



THE ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY
Australian Capital Territory Branch

COMMONWEALTH NEWS

RCS Newsletter Summer 2019-20

Patron: HE General the Hon. David Hurley AC DSC (Retd) Governor-General of Australia



AWARD FOR CROSS-CULTURAL SCIENCE COMMUNICATION IN THE PACIFIC

A project on cross-cultural science communication involving teachers in Fiji and Samoa has been awarded the 2020 Phyllis Montgomerie Commonwealth Award of the ACT Branch of the Royal Commonwealth Society.

The proposal, by Ms Emily Standen, a PhD candidate in the Centre for the Public Awareness of Science at the Australian National University, was the unanimous choice by a judging panel headed by RCS member, Dr John Sutton.



The award, of \$5000, will allow Ms Standen (*left*) to extend the time given to her fieldwork in order to explore the cultural barriers to science communication in the region. This will allow for

greater consolidation of the relationships with those taking part in the study, and allow, especially, for the use of a Pacific-based communication tool, *Talanoa*. This conversation-style method allows for in-depth exploration of a topic by a group of individuals and is highly regarded as a culturally-appropriate way of building knowledge with participants.

Ms Standen will be working primarily with teachers to determine whether principles of co-development theory* can be used to create culturally-appropriate professional learning workshops for science teachers.

For this, she will draw upon her experience over the past eight years of working at Questacon—the National Science and Technology Centre in Canberra—and CSIRO, where she has been designing, delivering and evaluating professional learning projects for teachers. The ultimate aim of the project—the development of a shared vision for science education—will involve

interested parties from government, educational institutions and community voices so that a platform for working with trainee teachers can be developed and sustained into the future.

Science education and STEM subjects are seen by a number of South Pacific Island nations as imperative to their development in order to compete in a global economy. Countries like Fiji and Samoa are also on the front-line of such issues as climate change, sustainable fishing, diet and obesity, all of which require science as part of the solution, underpinned by strong science education and inspired, effective science teachers.

According to Ms Standen, by improving the way science is communicated in the region, local people will feel empowered to take ownership of research happening around them and ensure outcomes are of greater benefit to their communities.

The Phyllis Montgomerie Award, for a research or education project, has been made possible by a bequest to the RCS ACT Branch by the late Mrs Montgomerie, a former President and Life Member, who died in 2011.

* *Co-development theory involve practices where the researcher and participants have equality in their contribution to a process of knowledge production, in this case, centred on traditional knowledge and western science.*

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Annual General meeting of the ACT Branch of the Royal Commonwealth Society will be held on Tuesday 25 February at 6.00 pm in the foyer of the Wesley Centre, National Circuit, Forrest.

Enclosed in this newsletter are a formal Notice of Meeting setting out the Agenda and a Nomination Form for election to Council. Councillors are elected for up to three years, and office bearers (President, Vice-President and Treasurer) who are elected for one year.

Also enclosed is a Membership Subscription Form. Fees are due on 1 January each year. If any member is in doubt about their financial status, please contact RCS Treasurer Mrs Ann Sutton, on 6295 1297.

FROM THE PRESIDENT . . .

This will be my final Newsletter message as I come to the end of my third consecutive year as Branch President. As I reflect on this, I am very conscious of tasks that have not yet been done or completed, or might have been done better, as well of course as those that seem to me to have been done well for the Branch. I am most grateful for the support I have received from Council, the broader Branch membership, RCS colleagues around the world and indeed many other kind folk – often friends or former colleagues – in various ways during this time.

A fine spirit was evident at the Branch Christmas drinks held on 8 December. It was terrific to see everyone present mixing so well – as well as giving every impression of thoroughly enjoying themselves. Once again, the generous contributions of non-perishable food made to the Salvation Army Christmas Appeal on that occasion were very well received when I delivered them afterwards. It is this combination of good fellowship and serious intent which I really like about our Branch.

I am pleased to announce that the Phyllis Montgomery Commonwealth Award for 2020 is being made to Ms Emily Standen, a PhD candidate in the Australian National Centre for the Public Awareness of Science at ANU. Her PhD topic is "Cross-cultural science communication: Teachers as a case study" and focusses on the interaction between indigenous knowledge systems and scientific knowledge in the South Pacific. I wish to thank warmly our panel of judges – Dr John Sutton (Chair), Mrs Maureen Hickman (Secretary), Mr Darrell Hills and Dr Natalie Mobini – for their efforts regarding the Award.

We have a special morning tea for members and friends coming up on Friday 7 February, when former Branch Councillor and current Cambridge University PhD candidate in History, Daniel McKay, will speak on 'Origins of the Commonwealth'. Details follow in this issue and I encourage you to attend. Similarly, there are details in this issue about the events of Commonwealth Week in March which I encourage you to attend as well.

