



DEPARTMENT of the  
HOUSE of REPRESENTATIVES

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# ALUMNI *Newsletter*



## Clerk's Message

Dear Alumni

It is lovely to be able to send a message for your newsletter. While unfortunately we cannot yet talk about post pandemic, joyfully, we have arrived at post lockdown!

As you will know, not long after my last message external reviews into the working environment at Parliament House brought the health and wellbeing of alumni and departmental colleagues sharply into focus. I trust those of you who wished to, were able to contribute to the Australian Human Rights Commission's Independent Review into Commonwealth Parliamentary Workplaces (Jenkins Review). The department fully engaged with that review as well as the interim Review of the Parliamentary Workplace Responding to Serious Incidents (Foster Report). While several aspects are more concerned with parliamentarians and their staff, we will use any findings to further strengthen the department's safe and respectful workplace culture.

I took the first opportunity available to get vaccinated and felt quite relieved three weeks after my second dose, even though I know we must still be diligent in terms of precautions for COVID safety. Many in the department have been fully vaccinated and I trust you also have been able to take up the full two doses of vaccine.

You will not be surprised that the department has continued to successfully meet the challenges of our time despite the uncertainties related to the COVID-19 pandemic and the limitations of lockdowns. Since August, most staff have been working from home, with less than one third of staff working in Parliament House during sittings. All staff are now equipped with laptops and have remote access to the Parliament's computing platform. The department has been heavily relying on videoconferencing software for aspects of our work, including daily team meetings, briefings, training, seminars, tutorials, whole of department forums, supporting committee meetings and even parliamentary liaison events. The past 12 months have seen significant changes in the way we work. Even some of our corporate services have been delivered remotely. If you are curious about what this has meant for the department there are further details in our recently presented [2020-21 Annual Report – Parliament of Australia \(aph.gov.au\)](https://aph.gov.au/2020-21-Annual-Report).

There have been changes too in the department's Executive with the retirement of Catherine Cornish as Deputy Clerk after years of commendable service in the department, and the promotion of Peter Banson to that role. Jerome Brown and Stuart Woodley have departed, and we have welcomed



the promotions of Russell Chafer as Clerk Assistant (Committees), Peggy Danaee as Clerk Assistant (Procedure) and Glenn Worthington as Clerk Assistant (Table). James Catchpole has remained as Serjeant-at-Arms.

With the House due to expire on 1 July next year, as well as supporting the final months of the 46th Parliament, we are already preparing our plans for the end of this parliament and the new one to follow.

I'm sure we're all being duly optimistic about a great end to 2021, enjoying the company of our friends and loved ones. May that wish come true for all of us.

I have pencilled in an alumni reception for early 2022 and I hope to see you there. In the meantime, stay safe and well.

With best wishes, and don't forget to keep your distance!

**Claressa Surtees**  
Clerk of the House



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# Note from the Co-chairs

Well, 2021 did not quite turn out as we had all hoped. For any of you in Western Australia and to a slightly lesser degree, SA, NT, Tassie and Queensland, lucky you! For those of us in NSW and Victoria, congratulations on surviving mammoth lockdowns (and earthquakes). And for all alumni in the ACT, our second lockdown of the pandemic will be over by the time you are reading this. As the joke goes, “what is the hardest part of a one-week lockdown? Weeks 7 and 8!”

We have been giving a great deal of thought as to whether we should hold an AGM this year, and a function – something we are sure you are all looking forward to. However, given we are not sure what ‘living with COVID’ will actually mean once restrictions are eased (including when cross-border travel will be free), we have decided to not hold anything in 2021, but will look at something in the first quarter of 2022. In our considerations, the health and well-being of all alumni are paramount. By next year anyone who can be vaccinated, will be and the risks of having a gathering should have reduced.

We look forward to seeing you all in person, finding out how you spent lockdown, and what plans you all have for the year ahead.

Best wishes to you all and your families for the Christmas and New Year period.

**Mike Salkeld and Joanne Towner**  
Co-chairs

## Where are they now?

We find one of our Alumni colleagues to see what she is up to.

### STEPHANIE JORRITSMMA

For the information of those who don't know me, I joined the Department in August 1992 starting in the Clerk's Office. I was looking to get back into the workforce as my three sons were all at school and so I responded to an advertisement. I had worked in the Senate before children where I had worked for Bert Nicholls, whose daughter Lynne Eveston, I was to work with in the Clerk's Office.

