

## Annual General Meeting minutes

The 30th Annual General Meeting of Writers Victoria Incorporated (ABN 18 268 487 576) for the Calendar Year 2019 was held on Wednesday 27 May 2020 at 6pm online via Zoom (due to COVID-19 restrictions).

Zoom's voting functionality was used and managed by Kate Cuthbert and Frances Terrett, ensuring anonymity of responses and an efficient online voting ballot platform, given the circumstances.

Agenda Item, Discussion and Decisions	Motions and Actions
<p><b>1. Welcome, Attendance and Apologies</b></p> <p>Nic Brasch (Chair) chaired the meeting, declaring the meeting open at 6.02pm AEST.</p> <p>Nic Brasch welcomed members, members who had nominated for election, Committee members and patron Christos Tsiolkas.</p> <p>A total of 32 people (with voting rights) were in attendance.</p> <p>Members in attendance: Alexandra de Fircks, Amy Gilsenan, Anna Song, Charnie Braz, Christos Tsiolkas, Fiona Lynch, Guido Melo, Hongjun Li, Ian Grimwood, Ian Keese, Joe De Souza, Joel Martin, Josh Raymond, Justine Sless, Kirsten Cameron, Kit Fennessy, Max Manta Rays, Meg Hughes, Megan Shaw, Paul Ross, Rebecca Fraser, Rosemary Race, Sharon Mullins, Victoria Dunn.</p> <p>Committee of Management members in attendance: Nicolas Brasch, Donata Carrazza, Abi Chellapen, Noe Harsel, Peter Hill, Bryan Keon-Cohen, Amy Maddison, Victor Sekulov.</p> <p>Staff in attendance (without voting rights): Lyndel Caffrey, Kate Cuthbert, Sarah Hollingsworth, Flora Lun, Deanne Sheldon Collins, Frances Terrett.</p> <p>Others in attendance (without voting rights): Mel Costello (Observership Committee), Narelle Trottman (Minute Taker).</p> <p>Apologies received from: Angela Savage, Dianne Millett, Ian James, Eddie Creaney, Yasmin Naghavi, Adela Abu-Arab, Ayma Noble and Noel Turnbull.</p> <p>Proxies received from: Adela Abu-Arab, Ayana Noble, Noel Turnbull, Yasmin Naghav, Mary Ryllis Clark and Ian James.</p>	
<p><b>2. Minutes of the 2019 Annual General Meeting</b></p> <p>Nic Brasch noted that the draft Minutes from the 2019 AGM were circulated to Members prior to the meeting.</p> <p>Victor Sekulov (Treasurer) noted a typographical error in Christos Tsiolkas' name that required amendment. There were no other comments in relation</p>	<p><b>MOTION:</b> The minutes of the 30th Annual General Meeting of Writers Victoria were accepted as a true and correct record of that meeting</p>

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<p>to the Minutes.</p>	<p>CARRIED with all who voted in favour In favour: 13 Against: 0</p>
<p><b>3. 2019 Reports</b></p> <p>All reports* are available online at - <a href="https://writersvictoria.org.au/sites/default/files/public/About%20Us/Annual-Report-2019.pdf">https://writersvictoria.org.au/sites/default/files/public/About Us/Annual-Report-2019.pdf</a>.</p> <p><i>*For ease of reference, a copy of each report (excluding financials) is attached to these Minutes.</i></p> <p><b>Director’s Report</b></p> <p>In Angela Savage’s (Director) absence, Nic Brasch noted there was mention in her Report regarding the 30<sup>th</sup> Writers Victoria birthday celebrations, with praise being given to staff for helping to organise these events.</p> <p>Nic passed on that Angela thanks all staff members and the Committee of Management for all their hard work.</p> <p><b>Patron’s Report</b></p> <p>Christos Tsiolkas (Patron) acknowledged the good work that Angela Savage does and expressed that his thoughts were with her given her absence due to her mother’s illness.</p> <p>Christos gave heartfelt thanks to the Members for supporting him and to the staff of Writers Victoria for the work that they all do. He said that the feedback he receives about programs is wonderful.</p> <p>Christos remarked on the fact that Writers Victoria has been able to continue supporting writers during these difficult times; indicating that there will be a lot of writers who will find the world difficult after coming out of the current COVID-19 crisis, and they will need support.</p> <p>Christos also said he is keen to discuss how Writers Victoria can move forward as an organisation as far as helping more people connect into Writers Victoria services, especially for those who cannot physically be present – e.g. via Zoom and the like.</p>	<p><b>MOTION:</b> The 2019 Annual Report (including the audited financial accounts) were accepted.</p> <p>MOVED: VS</p> <p>SECONDED: BKC</p> <p>CARRIED with all who voted in favour In favour: 30 Against: 0</p>

