

## **President's Report to the Annual General Meeting, ANZAMEMS, April 2023**

2022 was a year of significant disruption and change around the globe, in the higher education sector and, as a result, for many of us in our personal and professional lives. For ANZAMEMS, it was a year of re-assessment and transition as we seek the best ways to continue the Association's work in challenging contexts.

### **Administration**

#### **THANKS MARINA, KATHLEEN AND KATIE**

Careful management of the Association's finances over the past several years and the success of *Parergon* in publishing high-quality articles that generate revenue through royalties has enabled ANZAMEMS to build its savings and support a wide range of activities and initiatives in line with our mission statement. The Association nonetheless faces rising costs in all areas of our endeavours, notably in supporting our flagship event the biannual conference. ANZAMEMS has enjoyed a very strong financial position and still maintains a substantial balance of savings, however, increasing income and diversifying sources is necessary to ensure the capacity of the Association to continue its work in the medium to long term. In light of this, pursuing membership of the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission is a priority, and professional advice about the process and benefits will be sought. Membership fees have remained steady for a substantial period; a motion to increase fees, reflecting benchmarking with other scholarly associations, will be put to the AGM in 2024.

### **ANZAMEMS Events**

The digital conference delivered by the team at the University of Western Australia, co-convened by Dr Kirk Essary and Dr Marina Gerzic, was one of the great ANZAMEMS achievements of 2022. The travails of the pandemic meant they had to organize and re-organize multiple times and made the arrangements much more onerous and lasting than they would otherwise have been. I extend my thanks, and those of the Association as a whole to them. It was a terrific event which took full advantage of the affordances of digital communication, not least by enabling us to have presenters from around the world who could not have been able to join us in person even in the best of previous circumstances, lifting our international profile.

I also thank the team at the University of Canterbury, led by co-convenors Dr Madi Williams and Associate Professor Chris Jones, for their preparations for the next ANZAMEMS conference in February 2024.

With the uncertainties of 2022, the mid-year conference, and following the success of the digital-only Seminars in 2021, ANZAMEMS' regular Seminars were combined into a hybrid event as part of the inaugural Council for the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (CHASS) Congress at the University of Melbourne. ANZAMEMS was able to provide bursaries to support in-person attendance for postgraduate and early-career researchers as well as offer digital access. The day-long program was a collaborative effort which aimed to support both professional skills and conceptual development, and included sessions on: editing journal special issues (Prof Rosalind Smith, A/Prof Sarah Ross, Prof Katie Barclay, Dr Diana G. Barnes and a pre-recorded conversation with Kate Allan (Exeter College, Oxford) and Nupur Patel (Lincoln College, Oxford); moving into policy work from a MEMS PhD (Dr Gillian Polack); MEMS research in Australia (Uncle Bill Nicholson, Wurundjeri people); and a panel 'What Gives You Hope in the Humanities?' (Dr Helen Young, Prof Katie Barclay, Prof Lesley Head (President of the Australian Academy of the Humanities), Prof Charles Zika, and Dr David Newheiser). I extend my thanks and those of all who attended to everyone who contributed to the day organising, presenting and attending. ANZAMEMS has indicated willingness to organise a small event for the 2023 CHASS Congress to be held in Sydney. I encourage any members based there who are interested to be in touch.

### **ANZAMEMS initiatives and programs**

In 2022, the General Committee and relevant subcommittees (Futures, and Honours and Prizes) reviewed the current offerings of financially-supported initiatives, prizes and events, considering increasing costs, time pressures on members involved in administration and judging, the value and benefits of current programs and ANZAMEMS' mission and constitution. The biennial conference and annual seminars are Association core business, as is reflected in the Constitution, and as such should be the major foci for financial and other resources. The Futures subcommittee considered a range of possible changes that might be recommended, concluding that the conference should remain biennial, and that consideration of a hybrid component should be included in the guidelines for future conferences to support accessibility and sustainability, but should emphasise flexibility for the organisers.

Fellowships, Special Projects and Internships have been valuable to the Association as a whole and to members, but are not core business; a joint meeting of the Futures and Honours and Prizes subcommittees decided that in light of this they will no longer be offered by ANZAMEMS should they not be able to financially support them.

As noted above, in 2021 and 2022 there were variations in the annual ANZAMEMS Seminar program (formerly PATS). There will be a call for Expressions of Interest in running Seminars in 2023. The General Committee has also approved ANZAMEMS' support for MEMS events in Australia and New Zealand that are not organised by the Association; a call for applications and guidelines will be issued for events planned for the second half of 2023 and into 2024.

In 2022, an ANZAMEMS internships scheme to support various Association projects while offering skill and career-development opportunities for MEMS postgraduates and ECRs was instituted. The first internship, held by Dr Matthew Firth, supported redevelopment of the *Parergon* website through the ANU and was led by Professor Rosalind Smith. The pilot was highly successful, although there were administrative challenges in arranging transfers of funds. In light of new Australian government and university incentives financially supporting internships for PhD candidates, ANZAMEMS and *Parergon* will be open to hosting internships funded by other programs to support our activities rather than providing funds directly. We have budgeted for an internship this year, but encourage members to be aware of internships scheme through their institutions and to include ANZAMEMS in their consideration of suitable hosts for PhD candidates.

