

President's Report

It's been another challenging and, at times, exhausting year. But it has equally been a very productive and rewarding one.

From a presidential perspective the highlight has undoubtedly been watching Jackie and Claire develop into a formidable National Office team. They have worked tirelessly under rather taxing circumstances - notably a significant tightening of the budgetary straitjacket created by the loss of a key funder. They have responded with creativity and a determination to grow the Society. One direct consequence has been a significant expansion in the range of member benefits available.

But sustainable growth requires solid foundations.

From a National Council perspective, this involved strengthening the Society's governance and oversight. The reform process presented two options for members to consider - a nationally-elected model or a modified version of the existing regional representation model. After much healthy discussion and debate, members voted to retain regional representatives.

In the meantime we implemented new protocols for National Council members according to best governance principles. We strengthened the processes for selecting NZSA representatives to numerous boards and committees - eg CLNZ and PLR. In future we intend to open such positions to applications from the wider membership to ensure NZSA continues to have the best representatives available. We have also undertaken a review of representatives' reporting procedures to ensure National Council is kept suitably informed.

I have been delighted by the diligence and commitment of the National Council team. Our move to an on-line forum has allowed broad, in-depth and timely discussion of important issues. This has, I believe, added great strength to the decision-making process. Increasing the use of conference calls and cyber-meetings has reduced costs while allowing for more regular and effective communications as well. The decision by NC members to forgo meeting fees for conference calls given the current financial position speaks much for their dedication to NZSA.

The recent creation of an on-line Indie Taskforce, charged with developing and progressing projects to benefit our Indie members, is the first in a range of such initiatives designed to achieve concrete results. Establishing more Taskforces, each overseen by a designated NC member, to delve into specific key areas, is one of the exciting developments to watch out for over the coming year. I encourage *any* member with specific skills or interests to consider getting involved.

The Eleanor Catton furore exposed a virulent strain of anti-intellectualism. The response to her well-considered and eloquently expressed opinions was also a wake-up call to how perilous the notion of freedom of speech in New Zealand remains. NZSA (PEN) was vocal in supporting Eleanor's right to free expression. The strengthening of our PEN team with the appointment of Dana Wensley as our new PEN spokesperson is incredibly timely. Dana brings a wealth of experience and enthusiasm to the position, and I'm confident her initiatives will complement the sterling work already being done by Lesley Marshall and the Writers in Prisons team.

NZSA has been especially busy advocating on behalf of writers. There have been lengthy submissions to the Creative New Zealand Strategic Plan; drawn-out negotiations around changes to Copyright Licensing's Contestable Fund; concerns raised over Bauer Media contracts; lingering repercussions of Learning Media's demise and a significant rise in general contract queries. These consume considerable time and resources, not only of our National Office team, but also our contract advisory panel who continue to give so generously of their expertise.

National Council will continue to look ahead to ensure NZSA not only remains relevant, but plays an increasingly vital role in the literary community. At the same time I believe we need to ensure the work of those who came before us is suitably acknowledged. Which is why we've inaugurated our Kaumatua programme to honour long-term members' contributions to both the Society and to the welfare of all New Zealand writers. We also hope to expand the NZSA Oral History project as a vital historic resource.

The year began with the appointment of Daphne de Jong as 2014 President of Honour. It was not only an important nod to one of our most esteemed genre

writers, but also worthy recognition of Daphne's long-term commitment to supporting and mentoring the next generation of romance writers. For the first time the Janet Frame Memorial Lecture was, rather fittingly, delivered in Dunedin at the Dunedin Writers and Readers Festival. Daphne's lecture was wry, humorous and extremely enlightening.

For the second year we presented Waitangi Day Honours to writers who have achieved significant success in the past year. This year the recipients were Phillip Mann, Eleanor Catton and Anthony McCarten. Personally I think NZSA can, and should, play a significant role in acknowledging our writers and promoting local literature. Watch this space.

From a National Office perspective the year has largely been about consolidation and targeted expansion. We have significantly strengthened our infrastructure and capacity with new computers/software, and a much grunter new website. (Due for launch in August.) Given the current funding environment, this has been an achievement of Herculean proportions. There has also been a number of new initiatives for 2015. Expanding the mentorship programme to include graphic novels/comics has been a very popular move. In the coming year we will seek to expand our services even further to ensure we care catering to the needs of every sector.

Perhaps the key challenge facing myself and National Council is to ensure National Office is sufficiently resourced to ensure long-term sustainability. There are two main areas of focus. Developing or expanding programmes to grow our membership. And broadening our income streams so we become less reliant on funding from a shrinking pool.

I'm confident we have a team well able to meet the challenge.