**Chair’s Report**

Nic Brasch discussed the issues around governance reporting and reviewing of policies, particularly those that may have required review in light of the ‘MeToo’ movement.

Nic thanked the Governance Sub-Committee for their work on this.

Mention was also made of the success of Writers Victoria’s 30th birthday celebrations.

Nic expressed his gratitude to the Committee of Management, who have continued to provide their views and expertise with passion on a totally voluntary basis.

**Treasurer’s Report**

Victor Sekulov delivered the Treasurer’s Report and audited financial accounts for 2019, receiving confirmation that these could be viewed online.

It was noted that there was a deficit of \$9,360 which took into account depreciation.

While revenue was slightly less than the previous year, overall expenditure was also lower. Victor Sekulov also explained that the revenue drop was also mostly due to the timing of when grants had been received.

Membership has dropped significantly by \$12,000. This drop is for a variety of reasons and is an area of focus for the membership team and management.

Victor Sekulov confirmed there was a successful audit of the Writers Victoria financials for 2019; that the Writers Victoria financial reporting is excellent and all processes are being adhered to - with government reporting requirements also being complied with.

There were no questions from members regarding the financial accounts.

**2020 Update**

Given the unique situation that has been created by COVID-19, Victor Sekulov, in agreeance with the Chair (and with no objections noted) spoke briefly on how this has affected Writers Victoria from a financial perspective.

Victor Sekulov commented that Writers Victoria currently has a strong cash position which is very important in the context of COVID-19. He also noted that the CoM have met regularly and the Finance Committee nearly weekly.

Given a reduction in services and revenue, Writers Victoria has also been eligible for JobKeeper and will be receiving reimbursement of salaries paid which has made a promising difference to the current financial outlook.

As at the end of April, WV had a surplus in excess of \$20,000.

Agenda Item, Discussion and Decisions	Motions and Actions
<p>As Chair, Nic Brasch thanked both Victor and Flora (Writers Victoria Accountant) for their hard work, and expressed his gratitude that Christos took on the role of Patron.</p>	
<p><b>4. Secretary’s Report on the proposed amendments to the Writers Victoria Rules of Association.</b></p> <p><b>Special Resolution:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. That the proposed amendments to the Writers Victoria Rules be accepted.</li> <li>ii. The resolution covered in 4.i above is proposed as a Special Resolution, in line with the requirements of the Associations Incorporation Reform Act 2012.</li> </ul> <p>These were available to all Members prior to the AGM via email.</p> <p>Peter Hill (Secretary) summarised changes, including that the main modification to the rules was a change in the name of the ‘Committee of Management’ to a ‘Board’ and the position of ‘Director’ to ‘CEO’.</p> <p>Peter explained that a ‘Committee of Management’ is generally set up for small organisations where the Committee assists the operational management. As the CoM takes no part in the operational management of Writers Victoria, it is felt that the title of ‘Board’ would be more appropriate.</p> <p>For this same reason, it is also believed that the title of ‘CEO’ would be better suited than ‘Director’.</p> <p>The definition of ‘Member’ has also been altered to include member organisations.</p> <p>The existing Rules also state that the Treasurer must do certain tasks that are instead done by the staff. The new rules have thus also been amended to read that the Treasurer should ensure that these tasks are done.</p> <p>Peter Hill also reported that there were also minor edits, including changes to tidy up inconsistencies.</p> <p>A Member asked if the name change from CoM to Board would impact any insurance coverage, or change the status of the organisation, the Secretary advised that it did not, that it was just a change of terminology.</p> <p>The Secretary advised the process if the proposed rules were to be passed; that that the Rules of Association are required to be lodged with Consumer Affairs. He noted that this can take up to 4 months before being signed off. Once they are approved they will become active.</p> <p>Nic Brasch as Chair thanked Peter Hill and Bryan Keon-Cohen (Committee Member) for their work on the Rules.</p>	<p><b>MOTION:</b> That the Special Resolution for the proposed amendments to the Writers Victoria Rules of Association be accepted:</p> <p>CARRIED, with all who voted, in favour.</p> <p>In favour: 30</p> <p>Against: 0</p>

