

President's Report to the 2014 AGM

The 2013 CNAV AGM in Frankston saw a spike in nominations for the 9 committee positions. A full committee was elected for the first time in CNAV's history, and the average age instantly became substantially lower than at any time in the past! The decision by former President Mary Jo Fortuna to not seek re-election meant we lost a CNAV stalwart, but utilising the potential provided by the new mix of old and new members was our challenge.



The first committee meeting was held in November where the new executive was elected. Caroline Roff (Secretary) and Helen Smith (Treasurer/Membership Secretary) continued on in their roles, with Jens-Kristian Toft Hansen taking the Vice-Presidency and myself the Presidency. The committee was rounded out with Marina Cook, Thea Boudarian, Tim Croucher, Ian Oshlack (Rajeev) and Mick Bourke. Subsequent Saturday morning meetings at Borderlands were on 8 February, 12 April, 14 June, 12 July, 9 August and 13 September.

Communication with members was one of the committee's first discussions and Roundabout continuation was identified as a priority, with Tim Croucher to assist with the task. Our on-line presence was identified as an issue and it was decided to totally rework the CNAV website as a "repository of CNAV wisdom" and to establish a closed Facebook group to be used for interaction between members. Jens took on the role of leading the website process and Marina Cook the Facebook role.

Roundabouts have been published and circulated in November 13, December 13, February 14, April 14, May 14, June 14, August 14 and September 14. It is now circulated to all municipalities in the state, to Victoria's political leaders and, interestingly, requests for receiving it are now coming from some state and federal politicians. The website re-development has been an extended process due to circumstances beyond CNAV's control but a tender has been accepted and work is continuing by Computers in the Shire. We are looking forward to the end result and the benefits that will bring. The Facebook presence has been established with Marina issuing memberships of the page to requesting CNAV members. At this stage we have only a limited number of members, and the number of posts and responses to them have been similarly slow in developing.

Access by community newspapers to State Government advertising has continued to be a time-consuming priority. The appointment of PAS Consulting (Bill Penrose) as the CNAV Advertising Broker in September 2013 has led to many positive changes. The comprehensive website established allows CNAV members to log in, monitor and update their individual paper contacts, statistics, dates and charges and allows the State Government's buying agencies (now Mitchell and Partners and Zenith Optimedia) access to those details to assist their targeting and decision-making. This has seen an increase in government advertising, with some \$50,000 being paid to CNAV members in a 12 month period. Bill provides CNAV with a monthly report of government advertising activity.

A big breakthrough in the availability of State Government advertising came mid-year when the premier became involved and directed a meeting be held between Chief Advisor Steve Murphy, DPC's Director of Strategic Communications and Protocol Louise Martin and Assistant Director Christine Panayotou to meet with CNAV over this issue. From this meeting 3-monthly meetings have been planned to review progress and discuss issues. The first of these will take place before the 2014 conference. Mick Bourke has taken on the responsibility of co-representing CNAV with me at these meetings. In the meantime, CNAV continues to be represented at the State Government's Regional Communication Forums – at Shepparton in March 2014 and the next is imminent.

Access to Federal Government advertising has also been on the CNAV radar. No sooner had Mick Bourke taken on the Federal Government advertising role than it was announced the Federal Government had changed advertising agencies – Mitchell and Partners have won that contract. This has involved internal changes at Mitchells as a "Federal Team" is established. CNAV and Mitchells have agreed to meet as soon as this has occurred.

The CNAV Broker's role was covered by a Memorandum of Understanding when it was first established and PAS Consulting appointed. This was to last 12 months while a more binding and safe-guarding contract was drawn up. This has taken some time with two versions considered and more legal advice being sought. A 3 month extension to the Memorandum of Understanding has been offered to PAS Consulting as a result.

Governance has been at the forefront of much CNAV activity these last 12 months. Firstly there was the CNAV constitution that needed to be brought into line with the Consumer Affairs Victoria checklist for new model rules for incorporated associations. The result of these discussions is before us for consideration at today's AGM. Governance has also arisen as policy development has begun. Mick Bourke has taken on the role of Policy Co-ordinator for the CNAV committee. The CNAV committee understands that it needs a solid structure to ensure that decisions it makes are consistent, both in relationship to its constitution and between individual decisions themselves. Policies provide a strong framework for this to occur. Development of a suite of policies to ensure good governance of the association has begun. The planned policies cover a range of areas, such as governance, committee of management, financial management, values, people management and occupational health and safety. Once all policies have been adopted a process will commence whereby 2-3 policies will be tabled at each committee meeting on a rotating basis so that they are continually reviewed and remain relevant.

Whilst CNAV didn't run to a regional committee meeting this year it was involved in a grants workshop run by the City of Greater Bendigo and in meeting with the Community Development Department of Macedon Ranges Shire.

And there is the conference. Planning a conference is an annual issue and in anticipation of the task arising much work went into investigating, evaluating and deciding on the area and venue. Despite the early decision the multiple facets of the organisation ensure a long process – from MC, speakers, workshops, personnel, catering, format and running sheet. And on top of that then there's the awards – categories, judges, co-ordination, printing, presentations and encouraging representatives from the entered papers to attend the dinner. Caroline has done an incredible job in pulling these strands together again, supported by Helen's efficient handling of the always worrying booking situation.

An early 2014 CNAV Committee meeting



So where do those achievements leave CNAV? What are our challenges?

First and foremost, I believe, CNAV membership must go beyond the plateau we seem to have arrived at. CNAV had 70 members and 3 associate members at the beginning of 2014 and, with the financial year renewals still coming in, at September's committee meeting we are just approaching that hump again. To have a robust network, to boost our brand recognition and to assist in negotiations with the government and outside organisations, CNAV needs a strong and confident membership base.

Communication needs to be continually monitored and tweaked. A revamped website will need to be monitored and kept continually up to date and relevant, and our entry into the realm of Facebook fleshed out and expanded. To achieve these things CNAV needs to encourage a more active member participation – even to sharing items and achievements with Roundabout on a regular basis.

Selling ourselves depends on us communicating - knowing ourselves first. The updated The Community Newspaper is one small step in moving towards that. In a rapidly evolving communications environment we really need to ensure this publication is updated annually.

Finances are a continual concern because our annual memberships are our major income. Those \$30 membership fees then very much go in subsidising the conference! Our other income source is the intermittent administration component of grants that rarely come the way of community newspaper. To address this CNAV is planning to build a 5% commission onto State Government advertising that is published in CNAV member papers – “onto” meaning the newspapers still receive their full costings. Until CNAV can build a sustainable revenue stream the dream of one day having a base and/or administrative support will remain a dream.

And there's the committee. It has taken from the 2006 formation of CNAV to 2013 to fill all the committee positions available. Maintaining a full and vibrant committee is going to be a challenge for any state-wide organisation. Each committee member is valuable and has a valuable role to take on as their expertise and talents are recognised and shared.

As president this year I'm very pleased to have had the support and talents of Caroline, Helen, Rajeev, CNAV's Foundation President Mick, Jens, Tim, Thea and Marina to draw on.

And to conclude, all CNAV members must be thanked for their support of this association, and congratulated for their dedication in meeting those continual deadlines in the production of their community's voices.

John Ellis, President. 26/09/2014.