

President's report

Annual events, such as AGMs, provide good opportunities to take stock and reflect on the year behind us and the efforts of the many that have gone into supporting the important work of the Conservation Council.

At the time of last year's AGM, we were not to know that it would be our Executive Director's last year at the helm of the Conservation Council and it is fitting to acknowledge the incredible contribution Helen Oakey made to the Conservation Council. Helen's knowledge of the local community and capacity to make connections across it was truly inspiring. She put her all into upholding the vision of the Conservation Council to speak up for a healthy environment and a sustainable future for our region. Helen really took the profile of the Conservation Council to new heights. She was the media go-to on local environmental issues and built excellent relationships with politicians and supporters alike, across political divides. Helen has an intuitive understanding of campaigning, and with her staff, developed and drove campaigns to reduce our emissions and protect our local environment. Her advocacy to encourage us to make the switch out of gas and make the move out of our cars are campaigns that will benefit all of us. A hat tip here too to the huge contribution staff member, Kirsten Duncan, made to these campaigns. As will Helen's tireless advocacy for Lawson North and support for protecting Bluett's Block. But the Conservation Council, much like our natural environment, also benefits from regeneration and it is to this end that we wish Helen well in her new adventure in Melbourne and welcome Elle Lawless, our new Executive Director. Some of you might remember Elle from her previous time at the Cons Council. We are very excited to welcome Elle back in this new capacity and look forward to supporting her work in the year ahead.

The Board too participates in regeneration. I would like to acknowledge the immense contribution of the Board members who are not continuing with us, some of many years' standing. Peter Ottesen, who has served as President and Vice-President previously, Helen Sims, who has made an incredible contribution as Secretary over many years, Chris Ikin, who has been a fantastic and hard-working Treasurer and MaryClare Woodford, who has provided so much support with fundraising and encouraging us to raise our cultural awareness and engagement with First Nations issues. You will all be missed and the Conservation Council is the better for your contributions.

This has been the year of a federal election, often described as 'the climate election'. Many Australians made this very clear at the polling booth and it is exciting to see much-needed policy change in this space. At the time of last year's AGM, I did not foresee that I would be stepping aside from my role of chair for four months to work on an election campaign and I would like to publicly thank Rod Griffiths for stepping back into the role of Chair for that time.

We have enjoyed a strong Governance Sub-committee throughout the year which has continued to focus on ensuring our policies are up to date and fit for purpose and this is work that will be continued by the next Board.

Our finances are in very good shape and we have ended the year in a good financial position. Our (sadly outgoing) Treasurer Chris Ikin has put in an enormous amount of work to ensure we are meeting all our obligations and that our financial position is transparent and clearly communicated.

As President, I am thrilled to see how hard our Working Groups have worked during the year on submissions and developing positions on a range of issues. The Lawson North Working Group has taken on the Commonwealth's Defence Housing Australia to prevent extensive development in Lawson North which would significantly damage and threaten the critically endangered ecological communities of grassy woodlands and natural grasslands. Also the Biodiversity Working Group, which has an incredible amount of expertise and, with the Conservation Council's biodiversity campaigner, has been supporting the work of the Lawson North group has also been promoting a Biodiversity Network for the ACT that aims to achieve protection in perpetuity of biodiverse remnants across all tenures; the implementation of existing government strategies and policies; and improvement of existing on-ground management for restoration of biodiversity. And just since the 2021-22 financial year, the Transport Working Group has been activated and has already done a huge amount of work in that sphere...more on that in my report for the next AGM!

I would also like to recognise the incredible contributions made by our member groups, who do so much to add to our collective knowledge and advocate for a better future in so many important areas. That said, all of our working groups are always open to our member groups' participation - their meeting dates are always advertised in the Weekly Wrap. With that in mind, our First Nations Engagement Sub-committee has - again since the end of the 2021-22 financial year - converted to become a working group to broaden options for input and would welcome new members.

So here's to another great year of shaping a sustainable future for the ACT and to all the many people who will be part of making this happen.