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<p><b>5. Election of new members to the Committee of Management</b></p> <p>The Committee of Management is made up of 7 elected members, with the ability to appoint a further 3 members if required. This allows the CoM to maintain a good balance of skill and expertise.</p> <p>Nic Brasch advised Candidates that whilst there are three vacancies, if a Candidate was not successful, there are sub-committees that they may like to consider joining (Finance sub-committee, Governance sub-committee &amp; Development Sub-committee). There are also many other roles within WV that they may wish to pursue to get an understanding of how Writers Victoria works.</p> <p>There were 14 nominations for the 3 Committee of Management positions that have become available.</p> <p>Candidates were asked to provide a biography and statement setting out why they nominated and what they felt they could bring to the CoM. These were circulated to all Members prior to the AGM.</p> <p>Candidates were invited to give a 90 second video presentation (on Zoom) in support of their nomination.</p> <p>The following Candidates made video presentations on Zoom: Charnie Braz, Kirsten Cameron, Kit Fennessy, Ian Grimwood, Peter Hill, Ian Keese, Sharon Mullins, Josh Raymond, Victor Sekulov, Megan Shaw, and Justine Sless.</p> <p>The Chair read out short statements on behalf of Ruth Clare, William Goodman &amp; Yasmin Naghavi who did not attend the AGM.</p> <p>Voting was conducted by an anonymous online ballot which was managed by Writers Victoria staff. Each Member was asked to vote for their three preferred Candidates from the pool of fourteen candidates.</p> <p>The Chair thanked everyone who nominated stating that the calibre of nominees was fantastic.</p> <p>After tallying the votes, Nic Brasch advised that the three people elected to the committee of Management for a 2-year period were, in alphabetically order: Peter Hill (continuing Committee Member), Yasmin Naghavi &amp; Victor Sekulov (continuing Committee Member). He encouraged all other Candidates to nominate again next year.</p>	<p><b>OUTCOME:</b> The following members were elected to the Committee of Management (in alphabetical order):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peter Hill</li> <li>• Yasmin Naghavi</li> <li>• Victor Sekulov</li> </ul>
<p><b>6. Any other business.</b></p> <p>There was no other business.</p>	

Agenda Item, Discussion and Decisions	Motions and Actions
<p>□</p> <p><b>7. Acknowledgements</b></p> <p>Nic Brasch acknowledged and thanked staff and committee members for their contribution to Writers Victoria in 2019.</p> <p>Amy Maddison thanked Nic for his hard work as Chair and also farewelled outgoing CoM members Donata Carrazza and Abi Chellapen.</p>	
<p><b>8. Close of meeting</b></p> <p>The meeting closed at 7.20pm.</p>	

**Chair: Nicolas Brasch**  
**Committee of Management**  
**Writers Victoria**

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

# Director's report

We enjoyed a year of rolling celebrations to mark our 30th anniversary, starting with the launch of our 2019 program, 'True Grit'. Borrowing the title from Charles Portis's 1968 novel, the program celebrated the courage, resolve and resilience it takes to confront the blank page/screen, to take constructive criticism on the chin, to withstand the inevitable rejections that are a writer's lot. Also grit is what an oyster needs to make a pearl; in much the same way, the writer takes the grit of an idea, layers it with meaning and polishes it into a story. And the traditional gift for a 30th anniversary? – Pearls!

Our 30th anniversary celebrations took place live and online throughout the state. Under the banner 'Celebrating Victorian Writers', we curated panels at 14 festivals, 11 of them regional, showcasing the breadth and talent of our writers and creating new audiences for their work. Our online offerings included a Twitter-based flash fiction competition, '30K in 30 Days', and a monthly online series, 'Writers on Writers Victoria'. Our 80s Dance Party anniversary celebration in November, attended by some 140 members, was a huge hit. We were particularly happy to see writers turn up not knowing anyone and staying for the duration, talking and dancing the night away. Participants described the event as 'spectacular', 'fantastic' and 'fun-filled' 'with much joy'.

