

Presidents Report. 23rd January 2019

Let me start by thanking the ABPA Membership for supporting me as President for the last 12 months, I considered it an honour and a privilege. I would especially like to thank those members who communicated with me during the year, this gave me a beneficial insight into the thoughts, wishes and ambitions of Members of all levels. Regardless of if I agreed with you or not, I did listen, and your opinions and reasoning guided my own actions and ideas throughout the year.

Let me also thank all members of the Committee this year, for the work they have done. I am proud of what we were able to accomplish.

Meg Gordon as Secretary - **Janine Keating** as Treasurer (and a special thank you to **Carol Hutchenson** who filled this position for the first three months) - **Ray Essery** as Vice President - Committee Members:- **Bill Gordon, Max Pringle Tom McIlveen and Bob Kettle** - State Reps:- **Mick Martin** (Qld) – **Rob Christmas & Bill Kearns** (NSW) - **Jan Lewis** (Vic) – **Irene Conner** (WA) – **Kevin McCarthy** (NT)

I would also like to thank:- **Greg North** for his work as Website Editor and also he and **David Kitchen** (who is not even a member) for the work they did when we changed our Internet Provider. **Neil McArthur** whose work as Magazine Editor continues to see the magazine rated as the single most beneficial return our members get for their annual fee. **Jan Lewis** who has done a great job as Facebook Editor. **Brenda Joy Pritchard** for her work as Promotional Officer, and also **Mick Martin** who is monitoring the role so Committee can be better informed on the role. **Hal & Brenda Pritchard** – who approached the ABPA with a proposal for running the Blackened Billy Written Competition in 2019.

My personal thanks to **Rhonda Tallnash**. During the year issues arose where we needed to know what had been done by the previous Committee, Rhonda went out of her way to assist.

Thanks, to **Penny Broun**, who is standing down from the two positions, Public Officer & Returning Officer, that she has held for years. Penny has been a helpful, efficient, cheerful and smiling contributor to the ABPA.

Thank you to those who served on various Sub -Committee's this the year. Reviewing the Performance Competition Judging Sheet (**Jack Drake, Marco Gliori, Gary Fogarty**). Reviewing the Written Competition Judging Sheet (**Mal Beverage, Will Moody, Terry Piggot**). Reviewing the Guidelines (**Jack Drake, Bill Gordon, Marion Fitzgerald**)

The year has seen us make some fundamental changes to the ABPA Rules and regulations, and while these changes will serve the ABPA membership well into the future, change is never easy and seldom occurs without criticism. It'd be overly optimistic to expect every member to agree 100% with the decisions made, certainly not every decision went the way I myself wanted. I do ask that each and every member give the changes a chance.

During the year we Revised, and improved the following:- The Competition Guidelines - The Performance Bush Poetry Adjudication Sheet -The Written Bush Poetry Adjudication Sheet -The Yarnspinning Adjudication Sheet.

We developed Guidelines for:- Running a Bush Poetry Show - Walk-up Bush Poetry Events. We moved from a Rank Order Judging System to a simpler and equally fair Aggregate Score System.

These new documents are available on our Website, where for the 1st time Event Organisers will be given the choice of Shows, Competitions or Walk-up Events, eliminating the heavily Competition biased information available previously. This should in no way be taken to indicate that Committee does not support competitions, but we think it's time we supported ALL aspects of bush poetry equally.

The other major change, and maybe the most controversial, was the abolishment of the Judges Lists. This decision was heavily debated and not taken lightly. The reasons behind the removal of these lists are as follows:-

1. There is absolutely NO evidence that winning Competitions makes anybody a better judge.
2. Qualifying requirements for inclusion on the lists appears to have changed from 2 wins to 3 wins over the years, and this change seems to have occurred between Committee meetings.
3. Individuals were included on these lists without meeting the conditions.
4. Individuals were not included despite meeting all the conditions.

5. Individuals were included on lists without ever applying to go on them.
6. Individuals were removed from lists with no reason being given.
7. Conditions for inclusion as a Judge discriminated against poets who had retired from competitions many years ago and also those who chose never to enter competitions.
8. The Lists were only open to members of the ABPA. We wish to be an outward looking and inclusive Assn, inward looking Associations all eventually implode.

It was obvious the Lists were so corrupted as to be of no worth to the credibility of our Association.

