

Good afternoon fellow ASTW members, and welcome to our first virtual AGM. Thank you to the team who has put this day together, it's a huge effort to produce a virtual AGM – of course, it's not as good as coming together but it IS a first, and perhaps we hope, a last! 2020 has seen a lot of firsts – and too many have impacted our industry, our lives and livelihoods . First bushfires wreaked havoc at the beginning of the year, domestically upturning our summer, our health and our travel plans. The global pandemic that followed instantly halted Travel and Tourism and decimated our industry.

The moniker of Pandemic President is fitting.

Perhaps too, the stars were out of alignment for the ASTW also. Nominating for the role under extraordinary circumstances. Five committee members had resigned—a cloud over the 2019 awards creating dissonance within the committee and society all amplified by the stresses and anxieties our members have felt as we reeled from the unknown of this life-changing pandemic.

The first few months on the committee were extremely challenging.

The immediate tasks were daunting and challenging. Unfortunately the previous secretariat did not fulfil the contracted work, including correspondence with members or the legally required tasks. Collating the untended membership database was onerous. It took days of cross-referencing payments, emails, Facebook and website to establish the final and correct list of paid members. Four BAS payments had not been lodged. Information was withheld from the President and the Public Officer. The ASTW breached ASIC, Fair Trading and tax obligations as a result. The committee had no choice but to terminate her contract then paying a personal penalty of having to do all the omitted essential tasks and ongoing secretariat role which has led to the appointment of governance experts 'The Association Specialists' to better support our organisation.

The ASTW is about bringing our members together, something that has been virtually impossible all year and while Australia has done an amazing job to halt the virus (thank you especially Victorian colleagues) it has at times placed unreasonable stresses on the Society. At times, it has felt like we too have been/were in survival mode.

However, along with the challenges much has been achieved and these are sources of optimism for ASTW's future – which I'll expand on.

- A significant review of the 2019 Awards, the creation of the 2020 awards in a new iteration. Thank you for the combined 1000s of hours from your dedicated committee and specifically the extraordinary contribution of the Awards Review Panel and Awards Subcommittee. Their objective to identify issues with evidence, correct any previous flaws and define a path forward. Thank you Peter Hook, Mike Smith and David McGonigal, joined by Justine Costigan for the awards committee.
- As we found new ways to do business, the society found new ways to work together too. The seminars gave us some remarkable insights from excellent presenters. Then there were the virtual social events like Friday night drinks. My thanks to the

members who stepped forward to organise virtual events when in-person events were impossible. And the members voted solidly in favour of several changes to the ASTW constitution.

- Covid-19 led to another first - the creation of the virtual ASTW awards ceremony itself. We debated cancelling the awards this year, deciding to press on despite COVID. The disappointment of being unable to have a Whitsundays convention plus many lunch cancellations motivated us to create the only Australia-wide gathering this year, albeit online. I am proud of the achievement for our society and endlessly appreciative to everyone who gave of their time. In the spirit of constant improvement, there will be a review of the awards process next year with members invited to submit their suggestions for improvement.

I accepted the role as President of ASTW with a deep desire to bring our committee and membership together. I may not have always achieved this but I remain committed to considerate, respectful communication which I believe is the key to moving our society to its true collegiate potential and proper representation. And this is the only path to maintaining a stable, supported Board and stable society.

To quote Ruth Bader Ginsburg, 'You can disagree without being disagreeable.'

The role of President is the face and voice of the Board. Every decision is discussed by the full Board, voted on if required, minuted in meetings where this is essential. We are a team. A voluntary team. Accepting the role and workload on top of our own business and personal lives.

Consistently over the years there are a small number of members creating 100s of hours of work each year for the committee. The demanded input and response time that those members demand would require a highly paid administrative team.

For the ASTW Board to meet the demands of the few we would need to significantly increase membership fees to pay for that. We could not afford that in a normal year, let alone one of coronavirus. There has been no board discussion about membership fees for next year, but the objective must be ongoing financial sustainability of the society. The Board will continue to provide significant value to justify the membership fee.

It is essential to state the ASTW Board and committees have legal obligations to abide by the constitution, the NSW Fair Trading and the Associations Incorporations Act. Concerns have been raised about the role and management of committees so I need to stress that all activity and everyone operating under the ASTW banner must abide by our legal requirements. A new process is now in place for all ASTW volunteers in any role to be informed of these obligations. Fortunately, they are clear, straightforward and easily followed.

We are deeply respectful of all past ASTW Presidents, all past committee members and current board members. Some served for the society for many years. It is important to note

that this year the pressure, expectation and workload was so intense, burn-out and resignation resulted. Thanks to each one of you for your time, selflessness and dedication. I have spent so many hours working with you over the past nine months. Your commitment and contribution must be acknowledged and praised.

The Board had more departures and new members in 2020 than ever before in the history of the ASTW. All joining with the desire to support the society and members, leaving when they needed. Below is the full roll call of members who have all contributed their time to the ASTW during my tenure.

Catherine Marshall, Natascha Mirosch, Christina Pfeiffer, Saskia Baker and Deborah Dickson Smith for staying on after the crisis of resignations.

Carla Grossetti for a second term joined by Keren Lavelle.

Also the arrival of PR member Kylee Kay contributing her expertise as past President of VisitUSA and too many hours of accounting thanks to her qualification as a chartered accountant.

Scott Podmore (Poddy) and Phillippa Macken (Pip) for jumping on Board in the worst part of lockdown and industry downturn.

Finally the recent members, or the 'newbie elders', Lee Mylne, Lee Atkinson, John Borthwick and David McGonigal for adding perspective, experience, stability and much needed levity to the Board and society in a year of turbulence.

It's been a challenging and punishing year for us all. As 2020 comes to a whimpering close, we know that 2021 will not be business as usual. The ASTW will continue with the valued involvement of the new Board as the most respected travel media body in Australia. We will all be committed to creating a community of inclusion, support, respectful communication, professional development, and hopefully, many opportunities to gather and reconnect.

On behalf of the Board I wish you all a safe and happy Christmas break filled with love and reunion.

Elisa