Another memorable event on our 2019 calendar was 'Starry One Star Night', held at Buck Mulligan's Northcote, where writers read aloud from their worst one-star reviews on Amazon and Goodreads. The brainchild of author Bram Presser, the event was both hilarious and therapeutic—so much so that we've decided to hold it annually.

Among the year's other highlights was 'Only Connect', supported by the City of Melbourne Arts Grants Program, which provided two residencies for women whose caring responsibilities acted as barriers to their participation in the literary industry. The Publishability program under the leadership of Jax Jacki Brown recruited two new fellows and held a sold-out, highly successful training for publishers. Writeability continued to grow, with councils expressing interest in supporting writers with disability in their locales. And Maxine Beneba Clarke gave a stunning annual State of the (Writing) Nation oration for us, 'On Writing and Risk'.

In terms of staffing, Lyndel Caffrey took on the role of Writeability Program Manager at the start of the year, while Andy Jackson joined the team to run the Writeability Fellowships. Our valued Communications Manager Emma Cayley resigned in November and, on her advice, we will be restructuring the role in 2020. I'd like to acknowledge and thank all staff at Writers Victoria for their hard work and dedication, and for being such a pleasure to work with; and to thank the Board for their ongoing support and custodianship of our organisation.

## Angela Savage

## From our patron

Once again, it has been a great honour to serve as patron of Writers Victoria this last year. The last twelve months have been both galvanizing and sobering, with the environmental and cultural shifts occurring both nationally and globally making many of us writers question the efficacy of the work we do. I think there is something positive in that self-questioning and doubt. It is always clarifying to ask of ourselves: what is the purpose of what we do? But it becomes less positive when it leads to despair and apocalyptic thinking. What follows is often pessimism and inertia.

So, in a year when our politics and culture have been dominated by venality and dogmatic partisanship, it has been quietly encouraging to come into Writers Victoria and witness the purpose and diligence and good faith of the members and the staff. Over the last year WV has offered writers a wonderful series of workshops, classes and masterclasses, a range of programs that are admired and respected throughout the literary communities of this country. I know that because when I am interstate and talking with writers, the breadth and excellence of these programs is something my fellow writers comment on and applaud. The staff of WV continue to do inspiring work around membership, writing and diversity, and in building community links between our organisation and other literary and cultural organisations and communities in Melbourne and Victoria. I know that funding in the arts sector is always precarious, so I want to thank all the staff of the organisation for their patience, good humour and their outstanding work. I wrote in my last report, and it continues to be the case, that I am excited every time I get 'The Victorian Writer' in the mail. Congratulations to the team for continuing to produce such an excellent journal, both on-line and in print format.

Again, one of the undoubted highlights for me this year was introducing the State of the (Writing) Nation Oration that was delivered by Maxine Beneba Clarke. Maxine is always an eloquent and thoughtful speaker, and she spoke on questions of representation without resorting to cant, with a firm and humorous moral imperative to make the audience understand how under-representation and representations of bad faith are destructive to both an individual writer's confidence but also to our general culture as well. Maxine was joined by her collaborator, street artist Van T Rudd, whose accompanying visual presentation was equally thoughtful, and a delight. I urge Writers Victoria to keep supporting this Oration as it provides both a public forum through which WV can speak to its work and advocacy; and it also offers an opportunity for writers to take stock and make sense of what is happening in the world around us. This year has reminded us all how important this is. I want to thank everyone involved in organising the Oration and for making it such a success.

This last year saw Writers Victoria celebrate thirty years as an organisation advocating on behalf of Victorian writers. A celebration indeed was called for, as a recognition of the three decades of important work that have been achieved by everyone involved.



No one I speak to in Writers Victoria, however, is complacent. The political and social confusions that are affecting the whole of our body politic means there are challenges of communication, membership and purpose that will inevitably become more acute. Again, as I said to you all last year, please always free to 'use me'. If I can be part of these conversations, it would be an honour. I want to be part of a process of asking hard and necessary questions. And part of a process that is optimistic.

I would like to thank Nicolas Brasch as Chair, and Angela Savage as Director, for continuing to make me feel so very welcome in this role. I'd also like to thank the Committee Members for their work and loyalty. And, once more, a big and sincere thanks to all the staff who make coming into the organisation such a joy.

