

**AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS
(ACT BRANCH)
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 6 SEPTEMBER 2018
PRESIDENT'S REPORT**

The FY 17-18 was another dynamic year in international relations and at home we saw the release of the Foreign Policy White Paper in November and Australia hosting the ASEAN heads of government meeting in Sydney in March. The former became the subject of the talk by David Irvine at our Annual Dinner in March.

The branch has hosted 23 meetings since last year's AGM, drawing on distinguished local, interstate and visiting international speakers. Presentations have addressed a broad range of international relations subjects. Latin America has been a thematic focus in 2018, with three events held to date, and at least one more to come before the end of the year. Several events have been held in partnership with other organisations. While the core program has been strong, the incoming council could consider further diversifying the range of formats and venues in order to appeal to a wider audience.

I would like to pay tribute to Natalie Mobini who has done an outstanding job in putting the program together and promoting events over several years. And, Heath McMichael again took the lead in organizing the Annual Dinner.

Lawson Lobb and Jill Harris, often assisted by Brian Ely when they were travelling the world, have continued to sustain us all with snacks and drinks and we thank them for their efficient and reliable service to the Branch. The opportunity to socialise prior to and after events is part of the attraction of attending Branch events.

The Branch's finances remain strong but after seven years of not raising membership fees or meeting attendance charges the Council will need to consider what increases might be necessary to cover costs. The Treasurer will present the audited statement for the FY 2017-18 at the AGM.

We continue to use social media to promote our events and record events whenever possible for our Facebook page. Sacha Blumen has worked hard to upgrade coverage of the talks but there is more to be done to improve our overall social media presence.

As you will be aware, there has been a change of administrative assistants. Jackie Collinson moved to ANU after over six years of dedicated service and has been replaced by the equally capable and reliable Caitlin Plesek. Caitlin works eight hours per week in two blocks that change by semester but currently works on Tuesday and Thursday mornings.

The two main administrative changes we have made are to unify the membership category of student and replace PayPal with Stripe for the payment of membership and attendance charges. Stripe seems to be more user friendly but if you have any problems with it please advise a member of the Council or Caitlin.

Membership has declined from 398 last year to 301 (as at 28 August). The main reason for that is the drop off in student numbers and the cessation of the complementary DFAT graduate memberships (40). Student numbers bounce around because they rarely renew but the effort involved in recruiting them is an investment in the brand and the future of the AIIA. Consequently, the Council is undertaking initiatives to rebuild the student numbers and follow up renewals of individual/diplomatic memberships. Members are also encouraged to assist in promoting membership among colleagues, family, and friends.

The current Council, with the exception of me and Josephine Rickard are standing for re-election. There will be a contest for the position of president between the current Vice President, Heath McMichael, and a former president, Cameron Hawker. Two of the current Council, Natalie Mobini and Sacha Blumen, have also accepted nominations for the two vice president positions. There are also some new nominations for Council.

I would like to express my appreciation for the work and support of the Council over the last two years and to wish them and the Branch best wishes for the future.

Bob Lowry
President
28 August 2018