I later moved to the Table Office for a period, followed by time back in the Clerk's Office as assistant to then Clerk Assistant, Bernard Wright. Later I returned to the Table Office followed by a couple of years in the Chamber Research Office until I left the Department in November 2001.

During the early days of retirement, I assisted my husband John in the office with his business and was able to help in my local church. In 2005 we commenced construction of a home at Kianga on the south coast. Unfortunately, as construction approached completion John became ill with mesothelioma. We were never able to make it our prime residence although I still spend as much time as possible there. That house and the Eurobodalla region is still home to me as I grew up there and the family has a long history in the area. Sadly, the family home and much more was destroyed by the Badja fire on NYE 2019. I still have close family living nearby.

During this time grandchildren started arriving and we were fortunate to be in a position to babysit and spend time with them during those early years. Now they are very busy teenagers (when Covid 19 permits) and I am no longer needed in the same way.

Retirement has allowed me the opportunity to indulge an interest in travel, first with John and later with friends and my sister Jen whose husband passed away shortly after John.

John was born in the Netherlands and still had many relatives there. We visited a number of times and



developed special relationships with some of them. We also experienced a lot of the country's culture and museums and scenery. In 2009 we enjoyed a river cruise from Amsterdam to Budapest and followed up with a family wedding in the Czech Republic.

The following year we travelled to the west coast of USA visiting the wonderful national parks and then British Columbia. It was John's first visit to Canada, but it is one of my favourite places and was an opportunity to visit again with friends and relatives.

These days I sometimes travel alone or with friends but mostly with my sister. While travelling with my sister we have surprised a few people. We alarmed a Bus-About tour leader in Greece when he was confronted by two ladies in their seventies joining his tour designed for young ones. Fortunately, they were not all teenagers, and we kept up with the young ones most of the time. It was quite a fun time and we did and saw things we would have missed on a regular tour. We also surprised a number of much younger people who were not prepared to take some of the roads we followed on a grand tour of the back roads of northern Queensland,

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and the Centre in 2019. In between there have been visits to New Zealand, Japan, Europe and North America.

Covid 19 means I am unlikely to travel overseas again but remain hopeful of further travel in Australia. My sister and I did escape in May for a road trip in NSW and Queensland. I still travel between my two houses when Covid allows. I have looked at

downsizing but since the pandemic struck, I have been grateful to be able to isolate in my Canberra house and garden during lockdowns.

I am still meet regularly with former work friends, Lynne Eveston, June Murphy, Denise Picker and the only one still working, Anna Gadzinski. I did attend Alumni functions

until I made a dramatic exit in an ambulance some years ago.

I remember my time in the Department with fondness and had the privilege of working for former Clerks, Lyn Barlin, Ian Harris and Bernard Wright, and many others including Jim Pender and Don Piper in the Table Office, and Robyn Webber in Chamber Research Office.



## Alumni on (past) assignment?

### Return to Norfolk Island report by Jim Pender

#### NORFOLK ISLAND

In 2019 I was able to return to Norfolk Island after a 40-year absence. I say 'return' as I was a member of the team that helped establish the first Norfolk Island Legislative Assembly in August 1979.

This whole enterprise started with Justice John Nimmo presenting his report of the *Royal Commission into matters relating to Norfolk Island* to the Australian Parliament in 1976. As a consequence of the Fraser government accepting the majority of his recommendations the *Norfolk Island Act 1979* was passed by the Commonwealth Parliament and Norfolk Island was granted limited self-rule.

The Speaker of the House of Representatives, Sir Billy Snedden, was approached to provide officers from the Department of the House of Representatives to contribute to the establishment of the Legislative Assembly and provide for its continuing operation. The Clerk, Jack Pettifer, assigned Alan Browning (later 12th Clerk of the House) and me to perform this task. Marion Lambert was also recruited to assist us. We three joined a team from various public service departments to travel to the Island to launch this new self-governing entity.

Before we got there many tasks relating to the Assembly had to be performed; the Islanders had to elect their nine



▲ Sir Zelman Cowen opens the first Norfolk Island Legislative Assembly

representatives; standing orders needed to be drafted; and an opening befitting the occasion had to be organised.

With these tasks completed we set off!