**ADD TO MY WRITTEN REPORT:** thank you for Megan Cassidy-Welsh and Dolly McKinnon for their work revitalising the Maddern-Crawford Network with an event hosted at ACU in late 2022. As you may have noticed from the proposed budget that the General Committee has approved an ongoing financial commitment to support Network activities.

ANZAMEMS special projects have enabled targeted work in important areas. Negotiations are currently underway to contract preparation of the delayed Executive Summary for the State of the Field report. The report itself includes confidential information, and pending availability of finances, a redacted version may also be prepared for public circulation. Given that it was conducted in 2019-2020 pre-pandemic, there have likely been significant changes particularly but not exclusively in MEMS teaching. The Decolonising the Field Special

Project funded a session by Wurundjeri elder Uncle Bill Nicholson at the ANZAMEMS professional development day during the 2023 CHASS Congress.

In the second half of 2022, a planned review of the ANZAMEMS partnership with Arc Humanities Press offering prizes for open-access book publication was undertaken. A survey of members demonstrated strong support for ANZAMEMS continuing to offer book prizes but raised some concerns about the specifics of the current suite. Arc Humanities Press was positive about the prizes, but also suggested some changes to the offerings and administration. Scholars who had served on judging panels also provided input. The General Committee reviewed the feedback and a range of options and decided that the prizes in their previous form and the formal relationship with Arc Humanities should not be renewed. The awards were a very substantial financial commitment by ANZAMEMS which could not be reasonably contracted again in the current circumstances, and were of direct benefit to only a few members, and limited those who applied to publishing with a specific press. I congratulate those who won the prizes and thank all involved in the organisation and judging.

The General Committee and Futures and Honours and Prizes subcommittees are strongly supportive of ANZAMEMS continuing to support members' book publication endeavours. Two new initiatives will be offered in 2023/4:

1. A one-year trial of a publishing subvention/subsidy scheme.
2. Two new book prizes: Best First Book (2023) and Best Open Call Book (2024)

Guidelines and timeframes are currently in development.

### **Advocating for Medieval and Early Modern Studies**

In Australia, the election of the Albanese government has impacted the higher education sector substantially and ANZAMEMS has sought to continue its advocacy in consultations and reviews. In New Zealand, the landscape has been less volatile although no less challenging to work in.

ANZAMEMS joined with other organisations and scholars condemning this political interference in an independent grant assessment process in 2021. In 2022-3, the Albanese government conducted a Review of the Australian Research Council Act (2001).

ANZAMEMS' submission argued strongly for academic independence, valuing scholarly expertise, and the removal of the Ministerial power of veto over recommended funding. I am heartened to see that the Final Report of the Review recommends changes to bring Australia

into line with “the global gold standard ... that assessment of individual proposals must be passed on expert review free of political interference.”<sup>1</sup>

In early 2022, the Australian Research Council consulted with scholarly organisations, including ANZAMEMS, on the list of journals eligible for submissions to the then imminent Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) assessment. I am grateful to all those members who joined with me to give feedback across their fields of research to help advocate for inclusion of appropriate journals and for accurate recognition of *Parergon* in the list: Dr Georgina Pitt, Professor Katie Barclay, Dr Miles Pattenden, Professor Louise D’Arcens and Professor Constant Mews. Although the ERA in its previous form was shelved by the new Albanese government shortly in 2022, the Final Report of the Review of the Australian Research Council Act (2001) suggests new assessment exercises are likely to be developed.

ANZAMEMS has also contributed to the consultation on the Albanese government’s Australian Universities Accord through its membership of CHASS. I thank Dr Matthew Champion, a member of the CHASS board, for his contribution to that submission.

### **General Committee Business**

The members of the General Committee work hard on behalf of the Association and its members, and I thank them for their contributions. ANZAMEMS could do nothing without their efforts. I wish to extend particular gratitude to those who are stepping down from formal roles at this time: Ms Megan Shaw, Associate Professor Clare Monagle, Dr Amanda McVitty, Ms Anna Quercia-Thomas, and Professor Louise D’Arcens.

The General Committee has maintained its pattern of meeting by Zoom four times each year. In early 2023, I undertook a reorganisation of the subcommittees to streamline the structure and remove those that had been dormant for a sustained period to help reduce the commitments of General Committee members. The current subcommittees are: Editorial, Financial, Conference, Diversity and Equity, Honours and Prizes and ANZAMEMS Futures, A full list of the subcommittees and their current chairs and membership is available on ANZAMEMS website; memberships and chairs will be revised following the elections at this AGM.

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<sup>1</sup> Margaret Sheil, Susan Dodds and Mark Hutchinson. *Trusting Australia's Ability: Review of the Australian Research Council Act 2001* (Canberra: Department of Education, 2023), <https://www.education.gov.au/higher-education-reviews-and-consultations/resources/trusting-australias-ability-review-australian-research-council-act-2001> p. 25

The Honours and Prizes subcommittee, chaired by Dr Andrew Brown, has worked very hard at supporting our suite of prizes and awards. I also thank everyone who has served on the judging panels for ANZAMEMS prizes.

It has been a pleasure and an honour to work with the ANZAMEMS committee and members in this second year as President. I am grateful to you all for entrusting me with the position for this term of service.

President, Dr Helen Young

April 2023