



## **President's Report**

Prof Deborah Gare

2023-2024

It has been a pleasure and privilege to serve with my colleagues, and I thank them sincerely for their impact, enthusiasm and dedication to the History Council.

I particularly thank the colleagues who have not renominated for the committee in 2024 – 2025, but who contributed in valuable ways: Lorraine Clarke (outgoing and long-serving Treasurer), Sarah Fulford (outgoing secretary), Annemarie McLaren, and Vashti Fox. And also to colleagues, Michael Nind and Lucy Hair who regularly stepped in during the year when other committee members weren't available.

The most important issue we currently face is the need to dramatically improve the impact of our advocacy, the visibility of our organisation, and the strength of our voice.

Yet this is enormously challenging given that the committee is made up of volunteers who each maintain hugely busy professional roles. It is notable that a number of our key executive committee roles, treasurer, secretary and memberships secretary, have each been vacant for part or all of the past year.

This has compromised our ability to make swift progress in an improved communications strategy, to stay in touch with you all, to renew membership subscriptions, and also slowed our ability to lead advocacy efforts in relation to the Bicentenary, heritage and other critical issues.

For those reasons I am relieved and delighted to have a full executive team elected again this year, and to know that, as I step out of the president's role, there are four genuinely fabulous colleagues who will lead the committee over the next year.

### *Website project*

I am also really excited to let you know that we have recruited the expert help of Murdoch University web communication graduating students through the University's student consultancy scheme, MESSH, who have been working with us this year in the design of a new History Council website. They provided this service to the History Council at no cost to our organisation.

The project has been comprehensively and methodically approached—our current website was carefully analysed by the consultants, first, to observe how, when and why it is used, and which gave us a good idea for how it could be improved to suit members as well as community.

Sample users of the website were created and tested—how might different Western Australian users of our site work with the information we have online in different ways? What are they most wanting to get out of contact with the History Council? How can we help them? How can we reach them? These were a number of key issues that were analysed and planned for by the consultants.

The consultants proposed a range of visual concepts, each of which created a different impact and image of the History Council—we embraced the ‘Modern and Mature’ design scheme—and then designed the digital architecture that creates the foundation of website itself.

For most of the past ten years, the management of the website and what used to be regular newsletter mailouts were managed by a design company in Perth, while our website was hosted on an Irish server. The cost of our website and other communications was easily the most significant expense of the History Council each year, even though the communication strategy didn’t have the impact that it needed.

When our new website project launches in the new year, it will be hosted on the Murdoch University server and at no cost to the History Council.

By working with a digital platform that our committee members can easily edit, we will be able to take control of the editing of the website’s content, and synchronise this with an improved social media and email communication strategy.

In short, our new website, will reach more people, improve our impact, raise our visibility, and be more sustainable. It will go a long way to achieving our goal to be successful advocates for history in Western Australia.

### *History Awards*

Another renewal project that we are soon to embark upon is the History Awards, which launched in 2021 to acknowledge significant contributions and achievements in Western Australian history.

While these are a valuable service to our community and an effective method to promote history and heritage in Western Australia, we have paused the awards in 2024 to allow as the opportunity to review the categories, consider whether the nomination process is properly accessible to candidates, and identify an improved communication strategy to market the program.

We look forward to relaunching the new and improved Awards program in 2025, closely integrated with our new website and social media strategy.

### *New members*

This renewed impact of the Council will, I hope, be supported by the renewed membership of our committee in this next year, and I would like to thank the colleagues from universities and other organisations who been nominated for the Council for the first time this evening. And I also sincerely thank colleagues who continue to serve our organisation in their re-election.

As this will be my last president's report for the History Council, I'd like to thank you all for the opportunity to have done so, and for the support that many of you have offered during that time. There have been a number of very significant helpers while I have served in the role, especially Lucy Hair, Michael Nind and Bruce Baskerville.

Thank you to Sam Owen for stepping into the role this year, and to the new team who will be the Council's principal leaders.