Please also let me especially encourage you to attend the AGM on Tuesday 25 February. There are at least four Councillor positions available for three year terms and, as required by our Constitution, the positions of President, Vice-President and Treasurer must also be filled again for 2020. Getting a quorum of members in attendance would be much appreciated – and a real encouragement to the incoming Executive and Council.

Colin Milner

DFAT STEPS UP PRESENCE IN THE PACIFIC

Australia has expanded its presence in the Pacific with the opening of two new diplomatic missions, the announcement of plans for two more in 2020, and the appointment of a senior career diplomat, Dr Lachlan Strachan, as High Commissioner to the Solomon Islands.

The moves are part of the Government's 'Pacific Step-up', according to Australian Foreign Minister, Marise Paine, in a media statement in December 2019.

One of the new missions is in the Commonwealth nation of Cook Islands and the other in Palau, a former US Trust Territory. Ms Paine said the missions will work with both countries 'to promote economic integration and trade, build community links, and strengthen security cooperation'.

With a further two Australian missions set to open in Niue, French Polynesia, and the Marshall Islands in 2020, Australia will have a total of 18, said to be 'the largest diplomatic network of any country in the region'.

The appointment of an officer as senior as Dr Strachan—currently First Assistant Secretary, South and West Asian Division— as High Commissioner in the Solomon Islands, underlines Australia's increased focus on the region. Current co-partnerships include increased labour mobility for Pacific workers and infrastructure projects such as the Coral Sea Cable that will provide high-speed internet to Papua New-Guinea and the Solomon Islands.

KAVA TO CEMENT OUR CULTURAL TIES

Australia is also stepping up its cultural ties with the Pacific by easing the restrictions on the import of kava to allow up to four kilos in the accompanied baggage of incoming passengers 18 years and over. The previous upper limit was two kilos.

Describing the new arrangements as 'a pilot program', the Minister for International Development and the Pacific, Alex Hawke, said in a statement on 19 December 2019, that the decision—which came into effect the day before—recognised the significant place of kava in the culture of Pacific communities.

The use of kava in a handful of Aboriginal communities in Arnhem Land NT continues to cause concern among health authorities because of its harmful effects.

According to former RCS ACT Branch President, Fijian-born Kanti Jinna, this is because the communal aspects of the drug have not been previously embedded into the culture, as in Pacific nations. In the NT, he says, kava has been taken as a substitute for other intoxicating drinks and often mixed with them, whereas across the Pacific, kava is a ceremonial drink for formal occasions, weddings, festivals and family functions.

ANU REVIVES AFRICAN COURSEWORK

After a lapse of three decades, the Australian National University has revived its African Studies coursework with the offer of an undergraduate course on Conflict and Change in sub-Saharan Africa.

The course, available in the Second Semester of 2020 will be given in the School of Politics and International Relations.

In a course description posted by RCS member Dr David Lucas, convenor of the Africa Network, students will explore a range of topics including 'the issues, ideas, and trends that shape the politics of sub-Saharan Africa across almost 50 countries and a billion people', looking at the legacies of colonial rule, why political violence is more common in some countries than others and why democracy has been consolidated in certain African countries but regressed or collapsed in others.

The British Empire acquired a total of 20 colonies/territories in Africa during the 18th and 19th centuries, including the sultanate of Zanzibar (1890) and three more in the 20th century, the former German colonies of Tanganyika, (now Tanzania) and South West Africa (now Namibia) during World War 1, and Egypt in 1914. Not all chose to join the Commonwealth, e.g. Egypt, which became independent in 1922 and Sudan in 1966, but could qualify to apply for membership if they chose.

ORIGINS OF THE COMMONWEALTH

An informal talk on the history of the emergence of the Commonwealth and the Colonial Imperial Conferences will be given by Daniel McKay on Friday 7 February (see notice p.4 for details).

Daniel, a former Youth Member of the ACT Branch, is a PhD candidate at Peterhouse College, University of Cambridge, in the World History Program. He is currently in Canberra as a Norman McCann Summer Scholar at the National Library.

The Imperial Conferences of the early 20th century were a precursor to present-day Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings. Known as Colonial Conferences when they began in 1887 and from 1907 as Imperial Conferences, these were periodic gatherings of government leaders from self-governing colonies and dominions of the British Empire. The meetings, usually held in London about every four years, concerned mutual defence and economic issues on which leaders passed non-binding resolutions.

The final Imperial Conference in 1937 discussed the worsening situation in Europe, overwhelmingly supporting appeasement.

