract hits from interested members of the public. There is still greater effort required to update inputs both locally and internationally (Royal Commonwealth Society in London and other regions such as Africa, Asia, Caribbean and Australia and the Pacific). The Branch Youth membership has suggested working on making RCS communication sounder, user social media friendly.

11. Commonwealth News:

Four seasonal RCS ACT newsletters “Commonwealth News” were published during 2016. They kept members informed of key issues concerning the Branch and the Commonwealth. The circulation list is quite broad as it is requested by non members who enjoy reading it. Although we enjoy the look and feel to the printed colour copies and photographs and layout of our newsletter, it is becoming more expensive to produce, print, envelope and post especially since the increase in postage rates. We are hoping members would elect to receive their copies electronically.
12. RCS International Meeting in London from 5th to 7th October 2016:

A seventeen member contingent consisting four from the ACT, one from New South Wales, one from Queensland, five from South Australia, two from Victoria (including a Youth member resident in London) and two from Western Australia attended the International meeting of RCS in London. The meeting was preceded by a youth programme from the 3rd to 4th October. The purpose of the meeting was to plan for the future of RCS networks, share experience and knowledge and facilitate interaction and relationship building between branches. 81 delegates from 33 branches attended.

The youth programme provided a platform for young people to build leadership skills and identify how to instigate change in the Commonwealth. Opportunity was created to feed into the branch programme and to connect with branch members and RCS Regional Co-ordinators.

The three day branch programme was attended by 81 delegates from 30 branches and was opened by RCS President, Lord Howell, followed with a day of branch-lead sessions hosted by the High Commission of New Zealand. Day two addressed the programmes, research & policy and youth & education work of the Society and included speakers from RCS partners The Queen Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee Trust and Comic Relief. On the third morning, delegates attended sessions, run by speakers on Communications, Fundraising, Brand and The Queen’s Commonwealth Canopy.

Outside of the meetings delegates were invited to a concert given by ABRSM at the Australian High Commission and a tour of Westminster Abbey. An Afternoon Tea at the House of Lords was sponsored by RCS Ireland Branch.

The High Commissions of Australia, Canada, Malta, New Zealand, Nigeria and Zambia provided support and hospitality.

14. Charity and donations:

The financial reports prepared by Treasurer show that administrative costs have continued to rise and the Branch has become more dependent on subscriptions and donations. The ACT Government Grant is spent on the Commonwealth Day Celebrations and the Inter Secondary Schools Public Speaking Competition. The interest received from the Phyllis Montgomerie Bequest is insufficient to cover the Phyllis Montgomerie Commonwealth Award of $5000 each year. Your Branch raised a small sum for ORU PANAI mid day meals for school children in Sri Lanka raised from proceeds of the Commonwealth versus DFAT cricket match and the RCS ACT funds. The proceeds from the 50th Anniversary 2016 cricket match will likewise go to a charity in a Commonwealth country. Members are advised that the Council is considering registration under the Charitable Trust and applying for tax exemption status for donations. The Royal Commonwealth Society in London is a registered charity in England and Wales (226748), incorporated by Royal Charter.

RCS members donated generously at the Presidents Christmas event in December and were amalgamated with the Canberra ABC Radio 2016 Christmas Appeal which went to Anglicare.
15. Phyllis Montgomerie Commonwealth Award 2016:

In June 2012, The RCS ACT became the beneficiary of the Phyllis Montgomerie Bequest. The Council decided, in keeping with the spirit of the will, to make an award of up to $5000 to an ACT resident towards a project “to further it’s (the RCS) objectives and be used in education and research”.

The inaugural (2015) winner of the Award was Ms Claudia Benham, a PhD student at the ANU Fenner School of the Environment.

The 2016 Award went to Mr Stephen Fairweather who is attached to the Division of Biochemistry & Biomedical Science, Research School of Biology at the ANU.

The 2017 Award determined by the Panel of Judges will go to Mr Mitchell McMaster who is conducting a randomised controlled trial of older adults with Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI).