Due to the work of our Qld State Rep, Mick Martin, we're happy to welcome a new and vibrant group of poets based in Toowoomba. A couple of other new groups are in the embryo stage and we hope to hear more about this next year. Also thanks mainly to Mick, we have promotional Bumper Stickers which are available to members at \$5 each, this first run will be used to determine which slogans are most popular.

As per our Treasurers report, the ABPA is in a healthy financial position. We should use this money to promote Bush Poetry and/or provide opportunities for members to enhance their skills.

Those who attended our Special General Meeting are aware we have faced a significant issue in regards to our Constitution and that meeting was just the first step in addressing this. Now the issue has come to light, It needs to be addressed and the 2019 Committee should undergo a full Constitution review. Our Strategic Plan is outdated and badly needs to be revisited as well.

It became apparent a significant number of Gig opportunities per year come in via the ABPA Website/Committee and that in the past these Gigs had been allocated to a select few. For this reason we instigated the Survey as a 1st step in attempting to develop a workable and fair system of dealing with these enquiries. Unfortunately the response was poor. It is now up to members to monitor the distribution of these opportunities and demand a fair allocation. Our QLD Rep Mick Martin received 16 gig requests this year, took zero of these for himself and allocated them all based on poet location and experience. Well done Mick, you have set the standard.

Other Committee decisions during the year included the decision to run both the Blackened Billy and the Golden Damper Competitions again in 2019. In fairness to all ABPA Members, Committee made the decision that if we were not prepared to pay our Judges and Comperes at industry rates, that we had no right to pay prizemoney. This situation was blatantly unfair and should, under no circumstances, be revisited in the future. The paying of prizemoney with ABPA funds should be only in correlation to the payment for professional services.

Committee received expressions of interest and agreed the following Poetry groups be granted the rights to host State Championships in 2019:- Logan Bush Poets QLD - WA Bush Poets WA - Man From Snowy River Festival VIC.

We appreciate the dedication and drive of all these groups and wish them the very best of success and we will support them financially in line with previous contributions.

Finally, a quick look at our future;

We have a great product! - We have, as always, some extremely talented and dedicated people among our membership! - We have a fairly strong financial situation!

However, the ABPA is under extreme pressure, our membership numbers are plummeting, we are losing 10 – 12% of our membership a year due to ageing issues alone, this means we need to recruit approximately 30 new members a year, just to stay static. We are sitting at roughly 135 members today. Bush Poetry popularity is also in decline. There are a few isolated exceptions like the WA Bush Poets.

The easy answer is to blame this on the aging demographic of our audience and the natural ebb and flow of popularity of all art forms. But they are simply excuses and we can reverse these trends

We need to change our attitude. What we have been doing in the ABPA has not worked, and is not working for us now, to continue to do the same things and expect a better result is paramount to stupidity.

The modern revival of Bush Poetry was under way and thriving before the ABPA was formed, before the majority of our competitions started, and before we had the ABPA and all its rules and regulations. Since the formation of the ABPA, every time we encountered a problem we simply added a new rule or regulation, and we have become addicted. We refuse to look at other alternative solutions. We also encouraged the increase in prizemoney to a level where it encourages poets to build their career in Competitions and never back themselves to move to a more professional level.

Individual poets presenting poetry and performances that were relative and entertaining for our audience drove the modern revival and has continued to attract new audiences. Their success has dragged us all along for a wonderful ride and our competitions, walk up opportunities, written poetry and the like, have all prospered as a result.

Simply, we need to get back to what made us popular, and reduce our rules and regulations to a minimum so they no longer present a roadblock to the advancement of our most talented poets. The ABPA should use its resources in providing learning opportunities aimed at increasing the skills of our members and encouraging them to write for the benefit of our audience, rather than for ourselves. To achieve this we must first, chose our Committees carefully.

Unfortunately, in the latter part of the last year a committee member took it upon themselves to override a committee decision. As much as I would love to run for President again this year, I cannot bring myself to work with anyone so unethical, and will therefore not be standing again.

I'm proud of what we, as a Committee, achieved this year on behalf of our members. While not every decision this year went the way I wanted, I am proud of the fact that each time I cast a vote, I asked myself one simple question, "What is best for the ABPA?", and I voted accordingly. I'm also proud that every member, and every Committee member was given ample opportunity to express their opinions and argue those opinions. I'd encourage all members to be more active in the ABPA and express your opinions at every opportunity.

I remain passionate about Bush Poetry, I wish the new Committee and all members the very best for the coming year and again, 'Thank You' for the trust you placed in me by allowing me to be President for the last 12 months.

Gary Fogarty (President)