KENYA CELEBRATES ITS NATIONAL DAY



The High Commissioner for Kenya, HE Isiah Kabira (right) and Mrs Betty Kabira with Dr Harjinder Dhindsa and Dr Sunita Dhindsa at the celebration in Canberra in December to mark the anniversary of Kenya's independence in 1963.

HAMMARSKJÖLD DEATH: NEW INQUIRY

The UN General Assembly has agreed to pursue the inquiry into the death of former UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld in September 1961.

In late December 2019, a record number of members agreed to reappoint the former Chief Justice of Tanzania, Mohammed Othman, to head the investigation and called on those that had cooperated with him in an earlier inquiry to give him their full assistance.

This will be the fifth inquiry into the midnight plane crash which killed Hammarskjöld and 15 other people as it approached Ndola airport in the British colony of Northern Rhodesia (present day Zambia) on a flight from Kinshasa in the Congo.

Hammarskjöld was to meet with rebels from the Congolese province of Katanga, fighting to secede from the newly-independent former Belgian colony, a meeting arranged by British colonial authorities in an effort to broker a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

Two inquiries by British authorities soon after the crash found pilot error as the probable cause and a third UN-sanctioned inquiry in 1962 recorded an open verdict. The UN inquiry in 2017, headed by Judge Othman, concluded that classified recordings of radio traffic intercepted at the time by the UK and US governments should be made public. Earlier inquiries are said to have disregarded evidence by local witnesses who saw another plane and flashes in the sky on the night of the crash.

The inquiry headed by Judge Othman was in part due to the efforts by Susan Williams in 2011, who, as a Senior Fellow at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies in London, helped persuade the UN to re-open the case. Williams was author of the book, *Who Killed Hammarskjöld?* published in the same year.

RCS CHRISTMAS DRINKS PARTY



RCS President Colin Milner (right, above) with ACT Branch Council Youth Member, Holly Halford-Smith with her dog, Rusty, and Dr David Lucas, at the Christmas Drinks Party in December. Dr Lucas is convenor of the Africa Network at the Australian National University where Holly is studying Law.

ALLIANCE TO COMBAT DISCRIMINATION

The RCS London has joined three other independent, international and non-government organisations in an Equality and Justice Alliance, to end or amend discriminatory legislation.

The other bodies are the Human Dignity Trust, which works to defend human rights and challenge laws where homosexuality is criminalised; the Kaleidoscope Trust, whose aim is to uphold the rights of LGBT people within the Commonwealth and advocate on their behalf; and Sisters for Change, which works to end the social acceptance of violence against women and girls through legal empowerment, legislative reform, legal advocacy and social accountability programs.

When announcing the initiative in 2019, RCS London said all four organisations possessed a unique set of skills and a broad range of experience. Together, they had expertise in legal strategy, policy and legislative development, evidence collection, in-depth research, international diplomacy and legal advocacy dedicated to making 'better laws for better lives'.

Working to change laws that discriminate against homosexuality and also laws that allow early and forced marriage of women and girls in Commonwealth nations has been a priority for RCS London in recent years.

The RCS ACT Branch Newsletter *Commonwealth News* is published four times a year. Letters and contributions are welcome. Contact: Maureen Hickman, Editor, at maureen.hickman@bigpond.com

2020 QUEEN'S ESSAY COMPETITION

The topic for this year's Queen's Essay competition 'Climate Action and the Commonwealth' is drawing on the increasing youth movement across the Commonwealth and the ongoing climate crisis that is affecting many countries around the world.

Both the Senior (14-18 years of age) and Junior (under 14) entrants are being asked to consider their 'position and power' in bringing about change, according to RCS London, and how the Commonwealth can be 'used as a tool for positive action'.

The competition is open to all young people regardless of education or region. For more information see www.thercs.org and follow the links.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Origins of The Commonwealth

Informal Talk by Daniel McKay (*see story p.3*)

Friday 7 February at 10.30 am

at

Unit 12, The Elms, 36 Gosse Street Kingston

Please let Colin Milner have acceptances by

Tuesday 4 February.

colinmilner@7mail.com or 0418 287 684

Annual General Meeting RCS ACT Branch

Tuesday 25 February at 6.00 pm

Foyer, Wesley Centre National Circuit, Forrest

Commonwealth Week Events

- **Multi-faith Celebration**

Monday 9 March 2019 at 11.00 am

Centre for Christianity and Culture, Barton

- **Commonwealth Dinner**

Thursday 12 March 2019 at 7 for 7.30pm

Details to be confirmed

- **DFAT vs The Commonwealth Cricket Match**

Date and venue TBA

Members will be advised of the details of all Commonwealth Week events in a separate mailing.

NEW ACT BRANCH MEMBERS

The President and Council of the RCS ACT Branch warmly welcome new members Mr Sean Murphy and Mr Harley Thackray.