

CLA President's report for 2018

With a lilt in my voice and a tune buzzing in my brain, this year's report leads off with news of a 'Freedom Song' that has been in conception and composition in 2018. We hope it will be recorded in 2019. I've written the lyrics, and CLA member Jeff Carroll of WA, who is a professional composer, has written the music. We may have the song on the CLA website in 2019.

Right: It also gladdens my heart when members come to visit, as Jean and George Winston of the Blue Mountains NSW did mid-2018 while in Canberra to take in exhibitions at galleries.



Board meetings: I'm pleased to report that board meetings have been held quarterly with good attendance and even better rapport. I've served on boards where antagonism made the meetings most unpleasant. CLA's board is the opposite: people listen attentively and contribute when they have special knowledge or experience to offer. Much more gets done in much less time – and it allows board members coming in by Skype or phone link to take full part in proceedings. Board papers go out in advance for directors to read and assimilate; discussion by exception occurs if further debate is needed. We get through a full board meeting in two hours, often with time to explore bright ideas for the future.

During 2018, for the first time, we decided to try to bring all Board Members together for one meeting (but one director could not make it). The meeting in May saw directors Margaret Howkins (WA) and Rajan Venkataraman (Tasmania) attending in person, rather than electronically. It was an opportunity for board members to meet (some for the first time) and get to know each other better over breakfast in advance of the normal meeting. The trial was a success, and we expect to hold a 'physical' board meeting about every two years, funds allowing. Skype allows meetings as often as needed with individual interstate directors between board meetings.

Board composition: Eloise McLean was appointed a director of CLA in October. Elly was then a first year law student at ANU who had already contributed extensively to CLA work, including as submission author and lead presenter at an ACT Legislative Assembly committee hearing, and by attending a federal parliament committee hearing and consultative meetings of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Her brief background, along with those of other board members, is on the CLA website at <https://www.cla.asn.au/News/who-we-are/> For members without internet access, please post a request to me and I'll send you a full list of directors and their brief CVs.

Agenda-setting: During a year, we respond to requests from parliaments to comment on proposed legislation by making submissions. We made about 35 submissions, or were involved in similar hearing/meeting processes, over the past 12 months (from about 100 requests). That's about three major submissions a month, which is very demanding on a small volunteer group.

In virtually all cases, we are reacting to the agenda that other people are setting. So, to try to set the agenda, each year we write one or more CLA Australia Day letters proposing new approaches on important topics. In 2018, one Australia Day letter requested federal and state Attorneys-General to bring in a requirement for extra training before judicial appointment. Magistrates and judges are not required to do any training before appointment or after (many do, of course). This issue will not go away: having put it out in the public arena, CLA will continue to argue for judicial training, in advance, throughout Australia as part of our Better Justice initiative launched in 2016.

In 2018, our other A-Day letter asked the Senate President and House Speaker to commission analysis and research for a needed complete reform of the federal parliamentary committee system. This issue also won't disappear: eventually the parliament will acknowledge its committee system is seriously compromised by the expanding number of inquiries and the diminishing number of MPs who can devote adequate time to each of the many committees they sit on.

Spreading the word: The annual report shows that the Tasmanian and West Australian groups continued to be very active and to achieve diverse successes. Director Richard Griggs in

Tasmania is managing the process to secure a Tasmanian Human Rights Act, while Margaret Howkins in WA is leading the campaign for an Independent Police Complaints Commission for that state or, at least, a new system whereby police do not investigate police – either when the public make complaints, or when police health or mental health compensation issues are at stake.

Submissions: Rajan Venkataraman managed our submissions process excellently during the year, skilfully drawing on the wide expertise amongst directors and members. If you see an issue is topical, and you're a member with special experience or expertise in the field, please let Rajan or the secretary know that you can contribute. We made submissions during 2018 to parliament federally and in most states and territories. Getting 'double benefit' for the detailed work we put in to creating a submission is our new aim: we plan to send copies to the all state/territory justice ministries and the like well in advance of their producing their own contributions to the debate.

Marketing: In a first for CLA, director Jennifer Ashton – whose real expertise is as an international UN refugee officer for decades – organised printing of a small number of CLA T-shirts with a catchy slogan devised by Vice-President Tim Vines (see annual report). Having printed and marketed just 30, we've decided we're not likely to go into the T-shirt business in a big way. Producing greeting cards (which you can buy) and bookmarks, both featuring CLA's National Liberty Tree, were successes on which we are likely to expand. For the first time, in 2018 we undertook a mail-out to all CLA members to verify email addresses, to check members were receiving the *CLArion* newsletter, and offering bookmarks, greeting cards, and the T-shirt.

Right: I was able to contribute to the marketing effort in 2018, with comments on end-of-life and territory freedom of choice that received national coverage on the ABC and in The Australian.



Justice heavy: The continuing case of CLA member Sue Neill-Fraser is a huge concern. At year-end, we were awaiting whether she would be allowed a three-judge hearing under the "right to appeal" law in Tasmania that itself was the result of earlier CLA lobbying efforts. She has been in jail – wrongly, we believe – for 9 1/2 years. Her appeal has been beset by legal delays and questionable police tactics, with witnesses arrested and charged before they could give their evidence in her favour. We hope justice will finally prevail for Sue in 2019.

Justice light: The Big End of town seems to receive justice a la carte, and similarly Australia's spooks enjoy light-touch supervision because a key committee (Joint Standing Committee on Intelligence and Security) is dominated by MPs who see themselves as part of the intelligence elite, instead of being rigorous monitors and managers for the polity. With security agencies and police gaining ever more intrusive Identity, surveillance and detention powers, the skewed holding of our secret forces to account is a worry for civil liberties, rights and freedoms across Australia.

Extending good laws: 2018 campaigning nationwide for the "right to appeal" law may produce good results in 2019 in WA, the ACT and Queensland. CLA is also a leading campaigner for bills of rights, particularly in Tasmania and in Queensland. We are also actively working to highlight how most Australian governments refuse to abide by Model Litigant Obligations.

In 2019, my focus as president will be making even more effective use of the really wide range of expertise and skills of the directors and members of CLA. VP Tim Vines is due to complete his PhD (on global health preparedness) by mid-year, which will allow him to take more of a lead in managing CLA, as well as extending activity by training younger people under his National Media Spokesperson role. And I'm excited by the fact that we are going to more closely examine the area of 'regulations', where it seems to me bureaucrats get a licence to abuse, or make life hard for, the little guy. Protecting the little guy is most definitely an area of prime interest to CLA.

– Dr Kristine Klugman, President, 190228