PAPUA NEW GUINEA ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA

62ND ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING – 28 April 2013 – PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Ladies and Gentlemen - Welcome to the 62nd Annual General Meeting of the Papua New Guinea Association of Australia.

This AGM and Luncheon has traditionally been held the Sunday after, or closest to, ANZAC Day so it is an appropriate time to remember and pay tribute to all those who fought in Papua New Guinea during WWI and WWII. Just this week the Government response was announced to the Report of the ANZAC Centenary Advisory Board on a program of initiatives to commemorate the ANZAC Centenary in 2014. Recommendation No 1 says that the Anzac Centenary commemoration will be built around two uniting themes including:

'Rabaul to Return, which will recognise Australia's experience in the First World War, from the little known first military engagement in New Guinea, through Gallipoli and the conflicts in the Middle East and Europe, to the under-recognised efforts and challenges involved in the return home of our servicemen and servicewomen and their re-engagement with civilian life; '

Besides paying tribute to it, how can WE interpret the meaning of ANZAC Day today? – it is in a shared community spirit – something the PNGAA can be very proud of.

The PNGAA now has nearly 1600 members and I am delighted to welcome some of our new Rabaul and Montevideo Maru Society members here today (*and I thank Patrick Bourke for alerting me to the Government's response mentioned earlier about the ANZAC Centenary*.)

This year is an election year for the PNGAA Management Committee and two of our popular and long serving volunteers will be stepping down from it but, I am pleased to say, continuing in various roles to assist. Pamela Foley, who has previously held the roles of Deputy President, Secretary and Committee member, is stepping down after 32 years. It was Pamela who twisted my arm to come on to this committee! Marie Clifton-Bassett has had various roles for over 18 years – Marie has taken on Secretarial and administration duties in recent years but, prior to that, was Editor of *Una Voce* for nearly seven years I know how daunting it was to take on the editorship from her at the end of 2003. Both ladies have been tireless and generous in their work for the PNGAA and continue to give for which we are very grateful. We humbly extend an enormous thank you to both.

We are fortunate that Amanda Warhurst has agreed to become our new Secretary, that Keith Wall from Cairns has agreed to take on the editing of *Una Voce* and that Frazer Harry, from Albury Wodonga, is joining our committee and is also chair of the Rabaul and Montevideo Maru committee.

Social occasions and our quarterly journal, *Una Voce*, have been integral to the popularity of the association. You are encouraged to attend, to bring along friends, and to contribute entertaining and informative articles to *Una Voce*. Juli Allcorn's energy and creativity in organising our functions is widely appreciated!

The Management Committee has enjoyed having input from committee members in various states over recent years. In an attempt to make this a little easier the PNGAA now has a teleconference

facility which enables our interstate committee members to participate in meetings without the added cost of travel.

We are delighted that our quest to have regional groups, with activities to benefit more members, is starting to take further shape. George and Edna Oakes continue to open their home in the Blue Mountains each year for a casual and friendly gathering. Graham Taylor and Jan Kleinig organised another successful lunch in South Australia last October. Recently Murray Day, in Perth, offered to gather members in Western Australia together and the initial gathering is scheduled for 24 May. Discussions continue with others who have offered to help out in this regard – we thank those who have offered and look forward to hearing from more of our members.

After the dedication of the Rabaul and Montevideo Maru Memorial in Canberra on 1st July 2012 it was decided to integrate that Society with the PNGAA, to operate as a sub-committee of the PNGAA Management Committee with functions in conformity with the Rabaul and Montevideo Maru Society objectives - for example, for historical research and for educational and training purposes related to the New Guinea Islands which were affected by the events of the Rabaul and Montevideo Maru tragedies in 1942, using the substantial balance of funds received from RMMS for these purposes. The proposal to integrate the Rabaul and Montevideo Maru Society with the PNGAA has now been confirmed via a Memorandum of Understanding.

The Rabaul and Montevideo Maru Society was initiated within the PNGAA Management Committee in late 2008 under Keith Jackson and subsequently operated as a separate identity. Phil Ainsworth eventually replaced Keith as President of the Society and both contributed enormously to its extraordinary success. Now that its major goal has been achieved it is appropriate to integrate it with the PNGAA as a sub-committee to manage new and ongoing objectives. A separate account will be maintained for the transferred assets.

The Society has held an annual function in Canberra the last three years and will hold another on 29 and 30 June this year. Everyone is welcome.

