

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT 2018–2019

The Committee of the History Council held seven regular meetings and four executive meetings in the financial year 2018/19.

The 2018//2019 Committee of the History Council of WA was as follows:

Executive: Emeritus Professor Jenny Gregory AM (President), Associate Professor Bobbie Oliver (Vice President/Australian Society for the Study of Labour History Perth), Helen Munt (Secretary/Professional Historians Association WA), Nick Drew (Treasurer), Jan McCahon Marshall/Pam Harris (Fremantle History Society) (Membership Secretary), and

Committee members: Bruce Baskerville, Sally Davies (HTAWA), Kyra Edwards (Indigenous representative), Neil Foley, Andrea Gaynor (UWA Centre for WA History), Vanessa Kirkham (HTAWA), Bri McKenzie, Geoff Moor, Samantha Owen, Cindy Solonec (Indigenous representative) Pamela Statham Drew (Friends of Battye). I am very grateful to all Committee members for their contribution of time, knowledge and expertise.

Three members of the Committee, will not be seeking re-election because of other commitments; Neil Foley, Andrea Gaynor and Jan McCahon Marshall. All have made a valuable contribution and we thank them very much for their input. A special thanks is also due to Helen Munt, Secretary, who stands down from that role because of pressure of work. As well as representing the Professional Historians Association on the Committee, Helen has been our Secretary since 2016. We'll greatly miss her competence and capacity in that role.

### A VOICE FOR HISTORY

**Communications:** Items of interests and news of events continue to be posted on the History Council of WA Facebook site, which now has more than 1600 followers. The Quarterly Newsletters continue to be used to update members on matters of interest. The role of Editor rotates among committee members. We especially thank our 2018/19 editors Pam Harris (Winter 2018), Bruce Baskerville (Spring 2018), Sally Davies (Summer 2018/19), and Bri McKenzie (Autumn 2019). We also thank Grace Kasper at Flametree Creative for her technical assistance in uploading each newsletter to Mail Chimp for circulation to members and onto the News page of the History Council website.

**Conference:** I was pleased to represent the History Council on the Advisory Committee which planned the State Heritage and History Conference 2019 — 'Handle with Care'. As well as the History Council, it included representatives from Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage, Heritage Council WA, National Trust (WA), Australian Museums and Galleries Australia WA, WA Museum, WALGA, Heritage Perth, FACET, Australian Society of Archivists, Tourism Western Australia and WA Indigenous Tourism Operators Council (WAITOC).

Held on 28<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> March at the Westin Hotel, the conference attracted 353 delegates, with 87 giving papers, some brilliant keynotes — especially from Professor Lyndall Ryan who spoke about and demonstrated the massacre map of Australia that she and her team are developing — a great contribution towards truth-telling. The History Council ran a session on 'Dark Histories' with presentations from Bri McKenzie, Cindy Solonec and myself and presentations during other sessions by Samantha Owen with Jessica Johnston and Bobbie Oliver.

The conference was designed to attract historians, heritage professionals, archaeologists, museologists, and tourism operators. It had two long term aims. Firstly, to help educate tourism operators about the value of heritage and history for the tourism industry. This was a great step forward, as it was clear that some tourism delegates had little knowledge of history or heritage — one asked 'what are the History Wars?' and many were shocked to learn of the treatment of Aboriginal people. Secondly, to help professionalise the heritage industry — hence fees were steep, though thanks to a generous grant from Lotterywest, a large number of bursaries were available for delegates

from regional areas or who were self-funded. A survey of delegates attracted 167 response, 89% rated the conference either excellent or very good.

## **ADVOCACY**

### **National Archives of Australia (Perth)**

Members of the Committee were delighted to attend the launch of the new reading room and offices of NAA in Francis St, Northbridge on 29 March 2019. While it is disappointing that the separation of reading room and repository necessitates pre-ordering of items, both venues are state of the art and the Francis St office includes a spacious multi-purpose area that can be used for meetings and exhibitions alike as well as providing high quality working conditions for both staff and researchers.

**City of Perth History Centre:** The History Council made a detailed 10-page submission on the City's Strategic Community Plan (SCP) 2029 and the City's Cultural Development Plan (CDP) 2018-24 in March 2019. We were dismayed by the lack of recognition of the role of history in cultural development and the assumption that heritage was the same as history. We made several key points; that history is at the heart of all heritage — Indigenous, built, natural, tangible and intangible; is an essential element of heritage interpretation; creates the character of a neighbourhood; and that knowledge of a shared history connects and binds communities. As history forms an essential part of cultural activation, we expressed our concern that there had been a loss of expert knowledge of Perth's history collections within the City of Perth; that there had been limited progress on 'Finding Perth', a project exploring historical overlays of the city's buildings over time; and we encouraged the City to explore the potential nexus between the City's historical collections, Heritage Perth and the Museum of Perth. The functions of Heritage Perth have now been folded into the remit Arts, Culture & Heritage unit, without any extra staffing

Bobbie Oliver, Helen Munt, Pam Harris and I have now had several informative and productive meetings with the team at the City of Perth Arts, Culture & Heritage unit Art, Public Art, Memorabilia and the History Centre collections (photos, documents, oral histories housed in the Library and items in Council House Their responsibility is for the City's collections of art, public art, and historic photos, documents, memorabilia, oral histories). Staffing stabilised in early 2019, as follows Cultural Heritage Collections Coordinator—Kate Parker; Cultural Heritage Collections (History Centre)—Lauretta Davies, Farah Kabbani; Heritage—Hannah Eames, Noel Robertson and Karen Abercrombie; Community Engagement—Jenna Lynch; Projects Officer—Emily Hordern.

**Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972 Review:** Having made a submission to Phase 1 of the review, the History Council made a further submission to Phase 2 in May 2019. The substance and the progress of the review is very encouraging. The Government aims to have an amended Aboriginal Heritage Act passed by both houses of Parliament by the end of 2020.

**Heritage Act 2015 Regulations:** Following the passage of the new heritage act, the History Council has made a detailed submission on matters inadequately addressed by the proposed regulations.

**Redaction of Births, Deaths and Marriages Records:** Our representations to the Attorney General and the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages regarding the redaction of 'offensive' words on copies of certificates bore fruit. Although the application form for certified copies has been changed to enable people to obtain an unredacted copy, we have continued to lobby the Attorney-General to make alterations to the form for greater clarity.

**Commonwealth Marriage Act 1961 amendments:** The History Council of WA, along with the History Councils of Victoria, New South Wales and Victoria, wrote to the Federal Attorney-General, Christian Porter, expressing concern that under the proposed amendments to the Marriage Act, information about father's name, mother's maiden name, usual occupation and usual place of residence, currently collected and transferred onto Official Marriage Certificates, will no longer be required. As a result, these items will no longer appear on Official Marriage Certificates. If these changes go ahead, they will greatly impede genealogical and historical research in the future.

**State Records Office:** We were pleased to receive a presentation from the Australian Society of Archivists (WA), who are advocating against changes in the reporting structure of the State Records Office within the

Department of Culture and the Arts and concerned by the lack of storage facilities and the lack of a policy for storage of the government's digital records. Following this update, we wrote to Minister Templeman regarding the lack of adequate storage facilities for the state's records. Despite the standards which the State Records Office is required to comply with under its Act, it has had no available space left for storage for many years, nor the resources to adequately preserve records, whether physical or electronic.

**Eastern Guruma and the protection of Ngajanha Marnta (or Spear Hill):** We were disappointed that our submission to the Federal Government for the protection of around fifty culturally significant sites below the hill that in danger of being destroyed was not successful. FMG is proceeding with construction of a railway line through the area from their new Eliwana mine to Solomon Hub. There have been some changes to the rail route to avoid three other culturally important sites outside the area that we were concerned about.

**Uluru Statement from the Heart:** In a joint letter, the History Councils of WA, NSW, SA and Victoria wrote to the Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, urging the government to support the Uluru Statement from the Heart and the recommendations of the Referendum Council for an Indigenous voice to the Australian Parliament.

**Murujuga World Heritage Nomination:** We wrote to the Premier Mark McGowan congratulating the State Government for proceeding with the nomination for World Heritage listing of Murujuga (the Burrup Peninsula and the whole of the Dampier Rock Art Precinct) with the support of the Aboriginal peoples connected with the place. We pointed out various difficulties the nomination may face because there is no holistic heritage legislation in place in this state. As a result, at the invitation of the Minister for the Environment we meet for discussions with the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions, the agency taking the lead role in preparing the nomination on behalf of the State in partnership with the Murujuga Aboriginal Corporation.

**Reduction in Research Funding to the Humanities:** We wrote to the Federal Minister for Education expressing our deep concern that in 2017 and 2018 funding, worth \$4.2 million, was denied to 11 research projects, all of which were in the Humanities. This was despite the recommendations of the Australian Research Council's (ARC) panel of experts to fund these projects.

**History in the Curriculum:** The position of History in the curriculum has long troubled the History Council. We were disturbed to find that number of students studying History at Year 11 and 12 levels in WA is currently in decline. Following an informative presentation from Cathy Baron, President of the History Teachers Association of WA, the History Council has formed a working party to consider ways of encouraging the study of history.

**Bicentenary:** We wrote to the Premier requesting information about plans for the Bicentenary and suggested a number of events and activities. In his response of 14 August 2018, he advised that planning had not yet commenced, welcomed the preliminary ideas put forward by the History Council and noted that he was 'especially interested in initiatives that will bring the community together and celebrate our journey as a State.'

## **SUSTAINABILITY**

### **Membership base**

Membership numbers have reduced. In June 2019, the History Council had 54 members (19 corporate and 34 individual), compared with 77 (28 corporate, 49 individual) in June 2018, 72 in June 2017, 69 in June 2016, and 22 in 2015. The reason for this reduction is not clear but possibilities include the economic downturn, movement of knowledgeable staff employed in corporate member organisations (redundancies, retirements), increasing age of some members. We will be investigating this further and undertaking a membership drive, noting that our key role is to advocate on behalf of history, thus providing a unified voice for all those engaged in or supportive of the practice of history.

## **EVENTS**

While events are not our major focus, several were held in the 2018/19 year, as well as the WA State Heritage and History Conference in March 2019.

**AGM and Annual Address:**

The 2018 AGM was held on 23 August 2018 in the Kurrajong Lecture Theatre at the old Claremont Teachers' College (now part of the UWA Campus). Following the AGM, the History Council's 15<sup>th</sup> Annual Lecture was given by Alec Coles OBE, CEO, WA Museum, who gave us an update on progress on the new museum and exhibition plans under development

**Christmas Sundowner:** On Thursday 6 December, members of the History Council of WA and the Professional Historians Association (WA) attended a Christmas Sundowner at the former Lemnos Hospital, now part of Shenton College. Dr Davina French gave a fascinating presentation on the battle to establish Lemnos Hospital for the care of returned servicemen with serious mental illness after the Great War. We were also able to explore the building, now used for administrative purposes by Shenton College, which has retained its original architectural detail with a beautiful jarrah staircase and stained glass windows.

**Ideas Forum:** Our Ideas Forum scheduled for March 2019 was delayed due to lack of availability of participants.

Emeritus Professor Jenny Gregory AM  
President