Natalie Sambhi was elected president at the last AGM but has since taken up a position in Western Australia so I have only been president since 7 June. Our vice presidents, Miles Kupa and Chris Farnham, will also be stepping down at this AGM due to other commitments. Consequently, I would like to express the gratitude of the Branch for the work of Natalie, Miles and Chris in keeping a vibrant program going and representing the Institute more broadly.

As you may know, the National Office has been trying to dispose of the building for the last few years but those efforts have recently been derailed, at least temporarily, by complex bureaucratic and legal processes. Nevertheless, under the terms of a prospective sale the purchaser agreed that the AIIA would remain a tenant. Consequently, it would seem that the Branch can continue to use Stephen House as its meeting place for at least the next year.

During her term as president, Natalie recruited several new members of Council all of whom are standing for reelection. This will enable us to keep bringing you an interesting program of activities, improve our management, and leverage our programs through social media. This requires close cooperation with the National Office that provides the website and coordinates the social media.

The Branch’s finances remain strong so the Council decided to keep membership fees at current levels for the next year (the fifth year in a row). The Treasurer will present the audited statement for the FY 2015-16 at the AGM.

One of the key positions on the Council is Events Coordinator. Natalie Mobini, having assisted Garth Hunt in the past, has taken on that task for the last year with great success. Her report is as follows:

‘In the last 12 months, the branch hosted 20 events, averaging two events per month, with a break for the summer period. Speakers have included senior diplomats, academics, government officials and commentators, who addressed a wide range of themes pertinent to international relations and Australia’s place in the world today.

This year efforts have been made to vary the format of events, with more panel-style discussions, and to broaden the diversity of voices heard, including by hosting speakers visiting Australia from overseas. A highlight for the year was the annual dinner held in November 2015, where branch members were treated to a presentation by Mr Dennis Richardson AO FAIIA, Secretary of the Department of Defence. The Council has decided to move the timing of the annual dinner to March or April in future, in order to avoid clashing with the national conference.
Members will have noticed a lull in the event program in the early months of 2016, due largely to a transition period within the Council. It is pleasing to report that a fresh events team has now been formed, drawing on the talents and energy of new Council members, which bodes well for the event program for the remainder of 2016 and into 2017. Council always welcomes event suggestions or offers from members of the branch.

Lawson Lobb and Jill Harris have continued to sustain us all with snacks and drinks and we thank them for their efficient and reliable service to the Branch. Paul Gallagher is leaving after many years on Council and we thank him for his participation particularly for his assistance with administration and his wise counsel.

As a voluntary organisation, the Branch only exists because of the interest of its members. Membership has been maintained at about 280 over the year and will be maintained over the next year if your Council can continue to provide an attractive program and members spread the word and encourage others to join us.

We employ an administrative assistant for eight hours per week to process memberships and manage communications with the public, the National Office, and members. We continue to be well served in this regard by Jackie Collinson.

The AIIA website is run by the National Office and we will be working with them over the year to improve its functional performance, improve its presentation where desired, and link social media. Suggestions are welcome.

I conclude by thanking all members of the Council, past and present, for their support of the Branch over the last year.

Robert W. Lowry
ACT Branch President
Australian Institute of International Affairs