Earlier this year it was decided that our treasurer, Nick Booth, would take on the additional roles being carried out by the Lindfield Executive Centre for the past two years. Whilst a business centre has provided valuable stability, it was felt that the association needed to revisit the methodology and processes in some areas to ensure a tighter ship. In time the Management Committee may decide to revisit the services of a business centre to assist with the smooth continuation of services and to relieve the voluntary workload.

The functionality of the search and retrieval facility on the website has been made more interactive, relieving the workload on committee members. I thank Nick Booth and Ross Johnson for their vigilance in enabling this accessibility to members.

I also thank them both for the enormous time and effort put in to the financial affairs of the Association and I am pleased to confirm that the finances are in sound shape. I know that both Nick and I have been grateful for Ross' generous and continued support this year. Len Bailey's assistance is also appreciated. For a number of years, behind the scenes, Jeff Baldwin's contribution to the accounts has also been highly valued.

Social media is becoming more accepted as a means of communication and therefore a facebook group has been opened - I thank member Kieran Nelson for his time and energetic assistance with this. It is exciting to see it grow with more and more people using it regularly.

During the year the Management Committee decided to send letters to all national Australian newspapers to remind them of our ongoing interest in PNG contemporary news.
It also believes that corporate partners may assist our network in progressing the many civil links between Australia and PNG. If you can assist we would appreciate it. Members of firms doing business with PNG are encouraged to become involved in our Association.

Paul Munro has been of great assistance on the Management Committee in many roles including approaches to various organisations when this is needed. Often the time spent is not visible but highly valuable. At our last Management Committee meeting yesterday Paul was nominated as Public Officer, replacing Marie Clifton-Bassett.

Dr Peter Cahill has again put in an extraordinary contribution in documenting the many donations from our members to the PNGAA Collection in the Fryer Library at the University of Queensland. The PNGAA Collection is their fastest growing collection. During the year meetings were held in Brisbane with the Manager of Fryer Library with a view to progressing digitisation of the collection, however this is not progressing as quickly as we would like. Early discussions of an online exhibition foundered with the cost. It has been clarified that Fryer could not undertake any digitising of material from the PNGAA Collection until Fryer's 2013 Insurance valuation is completed in September or October 2013. In the meantime Fryer is happy to undertake one-off projects.

Another sub-committee, The Digitisation of Material Relating to Papua New Guinea's History, is being established to investigate the scope and seek Government support for a digitisation project that would enable material documenting PNG's history to be made accessible to researchers in PNG and Australia. Various factors have delayed the start of this however we expect it to commence later in the year.

At the same time, and following an approach from the Management Committee to the Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs, it was decided to create a database of cemeteries and historical sites in PNG based on input from our members. Paul Johnson has agreed to collate this so please contact him with any information.

As mentioned in the March *Una Voce* several successful events have taken place – the Christmas Luncheon in Sydney with Dame Carol Kidu as guest speaker was a tremendous and very joyful occasion with great spirit. It was wonderful to see many faces present, some of whom we hadn't seen in some years. Many came from interstate bumping our numbers to just under 200 present.

A dinner was arranged in Brisbane in late January with Justice Logan speaking about his experiences with the PNG judiciary. Sean Dorney was our inimitable Master of Ceremonies recounting some of his vast and extraordinary PNG experiences. The next day members were privileged to be given a personal tour of the PNG Exhibition within the 20th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art at the Gallery of Modern Art in Brisbane. This has resulted in other talks and visits. The exhibition was outstanding.

We are grateful to those who regularly support the work of committee members behind the scenes and are integral to the smooth running of the association – to Ross Johnson and Ann Graham a huge thank you. There are several who have willingly assisted with *Una Voce* over the years – my special thanks to Stuart Inder, to Harry West, Ross Johnson, Marie Clifton-Bassett, Jim Toner, Jeff Baldwin and Liz Thurston for their many years supporting me in my role as Editor. I am delighted that others are now volunteering to assist too.

I feel privileged to have been supported in my roles on the Management Committee, as Acting President and also Editor, by a competent and hard working group of volunteers and I thank them all – Marie Clifton-Bassett, Nick Booth, Juli Ross Allcorn, Paul Munro, Phil Ainsworth, Gima Crowdy, Deveni Temu and Pamela Foley.

Following on Harry West's vision and the work commenced by Keith Jackson, who initiated the change in the PNGAA Constitution, we have been able to successfully implement some new programs. This augers well for the association proving that the change in direction was timely and proper. The introduction of new members to the Management Committee will assure our future.

Andrea Williams

28 April 2013