

## **ANOS Illawarra President's Report for FY 2023/2024**

The 2023 financial year began with our AGM in July. I can only conclude that members were content with the previous year's executive since the nominations and voting returned all to their prior positions.

It has been and continues to be an honour to represent the members of the Illawarra group in the capacity of president. Compared with some societies we have a relatively small group of members regularly attending, however, year on year they each contribute to the running of our monthly meetings, public shows and various other events. It is truly their dedication that keeps our society functioning. Special thanks to our long running treasurer Barry Bush and secretary Bruce Porter who keep the lights on and things in order, and to Michael Penberthy our editor for his ongoing work on our monthly bulletin.

Month to month meeting attendance remained relatively static, even in January (holiday period) and July (AGM) which have traditionally seen low numbers. Our number of regular meeting attendees has slightly increased from previous years and we are hoping to build this further. Attracting new members continues to be a priority for our committee and we have been investigating ways to improve our visibility through additional sales events and community advertising. We have developed a relationship with the Australian Plants Society Illawarra Group who share a similar appreciation for Australia's natural flora and who are actively involved with conservation projects in the local area. We look forward to collaborating with them more in future.

We were saddened to learn of the passing of David Butler who in years gone by had been a regular visitor and provided our members with some great talks and demonstrations. Unfortunately, this foreshadowed losses closer to home, firstly with Emil Dallmer, one of our experienced champion growers and then several months later with the passing of my predecessor and mentor Alan Stephenson. Both their friendship and knowledge will be greatly missed.

In recent times sourcing guest speakers for our meetings has been a challenge but a number of our members rose to the occasion and gave some great talks and presentations to the group. Thank you to Anton, Bruce, Ian, Russell, Graeme and David for your contributions throughout the period. Special thanks also to our guest Erik Lielkajis for the informative talk on the orchids of southern Queensland.

During the year we sourced seedlings from Orchids on Newbold and Down Under Native Orchids. These purchases supported our monthly raffle and sales tables at our meetings and shows. We try to provide an array of genera both to suit our members interests and to hopefully increase variety on our show benches in coming years. As in previous years, we also sourced potting bark for members mid-year. Thanks to Barry for organising these purchases once again.

In 2022 road closures around our venue for the UCI Road World Championships coincided with the weekend planned for our Spring Show. Alternate dates were considered; however, it was ultimately decided to cancel our Spring Show and defer to our Sarcanthinae Show in October. After this interruption and postponements in the previous years due to a combination of COVID and low member attendance, it was refreshing in 2023 to hold both of our public shows once again. Despite peak flowering period coming earlier than expected, our members still managed to create impressive show bench displays. I was also pleased to see some new names feature in the winners lists and I believe our more experienced growers may face some stiff competition on the benches in the coming years.

Sales of plants and growing supplies to members remains our largest source of income, followed closely by takings from our shows. Pre-2020 we supplemented this with BBQ events at the local Bunnings stores, which of course were suspended due to COVID restrictions. Our committee considered resuming these events, however, decided against doing so at this time because the society is in a sound financial position. In contrast, our trial of card facilities for our sales tables via a Square reader proved very successful. With the inclusion of card transactions, we are not losing sales to the increasing number of people who operate cashless, especially since there are no cash withdrawal facilities close to our meeting/show venue. Given that approximately half of our show takings were through card facilities, the benefit is obvious.

As usual we shared Christmas dinner for our December meeting which included some excellent desserts provided by members, a gift raffle, and each member in attendance being presented with a seedling as a Christmas gift from the society. Terrestrial tubers were offered to members in February. A large quantity of tubers were donated by gifted terrestrial grower Nita Wheeler to whom we are most grateful.

We were informed in late 2023 that the Old Court House in Wollongong required roof repairs and removal of asbestos. This resulted in the postponement of meetings in March and April 2024 while the venue was closed for these works. During March, April and May we usually hold a private autumn show during which a monthly winner is chosen by popular vote. Due to the venue closure, this was pushed back 2 months and became more of a winter show. Despite this, there were good numbers of plants benched during these months, producing some very deserving winners.

Daniel Rajaratnam

President, ANOS Illawarra