

Keith Jackson's pre-election address to the annual general meeting of the Papua New Guinea Association of Australia



Before starting my remarks, I'd like to pay tribute to Harry West, Ross Johnson, Andrea Williams and those others who have worked productively and harmoniously in the interests of the Association.

The first proposal I intend to take to your new committee will be to create an honorary position of President Emeritus of the Association - and I want to see Harry West occupy that position.

This will honour the legacy of Harry's 25 years as President while enabling us to continue to draw on his wisdom and experience. I also hope the role will provide Harry with all the benefits and none of the drawbacks of elected office.

I'm offering a five-point plan to guide the Association through its next era:

1. First, I want to emphasise fellowship and caring: not only organising social events but also focusing on the needs of senior members of the Association.
2. Secondly, I feel strongly that the Association should be active in strengthening relationships between the people of Australia and the people of Papua New Guinea. There seems no reason why it should not evolve as the leading civil body to protect and advance such relationships and I see this as a great opportunity for the incoming committee.
3. Thirdly, it is clear that the communications activities of the Association are integral to its effectiveness. Arguably the publication of *Una Voce* is our most important continuing function and I would like to see more people working with Andrea and Ross on this important project. I also believe we can make the Association's website a more vital channel of continuing communication. And I see a role for the Association in organising talks and seminars on Australia-PNG affairs.
4. Fourthly, I'd like the Association to play a role in history and scholarship: collecting manuscripts and documents, including those in private collections, recording oral histories and keeping an eye on revisionist historians. Some of you are aware that I'm trying to persuade our Federal politicians to develop the former ASOPA site on Middle Head as a regional centre and as a continuing symbol of Australia's contribution to PNG. I'd like to see the Association join this challenge.
5. Finally, the financial, administrative and membership responsibilities of the Association must continue to be managed effectively. One of my goals is to increase the membership of the Association including establishing a corporate membership category to help strengthen our finances.

I'm committed to each of these five important areas for action. As President, I'll also expect each committee member to make a significant contribution in at least one of these areas over the next 12 months. In addition I want to establish expert groups to support the committee in each of the five areas.

Without committing the Association, over the past month I've talked to academics, archivists, journalists, diplomats and former parliamentarians to test how these support groups might work in practice. I've been delighted at the positive response. There is much good will towards Papua New Guinea in Australia and there is a desire for action to strengthen the bilateral relationship.

I also want the committee structure to be broadened to include States and Territories other than NSW and to extend active participation beyond Sydney. I have a number of ideas of how this may be achieved.

After the new committee has been given a chance to consider these and other proposals, I'd like to go to the membership with firm plans to update the constitution so it better reflects the aspirations of the Association.

Today I'm also committing that, at our own expense, Ingrid and I will visit Canberra and Port Moresby during the course of this year to meet with senior government officials and other people with whom I believe the Association should be building relationships.

This will be part of making the Association the leading civil body to maintain, promote and protect Australia's relationships with Papua New Guinea.

I think this is an exciting and feasible agenda that will transition the Association into its next era.

I accepted the invitation to stand as President so that, with the rest of the committee, I could use my skills, experience, understanding and commitment to the Australia- Papua New Guinea relationship to advance the cause of this relationship.

In my view, the vote you are about to cast is a vote to both honour the past and move energetically to the future. I seek your support.

Keith Jackson was elected PNGAA President on 27 April 2008