The opening by the Governor-General, His Excellency Sir Zelman Cowen, occurred on Friday, 10 August 1979. Prior to his address the Administrator, Desmond O'Leary, had sworn in the members who then elected David Buffett as the President of the Assembly. Also participating in the opening

were the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the Minister for Home Affairs, Robert Ellicott. (The minutes of the first meeting can be found at [http://www.norfolkisland.gov.nf/sites/default/files/public/documents/LA\\_minutes/1st/1979\\_08\\_10%20-%20MinPro.pdf](http://www.norfolkisland.gov.nf/sites/default/files/public/documents/LA_minutes/1st/1979_08_10%20-%20MinPro.pdf)).

We spent a fortnight on the Island. The celebrations that followed this historic occasion included a reception at Government House and a gala ball.

It was down to business the following Wednesday, 15 August, when executive offices were created; David Buffett becoming the first Chief Minister and William Blucher the first Deputy Chief Minister. Our provisional standing orders were presented and adopted with a Standing Orders Committee being immediately appointed. In his address at the opening Sir Billy Snedden proclaimed the standing orders to be the most modern of any Commonwealth parliament. A *Legislative Assembly (Powers, Privileges and Immunities) Bill* was passed as were two other bills: the *Public Moneys Bill* and the *Public Service Bill*. The Assembly adjourned until Wednesday, 5 September 1979, in what was to become a regular sitting time, meeting on a Wednesday, usually once a month, at 2 p.m.

Having successfully established the Assembly, Alan Browning and I attended the next six meetings of the Assembly and then Alan Hume (see *Newsletter 13*, September 2014) and I attended the meetings in April and May 1980.

We would fly to the Island on a Sunday. Meet with the Standing Orders Committee and the Business Committee each Monday, and the Assembly met on the Wednesday. The Standing Orders Committee went through each of the provisional standing orders determining whether they particularly met local needs and conditions and the Business Committee would determine the business to be transacted on the Wednesday. On Thursday we would produce the minutes and fly out on the Friday, weather permitting. Standing orders were finally adopted in April 1980, the last sitting Alan Browning attended as Clerk. Assembly proceedings were broadcast live on Radio Norfolk and rebroadcast on the following



▲ Marion Lambert and Alan Browning atop Mt Pitt

Friday. There was no television on the Island, so all ears were glued to the radio on a Wednesday afternoon.

I acted as Clerk until the Assembly appointed a full time Clerk, Clive Borrowman, in May 1980. Alan Hume attended for Clive's first meeting. Clive had been a Clerk to various regional assemblies in Papua New Guinea. He was succeeded by Robin Graham (now Robin Adams) in 1984. Robin is a local and her successor, Gaye Evans, is a descendant of the Pitcairn Islanders She was Clerk from 2010 until the Assembly was disbanded on 17 June 2015.

In 2010 Robin joined the members' ranks and was elected Speaker. She is now the Mayor presiding over the Norfolk Island Regional Council.

Early in my parliamentary service I was told that if you ever get involved in a place an interest in that place will stay with you for the remainder of your life. It is that way with me and Norfolk Island.

I was genuinely concerned when I learned about the disbandment of the

Legislative Assembly but understood that the Island (population 1748 in 2016) could not sustain itself. I was equally concerned when I read in *The Weekend Australian* of Saturday, 5 June 2021, that the New South Wales Department of Education was discontinuing its association with the Island's school. This contravened the intention of the recommendation (recommendation 36) of the Royal Commission (1976) and throws the onus back on 'the Commonwealth Government to ensure that the educational facilities available in Norfolk Island are of the same standard as those obtaining in mainland Territories'. I have also learned since that the Queensland Department of Education will take over this responsibility. David Smith, the member for Bean in the House of Representatives, is the federal member for the Islanders:

That residents of Norfolk Island be included in the electorate of Canberra (now read Bean) in the Australian Capital Territory for the purpose of giving them representation in the Commonwealth Parliament (recommendation 3 of the Royal Commission)

I have been in touch with him and now subscribe to his NORFOLK ISLAND COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER.

Norfolk Island has a fascinating history from the days of convict settlement to the settlement of the Pitcairn Islanders and now the period of limited self-government and the Council. For those of you who might be interested in an outline of the Island's history, I would suggest Merval Hoare's book, *Norfolk Island: A revised and enlarged history 1774-1998*.

Norfolk Island is a great place to visit!

Jim Pender



## FURTHER INFORMATION

For any further information on alumni events or information please contact email - [DHRalumnisec@gmail.com](mailto:DHRalumnisec@gmail.com), [Alumni.reps@aph.gov.au](mailto:Alumni.reps@aph.gov.au) or go to the blogspot - <http://dephouseofrepsalumni.blogspot.com.au/>.