

AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS (ACT BRANCH)
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
11 SEPTEMBER 2019

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

The ACT Branch has had a busy twelve months and we are poised for more activity in the year ahead. My heartfelt thanks go to fellow Councillors for their support in delivering an excellent program of events. In particular I would like to call out Vice President Natalie Mobini for her tireless work in organising events, Lawson Lobb and Jill Harris, often assisted by Brian Ely, for maintaining a high quality hospitality offering at events and Vice President Sacha Blumen for recording and placing events on the Facebook site.

Space does not allow me to mention all the speakers who have enriched Branch meetings over the course of the past year. Suffice to say that we have averaged three meetings a month in 2018-2019 on a broad range of topics and with an average attendance of 55 per event.

The Great Debate between Graeme Dobell and Tony Kevin in February that began the year set the tone for a number of cold war-themed presentations that followed. Notable amongst these was Professor Michael Wesley's talk on 'Knowledge, Innovation and the New Cold War'.

Given the current mood of international affairs, it is not surprising that a number of our events focussed on the question of China's influence in Australia. At the Branch AGM last year Professor Clive Hamilton spoke on Chinese influence in Australia and Fergus Hanson from ASPI covered cyber-security threats in his 'conversation' (a new delivery mode for Branch events) with me and Branch members in April.

It was a busy year for the conduct of national elections in our region and many speakers addressed the topic directly or indirectly in their presentations. Prominent amongst these were former Ambassador to Indonesia Bill Farmer's talk on Indonesia, Professor Peter McCawley's talk on Indonesia's seven Presidents, a talk by the Mexican Ambassador on his country's international outlook, and Bill Fisher's Christmas party presentation on the referendum in New Caledonia.

The Branch hosted a number of distinguished international thinkers and practitioners. Just to highlight a few, the Deputy Prime Minister of Ukraine presented on Ukraine's Perception of World Security, Professor Matsuda from Japan discussed the topic, 'The Dilemma between Security and Economy', and Professor Alan Tidwell from Georgetown University spoke on small power diplomacy in Washington.

A highlight of the year was the Branch's Annual Dinner at the Boathouse on 19 March. The Secretary of Defence, Greg Moriarty, spoke on Australia's evolving defence posture in what was a very frank and thought-provoking presentation. Feedback on the dinner was generally positive and reflected well on the Branch's standing in the international relations and security community in Canberra.

In response to a request from members of the Diplomatic Corps in Canberra, the Branch invited Allan Behm, formerly in the office of Shadow Foreign Minister, Senator Penny Wong, to deliver a presentation on the Australian Labour Party's foreign policy platform during the federal election campaign in April-May. The meeting received a lot of positive feedback from Embassies. Unfortunately, our request for a speaker on the Coalition's foreign policy platform did not yield any fruit before the election.

Membership numbers have been trending in a modestly positive direction in the first seven months of 2019 and remain healthily above the number of members for the same period in 2018. As at 8 August 2019, the Branch had 318 financial members.

It is important that ACT Branch, as with any volunteer association, undergoes internal rejuvenation in order to be self-sustaining. Over the year, the Branch took concrete steps to reach out to younger members and potential members. We organised stands at O-week events at the ANU and ADFA in February and at the University of Canberra's bush week market day in July. These recruitment drives led to a significant increase in new student members whom, we hope, will remain on the membership role for many years to come.

A particular focus of our youth outreach in recent months has been the forging of links with alumni of DFAT's New Colombo Plan who reside in and around the ACT. As you may be aware, the NCP gives university-level students exciting avenues to study abroad as part of their degrees. Since its inception several years ago, there are over one thousand NCP alumni in the ACT region alone. ACT Branch is currently working with local alumni on a special panel event to take advantage of generous DFAT funding for joint NCP-AIIA activities. We hope to host the ACT's NCP-AIIA event at the time of the National Conference focussing on the mobility of young professionals in the Asia-Pacific region.

Also on the youth front, Olivia Cable organised an 'AIIA in the Schools' pilot at Radford College and Cameron Hawker is leading an 'IR in the Pub' initiative we hope to hold before the end of the year.

On-line publicity of Branch events has been increasing but there is still room for improvement. Our Branch Administrative Assistant, Caitlin Plesek, is spearheading a social media strategy which is intended to heighten our presence and foster more informed debate. The objective is to maintain an active on-line presence by posting articles on topical issues on the Branch Facebook, Twitter, website and, eventually, Instagram pages. We aim,

at least, to ensure information about events is disseminated routinely via Facebook or Twitter feeds.

As you can see from Treasurer Phil Huntley's Report for the year ending 30 June 2019, we foreshadow a deficit of around \$4000 in the Branch budget for 2019-20. To offset this liability, Council recently discussed the pros and cons of increasing membership fees. We considered that an increase in membership dues would be preferable to charging members to attend individual events as some other Branches do. We are also aware that it has been at least seven years since the last increase of membership fees. Council is of the view, and we hope it is a view shared by all members, that ACT Branch membership provides substantial value for money.

With that by way of context, I wish to propose a modest increase in membership fees with immediate effect, as follows:

<u>Member Category</u>	<u>Current fee</u>	<u>Proposed fee</u>
	\$	\$
Corporate/Diplomatic	280	300
Individual	115	130
Senior individual	80	90
Family	135	150
Senior family	105	120
Student (with AJIA)	50	50
Student (without AJIA)	25	25

Please find amongst your papers a short resolution giving effect to an increase in fees as proposed by Council. I would be grateful for an indication from the floor that the resolution is acceptable.

The current Council, with the exception of Eleanor Paynter and Christopher Adam, are standing for re-election. A new nomination has been received from Bradley Innes.

In the year ahead Branch Members may be assured of Council's commitment to delivering a quality program of activities and we remain very interested in receiving suggestions for forthcoming events.

Heath McMichael
President

11 September 2019