



CEO's Report to the AGM 2016

Having only started my CEO role with the ASA in January of this year, preparing a report for 2015 is a slightly challenging experience, but it is a tribute to our great team that I have been able to work with them to scope out an overview of the previous 12 months.

Overall 2015 was a year of consolidation, bedding down a number of initiatives that had been taken in prior years and assessing which ones were bearing fruit and therefore worthy of further development and which ones needed to be changed or discontinued. One factor that remains steady from year to year, however, is our appreciation for the assistance that we receive from both the Australia Council and Copyright Agency, which allow us to continue to grow and develop the services that we offer to our members.

Highlights

- ❖ Advocacy including submission to the Productivity Commission on the proposed changes to Intellectual Property Arrangements
- ❖ The launch of the all new Style File website
- ❖ The first Virtual Writer's Group
- ❖ Launch of the Endowment Fund
- ❖ RA Book Pros, the new look Author in Schools Programme
- ❖ 2nd National Writer's Congress

Staffing

Over the course of the year there have been a number of staff changes, including Jane Coulcher, who replaced Lucie Stevens as Program Manager when she headed off to Germany, Brigid O'Sullivan who has taken charge of the financials on a contract part-time basis and Olivia Lanchester who has been working with us two days a week on the RA Book Pros initiative, but who is also providing wonderful advocacy support in her capacity as a copyright lawyer.

Then last but by no means least, Angelo Loukakis retired after six years as Executive Director with the organisation. Many of you will have attended one of Angelo's farewells, so I won't repeat the many accolades that have been rightly said about him, but as his successor I would like to publicly thank him for everything that he did to ensure a smooth transition for me into this role, not to mention the nuggets of advice over our regular glasses of wine.

Advocacy

Having recently conducted our membership survey, we understand even more clearly, the degree to which our members value our role as advocates. This advocacy covers two major areas; political/ industry issues and then individual advocacy on behalf of our

members when they find themselves in a difficult contractual or legal situation. 2015 saw an increase in both these areas.

The trouble began in last year's federal budget when the then Minister for Arts, George Brandis, raided the coffers of the Australia Council in order to set up a grants body within his own department. This move was devastating for arts bodies across all sectors, including the ASA, which was vociferous in its condemnation of these actions. Lobbying was extensive across all arts organisations and resulted in a Senate hearing, which was attended by both our ED and Chair. As a direct result of this hearing and the effectiveness of the campaign waged by the industry, Senator Mitch Fifield was appointed to the Arts portfolio and a third of the funding that had been stripped from Australia Council was returned. The Book Council fell victim to the changes, however, and was cancelled in December.

As if this weren't enough, the Productivity Commission also began another review into copyright, including a proposed change to the parallel importation rules and a move towards replacing our fair dealing exceptions with an American style Fair Use policy, both of which would have a devastating impact on Australian stories, literature and culture. The ASA naturally made a submission to that enquiry and the draft report was released at the end of April this year. You will all be hearing a great deal about this in the coming months, but suffice it to say that it is impossible to think of a more concentrated, ill-conceived attack on the fundamental rights of creators and we will be fighting long and hard in the weeks and months to come, along with our arts body colleagues, to repel and reverse this assault on author rights and income.

As for individual advocacy, we are finding that our advice has never been sought more keenly, nor needed so desperately, as the dramatic changes in technology have opened the doors to a raft of unscrupulous new operators, ready to exploit people's dreams of being published. We will be providing as much information as we can to our members over the coming months, to help arm them with the knowledge to avoid the charlatans, but there is a truism that is hugely applicable here: ***'if in doubt, don't!'***

Congress

As many of you will know, the ASA held the second National Writer's Congress in September in Sydney, with a stellar line up of presenters from Scott Turow to , Jackie French, Mark Dreyfus to George Brandis, Bronwyn Bancroft to Michael Mohammed Ahmad not to mention Linda Jaivin, Anne Summers and everyone in between. Entitled ***reclaim, reboot, renew: creative practice in the digital age***, it was well attended by authors, illustrators and industry professionals and the feedback has been overwhelmingly positive.

We are currently looking at ways in which we can continue to bring writers together and provide them with the stimulation of new ideas and new possibilities, but in a way that reaches a wider range of our membership.

Professional Development and Programs

As mentioned in the Treasurer's report, the program of workshops was carefully analysed and in 2015 has been focused on the events that are of most interest to our members. The Virtual Writer's Group has been a great new initiative, as has literary speed dating and we are delighted that some publishing contracts have resulted from

these events. Wherever possible, we partner with our colleagues at the Writers' Centres and organisations such as SCWBI, to ensure that as many authors as possible are able to benefit from these opportunities.

Our Mentors program, which we are able to offer as a result of generous funding from Copyright Agency, continues to be hugely sought after and successful, with a number of manuscripts wending their way to eventual publication, an exciting outcome for everyone. The Authors in Schools initiative has been revamped as Reading Australia Book Pros and a trial is about to take place for this in the 2016 year. The new look Style File website has also been well received, although enhanced future marketing should help this gain more traction in the coming year.

In addition, the Asher Award was presented to Joan Beaumont at the Sydney Christmas festivities, for her wonderful book, *Broken Nation* and Chloe Higgins took up the Ray Koppe Young Writers' Residence, for her novella intriguingly entitled, *Infomercials for mixing bowls and treadmills*. These awards are an important way of recognizing the achievements of our members.

Finally we launched the Endowment Fund in September, to support the ASA's work in advancing our nation's writing and reading culture, and the practice and interests of the authors who are its creative foundation. This will form an important part of our marketing plans in 2016.

The Future

The achievements from last year have all helped to place the ASA in a strong position for 2016. The Professional Development program is now in full swing, the mentorships are underway, our advocacy is ramping up significantly since the release of the appalling recommendations in the Productivity Commission's interim report on copyright and we are hard at work with a planned refreshment of the website, up-dated resources and a renewed focus on providing our authors with the skills and knowledge to maximize any and all opportunities in the brave new world that faces us. I very much look forward to working with you all to continue to build an exciting, vigorous and successful organization for the benefit of all our members.

Juliet Rogers
CEO