## Christos Tsiolkas



PHOTOS L TO R: 30TH ANNIVERSARY BOSS DANCE PARTY CELEBRATION; WV PATRON CHRISTOS TSIOLKAS INTRODUCES THE 2019 STATE OF THE (WRITING) NATION ORATION; HOPE MATHJUMBU, REBECCA LIM, DANIELLE BINKS & CARLY FINDLAY AT THE 'ASK...ABOUT WRITING FOR ANTHOLOGIES' PANEL.

# Chair's report

It was a matter of personal delight that I was able to be chair of Writers Victoria in its thirtieth year. I was constantly reminded that the main role of the Committee of Management (CoM) is to act as a guardian of a very valuable asset. This is done by providing the necessary support for management and staff to represent Victoria's writing community, providing employment to writers, and advocating for the rights of writers; and ensuring that the organisation remains financially sound and complies with all governance requirements. In all respects, I believe we ended the year with ticks against all the above.

The Director's Report provides operational highlights of the year. In terms of the CoM, the Governance sub-committee (GSC) reviewed our rules and revised them to bring them up-to-date with current practices. These changes will be put to members at the 2020 AGM for approval. The GSC also reviewed some of our policies in light of 'MeToo' developments, to ensure that they adequately cover and represent the needs of our staff, tutors, workshop participants, members of the CoM and anyone else involved in activities under the direction of Writers Victoria.

The highlight of the year, for me, was our annual strategy day, where the CoM and staff spent a Saturday forensically examining and discussing the organisation's operations. We have already started moving on some of the proposed actions and I am confident that in twelve months' time, they will be making a real difference.

I would like to thank all of the staff for their endeavours in 2019. They do a tremendous job – and anyone who spends just an hour or two in their presence could not fail to recognise this. Of course, thank you to our Director, Angela Savage, for leading the team.

Thanks also to our wonderful volunteers and interns without whom we would not be able to do nearly as much as we do.

Thank you to the generous departments, organisations and individuals who provide funding to Writers Victoria – all of whom are mentioned elsewhere within this report.

Finally, my gratitude to the members of the Committee of Management who continued to provide their views and expertise with passion (and on a voluntary basis). Seeing what they contribute makes me extremely appreciative of the work of all CoMs and Boards that oversee Victoria's creative organisations.

The Committee members who helped steer the strategic direction of Writers Victoria in 2019 were Deputy Chair Noë Harsel, Treasurer Victor Sekulov, Secretary Peter Hill, Donata Carrazza, Abi Chellaper, Bryan Keon-Cohen, Amy Maddison, Nada Kirkwood (until March 2019), and Michele Scott-Tucker (until March 2019 – also served as Deputy Chair). Thank you to all of you for your efforts and support.

## Nicolas Brasch

# Treasurer's report

Writers Victoria reported a deficit of \$9,360 in 2019 after depreciation, which was in line with our budgetary expectations for the year. We achieved total income in excess of \$1.0m for the second year running, which is all the more pleasing when you consider Federal arts funding has been cut in each of the last six years, in turn increasing demand for state, local government and philanthropic funding. While Writers Victoria narrowly missed out on several grants in 2019, we were successful in raising new funds to support residencies through the City of Melbourne Arts Grants Program.

Operationally, while our membership numbers remained relatively stable over the year, our workshop income and manuscript services continued to grow, indicating our ability to successfully tailor our services to the growing demand from our members. Expenditure was well managed with concerted savings made in the areas of printing, postage and administration costs as staff worked diligently to keep expenses within budget.

Our financial sustainability is strong as we continue to manage our operations in a financially sound and responsible manner, ensuring our cash holdings are well over \$0.5M. This enables us to look to 2020 with confidence and to explore exciting new projects.

I reiterate that the Arts funding environment is a challenging one and will continue to be so in the future. Economic, financial and social trends all play a significant role in shaping the arts arena, and Writers Victoria has managed its strategic objectives in line with the context in which it operates in to ensure an ongoing viable service that meets the needs of Victoria's writers.

2020 presents itself with even more challenges, but Writers Victoria is well positioned to continue to be the premier source of support for all writers, early, emerging and established. With continued improved systems, strong programming and new partnerships, we look forward to sustaining our organisation into the future.

**Victor Sekulov**