

President's Annual Report 2005–2006

Australasian Study of Parliament Group

Hon. Kevin Rozzoli

I am pleased to present my annual report. The past year has carried on much of the good ground work put in place over the last two years. In consequence of this the ASPG is now in the best financial position it has ever experienced and the Australasian Parliamentary Review has re-established its reputation as a quality journal not only for the interesting, well written and relevant articles within its covers but the reliability of its appearance on the shelves. The third benchmark of success is our conferences. Last year's conference in Sydney was marked by an innovative approach to the program that received favourable comment from all who attended. This was the introduction of workshop sessions relating to the theme of the conference, a feature which has been again incorporated into this year's program. It is my hope that it will be a regular feature of future conferences.

I am sure we are facing a time of great challenge for our democratic institutions. Public confidence is at low ebb and every day we see challenges to the democratic order both at home and abroad. In such a climate the ASPG has a vital role to play. Transparency of process and accountability in decision-making are major planks of democracy about which Sir Winston Churchill commented:

Many forms of government have been tried and will be tried in this world of sin and woe. No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time.

The checks and balances of a well functioning democratic institution are fundamental to their efficacy. To we who are dedicated to good governance the task of making those checks and balances interact appropriately in the interests of the community presents a clear challenge.

Finances

Firstly I would like to address the all important matter of finance. Our Treasurer has, as you will have seen from his report, done a superb job in keeping our accounts in order. We are now in the soundest financial position the ASPG has ever experienced with our year end balance of increasing from \$28,773.01 to \$43,474.61.

It is pleasing to note that all line items have come in above budget with the exception of corporate memberships which understandably are in line with the budget projection. It will be interesting to see what return we will receive in the coming year from the Copyright Agency. Not only has this been a substantial source of income this year it is in some measure a guide to the value of our publications.

I note the cautionary budget presented by the Treasurer for the forthcoming year. While enjoying better than ever revenues our reserves are still very small. I would like to increase these further before taking on any major financial commitments.

Once again I must express my sincerest thanks to Dr. Anthony Marinac for his dedicated service to the organisation.

The Australasian Parliamentary Review

During the year our Editor, Dr Elaine Thompson, has again produced two superb editions and thoroughly deserves our congratulations on an excellent job. I am sure Elaine would be the first to acknowledge however that the journal is only as good as the quality of its articles. To ensure the standard remains high we need to draw from the widest range of those whose work and interest is focused on the functions of our parliaments. I would encourage ASPG members, members and former members of parliament, academics and political journalists to submit articles. Only through its quality and relevance can we continue to develop and promote the value of the *APR*. My special thanks go to Elaine for her outstanding editorial work and also to those who work behind the scenes to ensure its production and distribution.

Website

This year we shifted our website to an external server. I thank the Department of the Senate for the excellent contribution made to its establishment. Its location within the parliamentary server was always seen as an interim measure. For a small annual cost we can now access a wider range of programs which will further build its usefulness. I note that it has not been kept as up to date as I would like an aspect we must address in the coming year.

Membership

There has been a pleasing increase in individual membership during the past year. Membership remains vital to our success providing valuable income for the *Australasian Parliamentary Review* which together with the Annual Conference constitutes our flagship activities. There is still, however, scope to increase membership further by reaching out to former members of Parliament, retired parliamentary officers, academics and journalists. We should particularly pursue the ranks of the recently retired. They possess a wonderful knowledge and experience base, free from the restrictions on activity and comment that may have inhibited them while working. I can personally attest to the greater objectivity one experiences after throwing off the shackles.

Research Projects

Last year I foreshadowed my interest in the ASPG pursuing a research project. While the project that has been undertaken did not follow quite the format I envisaged I am indebted to members of the Victorian Chapter who have marshalled a group of some ten academics and former members of parliament to produce an excellent discussion paper entitled 'Why Accountability Must Be Renewed'.¹ The paper may be accessed via the ASPG website by clicking onto 'Project'. It is intended to continue work beyond the Discussion Paper by engaging parliamentary leaders, senior public servants, and all persons interested in the pursuit of excellence in governance to join the debate and contribute their ideas. The paper received good media coverage at the time of its release and a considerable number of copies of the paper have been distributed. I addressed the Institute of Public Administration (NSW) recently on the Paper. The presentation was well received. The ASPG has gained valuable public recognition from the project and enhanced its standing in the eyes of the interested community. The work is an excellent example of the value of an individual chapter taking the initiative and driving a program that could have far reaching significance. I am aware of the amount of research being undertaken by individuals but am also aware that, while it is largely uncoordinated and, if I may use the phrase 'bannerless', its impact is diminished. I urge the Chapters to follow the Victorian initiative and bring forward work being done in their area for consideration of ASPG involvement.

Other Matters

This year has been a difficult one to maintain the momentum of previous year but nonetheless what we have achieved has been significant and satisfying. The key to building the ASPG lies in the capacity of the President to visit and encourage our more active chapters and also to visit and stimulate interest within the less active.

¹ This paper was published in *APR* 21(2), Spring 2006.

To assist in these endeavours I have asked the Treasurer to include a small amount in the budget to cover travel costs.

During the year I have had a very heavy personal workload and have not been able to devote as much time to ASPG activities as I would have liked. This has meant that a number of projects have languished, projects such as the Pacific Island initiative, the history project, the Newsletter, establishing links with Former Members Groups, In-house publishing, and the Index of Articles. I will be endeavouring to push these projects along in the coming year as I am certain that the Group must remain proactive if it is to thrive and reach out to its full potential.

We need to address the demands of driving the organization in a serious way. Actions do not occur of their own volition but need to be driven by the executive and, through their endeavours, the Chapters. The ASPG has enormous potential. Let us all work together to realize that potential. ▲