

## **President's report to the Annual General Meeting**

**3 October 2013**

Dear members

The past year has been a very busy and transformative one for NELA. We've had a wonderful energetic Executive enhancing just about every aspect of NELA's operations. Internally we've strengthened our governance and sense of purpose. We agreed a new strategic plan in April for 2013-2015 and a work plan to support it so the Executive can track progress, and in December 2012 we engaged a new secretariat providing our membership services. Externally we've produced new information services and actively engaged in policy and law reform debates and we've entered some exciting new partnerships with sustainable business organisations.

Last year the NELA Executive recognised that a long term decline in membership had reached a point that was not sufficient to cover administrative costs. Significant financial reserves provide a comfortable buffer but a decision needed to be made. Unless NELA became active and engaged with its members, law makers, and the wider business, NGO and academic community it had no future. At the same time developments in national environment and climate change laws have provided big opportunities for NELA to demonstrate its value. So the Executive grasped the nettle and started turning things around.

### **Policy and events**

In 2012 the Executive agree to three priority policy areas – Oceans policy, assessment and approvals under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Act*, and regulations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. On each of these topics we've promoted debate on effective approaches to regulation, participated in government consultation forums, published informative articles, made commentary in the media, organised events and collaborated with partner organisations.

The Oceans policy team, led by Sarah Waddell, has been the most active policy group with members from WA, Tasmania, NSW and Victoria (and they're looking for interested members from Queensland). Work on the other two areas will ramp up in coming months as the new Coalition federal government moves to implement its policies. NELA participated in the federal government's consultation forum on procedures under the EPBC Act over the past 12 months and we'll continue to actively engage.

NELA's biannual conference on *Delivering a low carbon future*, in Melbourne in March 2013 delivered an impressive program that debated law and policy on regulating energy supply, greenhouse gas emissions and environment protection in Australia, New Zealand, China, the USA and the UK. Speakers included the then Attorney General Mark Dreyfus, then Opposition environment spokesperson Greg Hunt, Columbia University Professor Michael Gerrard, with the President of Kiribati Anote Tong as our after dinner speaker. The conference had unprecedented support from sponsors, including five law firms.

NELA enjoyed extensive publicity in the lead up to the conference and participant feedback was highly favourable. But for a number of reasons it was not a financial success. Like so many similar

organisations, the current economic conditions mean that NELA can no longer expect to hold large annual or biannual conferences that make a profit. The Executive is working on a new business model for the next national conference, which is likely to involve partnering with others to provide a commercially successful and expanded event.

### **Partnerhips**

Building partnerships has been a major theme for 2012-13. For the national conference we entered partnerships with Melbourne Law School, The Climate Group and the Legal Practice Section of the Law Council of Australia to buttress publicity for the conference and contribute to the program. We also entered a successful arrangement with Thomson Reuters to publish the conference papers as a special edition of the Environment and Planning Law Journal. Melbourne Law School made the arrangement even better by providing editorial support for referee reviews of the articles – a contribution for which we are very grateful.

NELA entered an exciting new partnership with Sustainable Business Australia on 1 September. SBA is the peak body in Australia for the low carbon and environmental goods and services sector. Its members include investors, bankers, technology and infrastructure developers, consultancy and engineering companies. The partnership with SBA links NELA members to businesses who are committed to commercial solutions to environmental challenges. To be successful in promoting debate about effective environment and climate change regulation NELA needs to engage with business. Through the partnership with SBA we will work collaboratively on key policy issues, share information and provide presentations at each others' events.

At the time of writing we are in discussions with another potential partner - Australian Legal Sector Alliance. AusSLA is an industry-led association working collaboratively to promote sustainable practices across the legal sector. Members of AusLSA commit to reporting on their environmental impacts in the AusLSA Annual Report. A partnership between NELA and AusSLA would complement the interests and purposes of both associations.

During 2012-13 NELA also maintained its existing partnerships with the Resource Management Law Association (of New Zealand) and the Environment Institute of Australia and New Zealand, and consolidated our partnership with the Victorian Planning and Environmental Law Association through joint events.

NELA expanded its international collaboration as well, producing two editions of a new *International Environmental and Resources Law Newsletter* with the American Bar Association's International Environmental and Resources Law Committee, the Canadian Bar Association's National Environmental, Energy and Resources Law Section, and the United Kingdom Environmental Law Association.

### **Secretariat services**

In November 2012 NELA appointed Professional Association Management Services as NELA's new secretariat after going to the market with a competitive tender. PAMS has moved us to a more professional administrative set up and helped us improve our services to members, including a new website. It's been a major task to transfer records and establish a new membership database, financial systems, and all of the other support services that NELA requires. We thank PAMS for their professionalism in working through all of the tasks over the past six months.

I also wish to acknowledge Commerce Management Services who provided NELA's secretariat services for over ten years until November 2012.

## **Membership and information services**

NELA's publications have radically changed over the past year. First, in February 2013 we introduced a regular monthly email Bulletin full of legal updates, news, events and opportunities. It's a highly valuable service to our members provided entirely by volunteers. Thanks to NELA Secretary Ellen Geraghty who took on the task of commissioning and editing content, and delivering the bulletin on time every month. You're obviously enjoying it.

The National Environmental Law Review went digital this year, providing a savings of about \$10,000 a year in printing costs, and more importantly providing a format that is more accessible for our members. We are currently discussing the future format, audience and content of the NELR and how it can be integrated into our new website. A big thanks to Hanna Jaireth who has been a highly professional and dedicated national editor of the journal for three years up until the 2013:2 edition. It's an enormous task for a volunteer and we will think about how to make that role more manageable as part of the review of the NELR. Thanks also to our state editors who provide enormous value with their informative updates and commissioning articles, and to Jess Feehely who is a guest editor for the 2013:3 edition.

Building a new website that is vibrant and informative has been a major task over the past six months. It delivers practical enhancements such as a members only area, shared document storage for Executive papers and online payment and registrations. Thanks to Annaleen Harris, NELA's webmaster who has spent many hours working with PAMS to ensure the new website delivers what we want.

## **NELA Executive**

The NELA Executive, the company directors, have been a strong team of dedicated and talented people with a lot of energy and ideas. The executive met by teleconference more than 10 times during the year, with frequent meetings during the transition to PAMS between November and February.

We had a very successful face to face meeting for the first time in many years on 5 March 2013, just before the national conference. I believe it should be an annual event because it's crucial to the good governance of NELA.

Thanks and farewell to Barnaby McIraith, our Treasurer for two and a half years, and Lindsey Phelong Beck, representative for WA.

## **State divisions**

The Western Australian division of NELA has once again been active with its own WA committee staging a lively events program and a highly successful state conference in September 2012.

The SA division, which has had an active local committee until recently, has disbanded this year. Thanks to Stuart Henry and Bill Rudd who were President and Treasurer respectively for many years. Brendan Grigg, the SA representative on the national Executive will maintain NELA's university prizes in SA.

Amanda Cornwall  
President  
25 September 2013