Presentations of the A$5000 Award are made at the Commonwealth Dinner during Commonwealth Week. All three awardees were aspirants for a PhD at the Australian National University. Nominations are invited from all the universities in the ACT and the award is made to a Canberra resident who is working on a project that would benefit a Commonwealth country.

Phyllis Montgomerie OAM was President of the RCS ACT for two terms (1993-1995) and (2002 - 2004) and a Life member. She passed away in 2011.

16. Visitors to RCS ACT:

Mr Terry Spiro, President of the RCS Western Australia visited Canberra and met with Kantilal Jinna and Dr Hugh Craft in March 2016. The discussion centred on the activities of both branches and issues relevant to all RCS Branches and the RCS International Meeting in London;

Presidents of RCS Branches from New South Wales Mr David Beale; Victoria Mr Lloyd Byrne and South Australia Ms Libby Ellis OAM during the April 2016 NEM;

Ms Helen Jones MBE RCS Director of Youth Affairs and Education programs who attended the Canberra NEM; and

Mr Darryl Stevens from RCS Wellington New Zealand, Regional Director for the Pacific who attended the Canberra NEM.

17. Finance and Membership:

The Council is happy to present its Financial Report together with the Annual report. The finances show greater expense in the administrative and insurance costs in running the organisation. We are grateful for members who have renewed their membership and sent in donations. There has been a slight increase in our corporate, general and youth membership. This is pleasing to note.

18. Presidents Christmas function:
The end of the year get together and a Christmas lunch was hosted by Kantilal and Jyoti Jinna at their home on Sunday 4 December 2016. The response for charity parcels was very good and passed on through Canberra ABC Radio Giving Tree to Anglicare.

19. Conclusion

The formation of the ACT Branch of the Royal Commonwealth Society was approved by the Executive of the Society in London, England on 8th October 1958. We will be celebrating the Society’s 60th birthday in 2018. During this period, we have witnessed many historical changes and I hope we can document these so that we may share them at our birthday celebrations.

2016 has been a significant year in many ways:

We celebrated Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II’s 90th Birthday;

We thank our Patron His Excellency the Governor General Sir Peter Cosgrove and Lady Lynne Cosgrove for the continual support of RCS ACT activities;

We thank our Honorary Vice Presidents the High Commissioners in Canberra for their continual support;

We were delighted to welcome delegates from of the Australian Branches to the National Executives Meeting held in Canberra;

We thank the ACT Government Office of Tourism, Medibank Private and Westpac for their sponsorship assistance with the preparations for NEM;

We thank RCS Headquarters in London for their continual support in sending Ms Helen Jones to the Meeting of Australian Branches in Canberra;

We thank Darryl Stevens, Regional Director for the Pacific for his attendance at NEM2;

We congratulate RCS Director Michael Lake and his team in London for organising a very successful International Meeting held in October 2016;

We were delighted to communicate with Youth Members at the pre-Meeting National RCS Youth Seminar in April 2016;

We thank the Friends of the Commonwealth, the Commonwealth Round Table of Australia (CRTA), and the Commonwealth Day Celebration Committee (CDCC) for their collaborative effort and support with the Commonwealth Day Celebration, Commonwealth Week and other RCS activities;

We congratulate our Past President, IPP and Vice President Dr Hugh Craft and his wife Lynne on the celebration of their 50th Wedding Anniversary and thank Dr Craft for his advice and continued contribution to RCS ACT;

We thank the ACT Government for funding grants for the Commonwealth Day Celebration, providing flagpoles and flags of Commonwealth countries and with funding for specific projects;
We thank Professor Dr Stephen Pickard and his team at ACC&C for their continuous assistance with the Commonwealth Day Celebrations;

We thank the members of the Council, Life members, Past Presidents and members of the RCS Branch for their continual support;

We thank the spouses of all our Council members for their continuous support and assistance;

Thank you

Kantilal Jinna MoF JP

President

8th February 2017